Response to the draft SEA material by the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism and Sligo IT

Contents

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European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

IT Sligo

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the SEA material. Our response:

- Sets out some general comments and principles (Introductory section)
- Suggests some additional text for the main analysis section of the SEA (Annex 1)
- Suggests some amendments and additions to the AEC measures section of the SEA (Annexes 2 & 4)
- Suggests some limited but necessary additional measures and amendments to proposed other measures (Annex 3)

We acknowledge the level of detail and comprehensive description of the current situation in Ireland and broadly concur with the results of the SWOT analysis. Some minor errors and observation are highlighted below. We also agree that measures are more effective if they are designed to cut across a number of rural development priorities and associated focus areas in a way that is mutually supportive and integrated.

We wish to highlight that the remote and depopulated rural areas identified in the report as probably facing particular challenges in relation to economic and social sustainability would be in the main considered as High Nature Value (HNV) farming areas. As noted in the report these rural areas have significant potential to meet the growing demand for rural amenities and tourism, while providing a store of natural resources, high value landscapes and important carbon sequestration and water quality maintenance and water regulation services. The implementation and design of measures within the RDP have to build capacity and enable delivery of these valuable products and services from these rural areas in combination with high value food products.

The statement of p.16 that "Species of conservation concern are faring well" needs to be referenced at very least, as we do not believe it to be supported by an objective reading of the evidence. Number on bird species on Red List has increased by 12 and the amber list by 5 (see Colhoun and Cummins 2013[1]). Worrying from an assessment of the effectiveness of past AEC schemes is the continued decline of species dependent on extensive HNV farmland such as lowland farmland, wet grassland and upland birds, e.g. curlew; meadow pipit; lapwing; golden plover; dunlin; sparrowhawk; whinchat; stonechat; red grouse; cuckoo. Where locally targeted conservation interventions took place there was some localised successes. This demonstrates that targeted action is required at much larger spatial scales through the RDP and specifically in AEC schemes. The main factors that need to be addressed in lowland areas included drainage and changes in grassland management and in the uplands, afforestation, grazing regimes and predation i.e. habitat loss and deterioration in habitat quality. Given the general high uptake of AE schemes in extensive farming areas, this continued decline is worrying and suggests an issue around design and implementation rather than uptake.

A similar picture is found for many habitats. The Article 17[2] report on Ireland's grassland habitats describes dry calcareous grassland (habitat 6210); species-rich *Nardus* grassland (6230); *Molinia* meadows (6410) and lowland hay meadows (6510) as Unfavourable in terms of both recent changes in the area of the habitats and in terms of their future prospects. These findings were reinforced by

[1] http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EjODk32LNcU%3d&tabid=178

[2] http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article17/habitatsreport/?group=Z3Jhc3NsYW5kcw%3D%3D&country=IE&region=

the Irish Semi-Natural Grasslands Survey 2007-13[3]. The same survey found that only 36.9% of Ireland's Annex 1 grassland habitats are within SACs and only 21.7% are listed as part of the qualifying interest of the site. It found that not only was intensification a threat, but also that '*land abandonment is an important issue that needs to be tackled quickly if large areas of semi-natural grassland are not to be lost permanently*' and that '*there is also the danger that such marginal land will be converted to other land-uses, such as forestry*'.

Taken together, this means that AEC measures have a key and vital role in safeguarding these valuable and iconic habitats. Simplistic approaches to AEC schemes must be avoided at all costs – the grassland survey found many examples of habitats fenced-off under REPS and subsequently under-managed: '*In most cases, these areas had become rank, closed and often scrub-encroached, and were unlikely to provide suitable habitat for the birds for which they were set aside; this was far from being the desired outcome of the measure'. It is imperative that all owners of land within an SAC, particularly those who manage Annex I grassland habitat, should be made aware that the management practices that they carried out pre-designation, and which have maintained the Annex I habitat in the past, should be continued, not stopped.'* Our submission proposes building on and further improving the more considered approach taken under AEOS, not least by reintroducing the need to planned management for each area under contract.

Many of these issues relating to ongoing problems with biodiversity decline and ineffectiveness of current AE schemes to deal with the issue are not identified in the draft environmental report. It is essential that the RDP both describes the situation accurately and responds appropriately, not least in learning the lessons from past schemes and putting forward improvements to approaches and measures in 2014-20.

The tiered scheme as identified in the SWOT analysis (p38) is only reflected in a very limited way in the subsequent proposal, with allocation of budgets a concern for delivery. €5,000 spread across 50,000 farms limits opportunities for effective targeting. It does not enable the delivery of meaningful and effective support to those farmers who are delivering the most in term of public goods and who are facing particular challenges in terms of economic and social sustainability. Current proposals will not secure delivery of public goods from those areas that are producing higher quality and quantity of services such as biodiversity provision, high status waters, C storage etc. We have endeavoured below to address some of these issue by proposing relatively minor changes to the structure such as making GLAS+ additive on top of GLAS and targeted at HNV farmland systems; building some output based elements into the design of key actions in GLAS and by proposing a structure for the locally led output based AEC that will optimise delivery of public goods based on the Burren Farming for Conservation model.

The design changes that we are proposing focus on the farmer delivering results that will provide the most environmental benefit on his/her farm to ensure that the optimum environmental impact is achieved as highlighted on P51 of the draft SEA. To enable this we have devised a prioritised action table for a range of farm types identifying the most suitable actions for a range of farm settings found in Ireland.

The current balance between action and output based approaches to AE may not be appropriate to deliver real benefits. Currently the vast bulk of resources are targeted at action based approaches. Recent reports on the effectiveness of action versus results/outcomes based approaches to AE

[3] O'Neill, F.H., Martin, J.R., Devaney, F.M. & Perrin, P.M. (2013) The Irish semi-natural grasslands survey 2007-2012. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 78. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

schemes[45] highlights that a blended model combining both actions and results/outcome based approaches to the design of AE schemes may optimise chances of delivering on objectives. Payments by action are favoured where there is a clear response of the target to the specified actions. However, payments by results/outcomes are favoured where the response to specific actions is weak. Having an enhanced focus on outcomes/results creates a market for environment service provision at farm level, rewarding farmers for delivery of high quality public goods and ecosystem services (C sequestration, water quality and storage, biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage, etc.).

Given the appropriateness of applying different actions in different farm settings we advocate taking a dichotomy of approaches to intensive and extensive farmland. This needs to be followed through in identification of appropriate actions to particular farm settings.

Based on above introductory remarks we have concentrated this submission on design and implementation improvements for the proposed GLAS, GLAS+ and locally led scheme to meet the objectives identified in the SEA. The need for well designed, targeted, monitored and managed measures is clearly stated in the SWOT analysis. Key issues identified in the SWOT i.e. opportunities for enhanced and targeted environmental measures in Pillar 2; measures to protect common farmland habitats and create new ones; supporting farmers to address land abandonment and farm viability; protection and restoration of priority habitats/species on and outside Natura 2000 sites; and potential to encourage the more sustainable management of upland habitats are concentrated on in this submission. Throughout the submission proposed improvements are cognisant of the need and potential of measures to provide multiple benefits for biodiversity, water management, landscape, climate change actions and preventing soil erosion and improving soil management (particularly in peatland and heathland areas), poverty reduction and economic development.

General Principles

The general principles that we are proposing that form the basis for our proposals are outlined below. These broad principles are also supported by a recent publication in the journal Science by over 20 leading scientists from across Europe[6].

1. RDP measures especially AEC measures, need to improve habitat quality and maintain biodiversity through well designed, targeted and financed actions.
2. AEC measures should be designed in a way that secures multiple benefits for biodiversity, water, climate mitigation, rural communities (society and economy) and landscape objectives
3. Farmers should be encouraged to act jointly in collaborative measures to realise benefits at the landscape scale (see collaborative proposals for commonages)
4. Payment systems should be fair and transparent and incentivise improved environmental performance by farmers
5. Prioritise context specific measures have been shown to support biodiversity and ecosystem services (see prioritised action table below)

[4] Gibbons, J.M., Nicholson, E., Milner-Gulland, E.J. and Jones , J.P.G. 2011. Should payments for biodiversity conservation be based on actions or results? Journal of Applied Ecology, 48 pp 1218-1226.

[5] McGurn, P. and Moran, J. 2013. A National Outcome –based Agri-environment Programme under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-202l0. Report produced for The Heritage Council. http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Press_Releases/Press_Releases_2013/AGRI_ENVIRONMENT_SCHEME_RDP_2014-2020_final12Dec.pdf

[6] Pe'er, G. et al 2013. EU agricultural reform fails on biodiversity. Extra steps by Member States are needed to protect farmed and grassland ecosystems. Science 344, 6188

6. AES should be designed in a way that target specific groups (e.g. HNV farmland in marginal areas, cooperating farmers) enabling them to profit from environmentally friendly practices, thus incentivising their delivery and encouraging land use optimisation (target supports at land best suited to deliver on specific objectives)
7. AEC measures combine both action and outcome based in a results focused blended approach to ensure delivery on objectives and minimise risks of unintentional outcomes
8. Delivery of actions supported by a well-trained and resourced farm advisory service.
9. Comprehensive monitoring programme targeted at monitoring outcomes to evaluate effectiveness of measures and ensuring that monitoring can inform future design of AE schemes

Annex 1: Additional text for SEA analysis sections

Additions to Strengths 1.1.2

High Nature Value farming
Ireland has over a million ha of semi-natural farmed vegetation (EEA/JRC estimates are being updated and improved upon in current IDEAL-HNV project), concentrated in the mountain and other rough grazing areas, but extending onto the lowlands in those areas of the north and west where soils have been too thin or too wet to allow the intensification of agriculture in the past. This quarter of Ireland's agricultural area supports most of the farmed Annex 1 habitats and contains vast if so far unquantified resources of sequestered soil carbon. Mostly found in high rainfall areas, Ireland's HNV farmland performs a vital function in regulating river flows and in ensuring clean water resources for some key Annex 2 species including freshwater pearl mussel, brook lamprey, Atlantic salmon and otter, as well as for human consumption.

(Existing paras. at bottom of p18 and top of p19 could be moved here)

Islands
Ireland's offshore inhabited islands add considerably to the country's tourist offer, as well as being important for the maintenance of the Irish language, traditional culture and for some species and habitats of conservation concern, including limestone pavement and the red-billed chough.

Additions to Weaknesses 1.1.3

(Insert new section after Environmental and Biodiversity Issues)

Specific issues relating to commonage
Commonage accounts for over a third of HNV farmland and is part of the farmland resource of 15,000 farmers. As areas of joint ownership or, in some cases, common rights, these areas are subject to much higher levels of social inertia and higher transaction costs than sole occupancy farmland when accessing rural development opportunities requires collaboration or at least agreement between shareholders. Such impediments represent both structural issues for the farm businesses concerned and a wider policy concern, given the importance of supporting and influencing the development of sustainable grazing and other vegetation management practices. The RDP must address these blockages and put in place mechanisms to overcome the transaction costs, in the widest sense, of collaboration and/or joint decision making on commonages.

Specific issues relating to islands
Ireland's offshore islands face specific difficulties of access, which raise the costs of imported goods and add to the expense of marketing island products on the mainland. Such difficulties are compounded by weather, which can literally isolate these communities for days or weeks at a time. At the same time, they often lack the critical mass needed to support some services or to allow for easy access to back-up services due to their small populations, making them even more dependent on provision from the mainland, with the additional costs and uncertainty that implies.

Additions to Opportunities 1.1.4

(New sentences for end of existing text)

The proposed locally-targeted output-related measures also represents a ground-breaking developing in creating a locally-tailored thread within the AEC programme, building on the lessons from BurrenLife and the Burren Farming for Conservation Scheme.

Commonages often dominate the landscape in mountain areas and are actual examples of community management which delivers a range of market and public goods. The RDP provides an opportunity to turn these into dynamic foci of rural development activity, by overcoming the barriers to collaboration, and in doing so to improve considerably both the delivery of public policy goals and the socio-economic aspirations of farmers.

Similarly for islands – appropriate, HNV farming as part of a wider rural development package has excellent potential to complement ecotourism and the 'traditional Ireland' offer which is so important for island areas.

Additions to Threats 1.1.5

(Text to add to final paragraph)

The land abandonment already observed – in inbye gley soil and small field areas as well as on mountain land - could be magnified many times over, posing a significant threat to many habitats and leading to breaches of Birds and Habitats Directives obligations. Lack of complementarity between cross-compliance, Pillar 1 rules and Pillar 2 schemes could fail to provide the necessary support for socio-economically vulnerable grazing systems, creating a vicious spiral of decline, regulatory breaches, penalties and further decline.

Failure to address their unique circumstances and higher transaction costs could lead to commonage management being threatened all over the country. Given the significance of the commonage area to shareholders' businesses, this is likely to lead to knock-on effects on the overall farming community, whether manifested as wholesale outgoing from agriculture or as attempts to compensate for the loss of the hill by undesirable intensification on the inbye.

Islands are also very vulnerable to abandonment – a process which could impact on the cultural landscape and on the all-important tourism sector on which many of them depend.

Choice of measures 2.2

Add to Priority 4 entry on choice of measures table 'Cooperation measure; Technical Assistance measure" (see Annex 3 of this submission).

Revise following paragraph:

In keeping with the integrated approach to measure design and the significance attached to the environmental issues emerging from the SWOT etc, a number of other measures have been designed in order to reinforce and complement the benefits to be delivered by GLAS. The Locally Led AEC Measure will address a limited number of high-priority environmental issues which pose particular challenge and which require a collective response at local level, while the Knowledge Transfer Group, CPD for Advisors and EIP Operational Groups, Cooperation and Technical Assistance Measures will all contribute to the knowledge base and capacity building which will underpin the achievement of greater environmental benefits. Finally, the Areas of Natural Constraints Measure will support the continuation of farming in accordance with environmental standards in areas facing particular constraints.

Priority 5 Focus Area 5e p. 53

Missed opportunity to highlight that improved management of semi-natural grassland and peatland sites under AEC measures can foster carbon conservation and sequestration as identified in SWOT.

Annex 2: Proposals to amend AEC Measures (GLAS, GLAS+ and Locally-led Output-linked AEC) text

General points

Money should be targeted at Priority Applicants – not just on paper, but in reality. Priority applicants should not have greater difficulties in accessing options, or have to do 'more for the money' than other applicants, especially where the Priority reflects *positively* on their farm. Following the draft SEA, we propose the following High Priorities, which deliver a wide range of public goods, including water quality and carbon storage:

a. Natura 2000 sites and species, including Natura commonage; freshwater pearl mussel, lamprey and/or salmonids
b. Other High Nature Value Farming, including other commonage **(see Annex 4 for methodology for identification of HNV farms)**

The second level of Priority is given to actions which achieve a narrower range of public goods:

a. Organic farming
b. Farming techniques, which go above minimum standards and safeguard water quality and regulation (including those set out in the Water Framework Directive, Nitrates Directive, Groundwater Directive etc.) as regards nutrient and sediment management

Where appropriate, all options under taken by the applicant should be linked to one or more of the priorities for which secured priority entry to scheme. Options for maintenance/enhancement of existing habitats must always be exhausted before any creation of habitat options can be applied for.

All options must be separately costed and paid for to ensure value for money and outcomes, and to allow for targeting and linking of actual spend to targeting. When entering under a certain priority/priorities, >75% of the recurring payments should be spent on relevant options, as per table 1. Applicants with priority features on their farms who propose spending <75% of the recurring payments on options not specified in Table 1 as relevant will be considered non-priority applicants except on Natura sites with the discretion of NPWS.

All applicants will be required to have a management plan produced by a certified planner, which should contain a map of *all* semi-natural habitats and features on the holding. The management plan should set out the particular habitat(s) and species targeted and in broad terms the habitat condition which the proposed management is intended to promote and, in the case of Priority Applications, link them clearly to the priority or priorities being addressed. The management plan must clearly address the highest priority items first and plans not found on inspection to be managing the highest priority items on the holding should be liable to penalty.

Function of GLAS+

GLAS+ should not in principle contain additional options (to avoid these being unavailable to suitable smaller farms). It should rather be an additional pot of money available to Priority Applicants only where the lower ceiling places a restriction on the amount of money they can claim on priority options and the quality and quantity of the deliverables. In order to ensure that GLAS delivers exceptional environmental benefits above and beyond GLAS, this funding should be available to high priority applicants only (e.g. High Nature Value Farmland. See Annex 4: HNV status at farm level).

Table 1 Proposed Community Priorities table. Highlights list of actions that can contribute to addressing each priority.

Broad Priority	**Biodiversity/HNV farmland**					**Water management/biodiversity**			**Climate change^^**	
Specific aspect covered	**Natura 2000 sites**	**Annex 1 habitats outwith Natura 2000**	**Annex 2 species/ Annex 1 birds outwith Natura sites**	**Other semi-natural habitats**	**Other terrestrial species of conservation concern**	**Other aquatic species of conservation concern**	**Safeguarding High Status Water Catchments**	**Soil erosion prevention through better soil management**	**Carbon sequestration and safeguarding carbon stores**	**Low emissions farming**
Semi-natural grassland management	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Traditional hay meadow premium	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Corncrake management top-up	x		x		x					
Sustainable management of commonages & other rough pastures	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Protection of archaeological sites								x		
Riparian Margins	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Hedgerow planting				x	x					
Coppicing hedgerows	x	x	x	x	x					
Laying hedgerows	x	x	x	x	x					
Traditional stone wall maintenance										
Tree planting				x	x					
Birds, bees and bat boxes	x		x		x					
Protection of water courses	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Rare Breeds										
Low Emission Slurry Spreading				x	x	x	x		x	x
Fallow land option				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Arable margins			x		x	x	x	x	x	
Wild flower margins			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Minimum Tillage					x	x	x	x	x	x
Green Cover Est. from sown Crop						x	x	x	x	x
Wild Bird Cover					x				x	x

Note: Core scheme requirements (use of FAS approved advisor, preparation of habitat and nutrient management plan, training and record keeping) potentially address all priorities

Note: capital works which cannot be stand-alone are not listed here.

^^ Climate change priority not addressed through separate actions but accrue from undertaking existing measures as shown

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GLAS Measure Details

The texts below are based on AEOS, including individually costed-items, the use of the Community priority table etc. While the proposals are overall very similar to those in AEOS, targeting has been refined to ensure better outcomes. AEOS options have been adjusted in some cases to give better differentiation and reward between targeted areas. Differentiation is also made in payment structure for semi-natural grassland to reward the production of high quality outputs. Note: we focus on those actions particularly relating to HNV farmland; the absence of comment does not imply either support or lack of support for other measures.

Semi-natural grassland management

(Note: it is proposed that the current low-input permanent pasture option currently proposed in GLAS be removed. As we pointed out in our last submission in February there is clear scientific evidence that even low levels of fertiliser input (as permitted in AEOS 3) can reduce the ecological value of pastures).

As part of the management planning process the planner produces a map of *all* semi-natural habitats and features on the holding. The management plan should set out the particular habitat and species targeted and in broad terms the habitat condition which the proposed management is intended to promote. Examples of how this may work for particular habitats are outlined below.

Farmers can participate in this action by identifying suitable grassland habitats on their farm. These are full or mapped parts of LPIS grassland parcels that have not been cultivated in the last 8 years.

If you select this action the only other area actions you can select on this LPIS parcel are Traditional Hay Mowing Premium, Corncrake Mowing Top-up and relevant capital works. This action cannot be selected on commonage lands.

There are different kinds of semi-natural grasslands, and in each type there are species-rich and less species-rich sub-types. The basic measure payment is targeted at types with modest diversity; more species-rich types are eligible for higher "premium" payments as detailed below.

Wet Grasslands with or without rush cover

For the basic payment, the grassland must

- have at least 6 "positive" indicator species from the list below, at least 4 of which are widespread in the sward
- and have no more than 20% cover altogether of the "negative" indicator species;

For the species-rich grassland rate, the grassland must

- have at least 9 "positive" indicator species from the list below widespread in the sward and
- no more than 20% altogether of the "negative" indicator species.

By way of exception, semi-natural grassland which is used by Natura or other species of conservation concern (chough, corncrake, hen harrier, twite, etc.) and which meets the criteria for the basic payment may, with the agreement of NPWS, receive the premium payment.

Positive Indicators[7]

Bush vetch	Self-heal
Common lousewort	Short-fruited willow-herb
Cuckooflower	Silverweed
Devil's bit scabious	Sorrel
Greater bird's foot trefoil	Tormentil
Heath wood-rush	Water mint
Jointed or sharp-flowered rush	*Bitter vetch*
Lesser spearwort	*Butterfly orchids*
Marsh bedstraw	*Marsh cinquefoil*
Marsh marigold	*Marsh orchids*
Marsh pennywort	*Marsh pea*
Marsh ragwort	*Marsh violet*
Marsh thistle	*Sneezewort*
Meadow thistle	*Spotted orchids*
Meadow vetchling	*Angelica*
Meadowsweet	*Valerian*
Ribwort plantain	*Marsh St. John's wort*
Yellow iris	

Negative indicators

Rye grass	Broad-leaved dock
Creeping buttercup	

Dry Grasslands

For the basic payment, the grassland must

- have at least 8 "positive" indicator species from the list below, at least 5 of which are widespread in the sward
- and have no more than 20% cover altogether of the "negative" indicator species;

For the species-rich grassland rate, the grassland must

- have at least 12 "positive" indicator species from the list below widespread in the sward and
- no more than 20% altogether of the "negative" indicator species.

By way of exception, semi-natural grassland which is used by Natura or other species of conservation concern (chough, corncrake, hen harrier, twite, etc.) and which meets the criteria for the basic payment may, with the agreement of NPWS, receive the premium payment.

[7] The species in normal type are indicators derived from the Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey Other examples of potential indicator species are shown in italic; this list is not exhaustive and may be supplemented by other suitable species, by agreement with NPWS or the Department in individual cases.

Positive Indicators[8]

Autumn hawkbit	Sorrel
Black knapweed	Stag's horn plantain
Catsear	Thrift
Devil's bit scabious	Thyme
Dog violet	Tormentil
Eyebrights	Wild carrot
Fairy flax	Yarrow
Harebell	Yellow rattle
Heath wood-rush	Yellow vetchling
Kidney vetch	*Bee orchid*
Lady's bedstraw	*Bitter vetch*
Lesser bird's foot trefoil	*Bugle*
Milkwort	*Butterfly orchids*
Ox-eye daisy	*Carline thistle*
Red clover	*Cowslip*
Ribwort plantain	*Fragrant orchid*
Self-heal	*Hogweed*
Smooth hawksbeard	*Lady's mantle*
St. John's wort	*Pignut*
Yellow-wort	

Negative indicators

Rye grass	Broad-leaved dock
Spear thistle	Creeping thistle

Semi-natural grassland claimed under this option must be managed as follows:

- *Fertilisation:* No artificial fertiliser may be applied.

- *Grazing:* You must own grazing animals. The grazing regime set out in the management plan must be such as to conserve the ecological integrity of the habitat and may also be designed to benefit particular species, e.g. breeding waders. Where the farm is within or adjacent to Natura 2000 sites or where high priority for application was granted on the basis of Natura habitats or species, management to benefit the site's features of Community interest (habitats and/or species) should receive priority and be agreed with NPWS. Examples include management to benefit hen harrier, chough, corncrake and marsh fritillary.

- *Topping:* Grasslands must not be topped until after July 15th in each year of the contract.

- *Drainage:* Planned maintenance of existing drains is permitted.

- *Supplementary feeding:* Supplementary feeding may not take place on these parcels.

[8] The species in normal type are indicators derived from the Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey Other examples of potential indicator species are shown in italic; this list is not exhaustive and may be supplemented by other suitable species, by agreement with NPWS or the Department in individual cases.

- *Use of Herbicides:* The use of herbicides is not permitted. However, where mechanical control of noxious weeds and/or rushes is not feasible, spot-treatment with herbicide is allowed.

- *Burren Life Scheme:* Participants in the locally led AEC who also participate in GLAS must comply with the requirements of the locally led AEC for species rich grassland paid for in GLAS.

Traditional Hay Meadow and Corncrake Mowing Top-up

For this action, you must have whole grassland LPIS plots with at least 3 grass species (other than Ryegrass). Parcels with a higher number of species are also in principle eligible for the semi-natural grassland option, including the higher species-rich rate. Only parcels that have not been cultivated in the past 8 years are eligible. The maximum area eligible for payment is **10 hectares** except in corncrake SPAs**.**

If you select this action, the only other actions you can select on this LPIS parcel are Semi-natural grasslands, Coppicing of Hedgerows, Laying of Hedgerows, Stone Wall Maintenance or Water Trough installation.

Requirements:
(Where this payment is claimed in combination with the semi-natural grassland option, the requirements for that option must also be followed)

- *Fertilisation:* The annual (organic) nitrogen application is restricted to 30 kg/ha.

- *Closing Off:* Parcels selected for this action must be closed off for cutting by the 15th April each year. The after grass can be grazed.

- *Mowing:* Meadows for conservation must not be cut until after 15th July in each year of the contract. Where, because of bad weather or for other reasons, the hay cannot be saved, you can make silage, but you must turn it at least twice before collecting it to let the seeds disperse.

Corncrake Mowing Top-up

This top-up is only available in conjunction with the Traditional Hay Meadow option.

Requirements:

- *Mowing dates and method:* (to be specified)

Sustainable management of commonage and other rough grazing

Payments for sustainable management based on an agreed written plan will be available on all mountain land (and on other land cover types on commonage, which are also covered by this option).

Where the farm is within or adjacent to Natura 2000 sites or where high priority for application was granted on the basis of Natura habitats or species, management to benefit the site's features of Community interest (habitats and/or species) should receive priority and be agreed with NPWS. Species examples include hen harrier, chough, freshwater pearl mussel, salmon, brook lamprey.

In the case of commonages, a single plan must be drawn up, which will underlie all the AEC applications covering that commonage. This plan will be approved by NPWS as part of the overall AEC approval process and will then supersede any draft maximum/minimum stocking rates produced at the national level.

The costs of drawing up the plan will be factored into every individual option payment. In recognition of the time constraints during the initial application period, transition arrangements are proposed for the first year, by the end of which the management plan must be in place (see below).

For non-commonage land, the applicant eligibility rules are identical to those for all other options under GLAS.

In the case of commonage land:

- for actions which are wholly under the control of an individual shareholder (individual stocking numbers, stock type, shepherding practices) the eligible applicant is the individual shareholder farmer through the farm application
- for any other actions the only eligible applicant is a graziers association duly constituted as a legal person and allocated a business reference number (equivalent to herd number for individual applicants). A graziers association is eligible for the full allowance of GLAS funding in its own right.

Since any application on commonage has to be underpinned by a *single* habitat/species assessment and commonage management plan, irrespective of whether collective measures are subsequently proposed, it will in practice be necessary for potential participants to come together to commission such an assessment and plan. It is also the case that time will not allow the completion of the management plan before the closing of the first application window. To recognise these practical issues, it will therefore be a requirement that *all* such applicants sign a joint declaration of intent before application, certifying that:

- they will apply to GLAS in relation to the commonage in the first year
- they will ensure that the overall stocking on the commonage falls within the draft max/min range for the duration of that first year
- they will have a management plan prepared and a 5 year collective agreement between themselves based on that plan drawn up before the first anniversary of the date on their AE contracts
- each individual GLAS application will refer to the obligations set out for that shareholder or association in the collective agreement
- they will subsequently implement that agreement for the remaining 4 years, with a full review after 2 years (and annually if necessary).

We are not convinced of the need to apply fixed rules regarding the proportion of shareholders and/or of those claiming commonage forage on their SAF and/or of active graziers who need to participate in the agreement or to undertake positive management eligible for payment under this scheme. Practical questions are likely to make agreements which involve only a small proportion of active graziers or active direct payments. However, should the Department deem such thresholds to be necessary, they should be of direct payments claimants in the previous year, *not* of all

shareholders. A list of commonages with the number of shareholders claiming forage on each should be made available each year as soon as all SAF submissions have been processed.

Proposed commonage application process, step by step

Before AE application

- Farmers individually decide they interested and one of them takes the initiative to call a meeting of shareholders
- Meeting, ideally attended by an advisor/Commons Development Officer to ensure full understanding of scheme in detail, its process and potential pitfalls, decides to try to secure the agreed (specified?) % of SPS-claiming shareholders (based on latest year's claims data) signing up to declaration of intent
- Someone (farmer ideally, but possibly a planner) undertakes the job of getting active and claiming shareholders signed up to a declaration of intent (see above)
- Each farmer can then apply for AE, with the conditions being as per the declaration of intent.

First year after AE application

- A habitat assessment and draft management plan will be drawn up by a registered planner – who may or may not subsequently prepare some or all of the GLAS applications. To recognise the extra transaction costs of drawing up and implementing such an agreement on commonage, management payment rates for commonage will be 30% higher than those for other rough grazings (Art. 28.6).
- Shareholders can avail themselves of the services of a Commons Development Officer to translate the habitat/species assessment and draft management plan into a workable internal agreement between the participating shareholders.
- Any management options which are not fully under the control of the individual applicant, can *only* be applied for by a properly constituted graziers' association, which would then also be a signatory to the internal agreement along with the individual participating farmers. Once again, payments would include a 30% collaboration transaction cost top-up compared to sole occupancy farms (Art. 28.6). Free facilitation support would be available for forming this association, as would be a modest 50% grant for legal costs to draw up the necessary articles of association (Art. 35). The association must be open to any shareholder who is active and/or claiming BPS/ANC payments on the commonage. Where no such actions are deemed necessary, the lack of an association would not preclude the drawing up of an agreement and to the inclusion of commonage options in individual GLAS applications

Linking to output-related locally targeted measures

- Any locally-targeted, output-related scheme for commonage would only be open to graziers' associations.

Given the need to secure agreement between shareholders, we do not agree with the proposal that farmers with commonage *must* enter the commonage or be debarred from GLAS. However, we do not believe that such applications should be accorded a high priority unless the farmer is proposing Natura 2000 management on his sole-ownership land.

In recognition of the technical difficulties of setting up collective arrangements between shareholders, including setting up graziers associations, commonage farmers will have access to free support from Commonage Development Officers appointed with Technical Assistance funding under

this scheme (see below). Model collective agreements will be made available to minimise legal costs.

Legal costs associated with the initial set-up of the graziers association can be 50% reimbursed under the collaboration measure for up to €500 per townland (i.e. €1000 of total costs) under the cooperation measure (see below). Model association statues will be made available to minimise legal costs. Associations are eligible (additional specific eligibility rules allowing) to apply for other AEC options and other RDP measures.

Transaction costs for ongoing delivery of the scheme should be are recognised through the use of the (10%+20%) enhancement in annual payment rates for commonage.

As regards compatibility with cross-compliance, draft maximum stocking rates are an obligatory constraint and cannot therefore be compensated through AEC measures. Minimum stocking is however a positive management practice which cannot be made obligatory and is therefore a valid item for inclusion in a management plan under this option along with other positive actions.

Proposed payment levels for above options

The following per hectare payment rates (we list only the ones we propose should be amended) are based on NPWS and/or AEOS and costings included in McGurn and Moran 2013[9], but with the additional consideration of trying to make them logical between each other and avoid perverse unintended incentives.

Semi-natural grassland	€200
Semi-natural grassland (species-rich)	€300
Traditional hay meadow (can be stand alone or claimed on top of semi-natural option	€100
Corncrake mowing top-up (must be claimed with at least traditional meadow option)	€100
Mountain land management	€90
Mountain land management (commonage)	€120[10]

In all cases, management to be carried out on islands not connected to the mainland by road will receive an additional 30% top-up to reflect the additional costs of positive management there.

Targeted output-based AEC

The expansion of the Burren Farming for Conservation model to other areas as identified in the SEA offers an opportunity to encourage the development of innovative locally adapted solutions. This offers a complementary approach to the GLAS and GLAS+ and all 3 AEC measures need to provide an integrated response to environmental challenges in the areas where all three will operate simultaneously. We wish to highlight the following points in relation to the operation of locally led AEC:

- GLAS, GLAS+ and Locally-led AEC need to operate in a tiered fashion with each layer delivering additional environmental benefits. There needs to be a clearer, integrated approach to the delivery of agri-environment measures across GLAS, GLAS+ and locally led AEC. The implementation of the three measures should complement each other to deliver

[9] McGurn, P. and Moran, J. 2013. A National Outcome –based Agri-environment Programme under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-202l0. Report produced for The Heritage Council.
[10] 130% of non-commonage rate

the required output of multiple ecosystem services (production, regulatory, support, aesthetic and cultural products and services) in any one area.

- Suggested targeting for additional (to Burren and Pearl Mussel) locally led AEC: Call for expressions of interest from HNV farmland areas to pilot best practice (supported by research, monitoring and knowledge transfer under article 35 and 51- see annex 3 below), potential areas include extensively farmed upland areas, extensive semi-natural wet grasslands and floodplains and offshore Islands.
- The methodology for measurement of Outputs needs to be user-friendly and efficient, and designed so that it can be carried out by farmers as well as advisors (farmer needs to be totally aware of what he is aiming to achieve on each field). The output based system also represents an excellent method for monitoring environmental impact and generating 'performance indicators'– which must be a priority for locally led AEC – as well as guaranteeing better value for money for the taxpayer.
- As in the BFCP model locally led AEC must be designed in a way that does not require a higher level of 'inspection' than GLAS, rather a realistic level of farmer support. Local support structures should support the farmers and advisors in identifying and costing priority actions, in securing required permissions and in verifying payments due for actions and outputs. We have proposed a mechanism for this using article 51 in Annex 3.

Work on the development of locally led AEC should begin immediately (in 2014) to enable such projects to be rolled out in 2015. There is sufficient information readily available both to identify suitable areas and develop the necessary programmes.

Annex 3: AEC-complementary measures

Non-productive investments (Art. 17.4)

The following non-productive investments[11] can be claimed **where appropriate and essential to deliver AEC options** and justified in the habitat management plan:

Stock fencing
Deer fencing
Gates
Stiles
Restoring dry stone walls
Hedge maintenance using specified methods
Watering points and associated pipework
Path maintenance in areas of high erosion pressure
Scrub removal
Grip blocking in blanket bog
Control of Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*)
Control of invasive species – *Rhododendron ponticum, Gunnera tinctoria*.
Control of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinium*)
Regeneration of heather (*Calluna vulgaris, Erica* spp) by rotational burning and/or flailing
Seeding into bare peat areas
Small scale tree planting (individual trees or <0.1 ha plots)

By way of exception, appropriate measures may also be used to safeguard and protect designated and, by agreement of the Department, undesignated historical or archaeological sites.

Co-operation and EIP (Art. 35)

Start-up support for commonage associations

The move from simple stocking-rate-only measures for mountain land to a more holistic set of possible actions and towards having a commonage-scale agreement *between* shareholders on the overall stocking levels and potentially on land-based actions represents a significant step forward in the approach taken, compared to all previous schemes. It is not, however, one without very significant challenges, which will be addressed using a combination of measures.

Setting up an association is one possibility foreseen in the measures, one that will be mandatory in order to apply for any actions which are not under the control of individual shareholders. This will entail small but significant initial set-up costs. A 50% grant of up to €500 may be claimed for set-up costs. To ensure value for money and a direct link to RDP outputs, the grant may be claimed by the association as part of an AEC measures application containing at least one action.

EIP for developing output-related locally targeted measures

This RDP contains for the first time proposals to allow third parties to develop and propose locally or thematically focussed AEC schemes. This innovative requires the rapid formulation of proposals, which will involve not only the collation of existing research, but limited data-gathering in order to fine-tune the various aspects of the scheme proposal (prescriptions, eligibility rules, targeting

[11] Indicative list only

mechanism, payment calculations, monitoring methodology, evaluation criteria etc.) so as to present the proposal in an acceptable form in a timely manner. This poses considerable challenges for potential partnerships – one which could stifle this innovative approach to AEC measures. The EIP measure is wholly appropriate for meeting this challenge. Funding will be available for *short lifetime* EIPs to develop targeted, output-based AEC (including monitoring and evaluation methodologies). Potential EIPs must demonstrate in their application for funding the relevance and suitability of the output-related approach and that the proposed partnership contains an appropriate range of stakeholders. To avoid double funding, existing Life schemes are not eligible for this measure. We propose that the initial call for applications should fund up to 5 partnerships of one year's duration.

Technical assistance (Art. 51)

Commonage Development Officers

The move from simple stocking-rate-only measures for mountain land to a more holistic set of possible actions and towards having a commonage-scale agreement *between* shareholders on the overall stocking levels and potentially on land-based actions represents a significant step forward in the approach taken, compared to all previous schemes. It is not, however, one without very significant challenges, which will be addressed using a combination of measures.

The State has a direct interest in the success of the AEC schemes on Natura 2000 sites. The transition to a more collective approach, even as part of a mixed individual/collective picture, offers considerable potential benefits in terms of moving towards Favourable Conservation Status through *positive* management (as opposed to the avoidance of damage). Negotiating such a shift in approach should have long-term benefits and, once taken, should become a permanent and valuable part of the social fabric of commonage management.

However, such a change requires careful explanation and facilitation however – development work which must be seen to be independent of any commercial interest in the result and which serves to minimise the additional transaction costs in the broadest sense to commonage shareholders. As part of this package we propose that the State funds, under this measure:

- 30 field-based Commonage Development Officers to facilitate cooperation between commonage shareholders, whether as a set of contracting individuals or as a commonage association
- Basic legal work to draw up a set of model internal agreements which could be used by groups of commonage shareholders or by commonage associations in support of AEC applications
- Basic legal work to draw up model statues for commonage associations.
- **NB: Commonage Development Officers will not be permitted to draw up commonage management plans or AEC applications; funding is available for these under the AEC measure**

Guidance for formulation of targeted output-led AEC schemes

The proposal to allow third parties to design AEC measures is innovative and exciting, but poses considerable challenges. To be implemented, proposals must not only conform to the requirements of the relevant legislation in and of themselves, but must also fit in a lawful and administratively-practical way into the existing support framework provided by the main RDP measures, direct payments, State Aids etc. Furthermore, all the work needs to be completed within a short time frame if such measures are to be properly implemented within this programming period. The State must be able to provide adequate support and guidance to prospective AEC design partnerships

(including both existing scheme implementers under Life etc. and new EIP partnerships funded under Art. 35). We propose that this measure is therefore used to fund a full-time post to liaise between Government Departments and the partnerships, focussing on supporting the timely submission of lawful, practical measures with all the necessary supporting documentation in the required format.

Annex 4: Draft methodology for identification of HNV Status of Farm

Step1. Farm data

Questions	Answers
The size of farm in hectares?	
The percentage of the farm which is improved grassland or arable? (%)	
The length in meters of field boundaries including stone walls, earth banks, tree lines, hedgerows, open drainage ditches, streams, rivers? (m)	
Linear features per hectare of farm (m/ha).	
Livestock on the farm?(LU)	
The area of the farm described as utilisable agriculture area (UAA)?	

Step 2. Scoring

% improved agricultural grassland	Score G	Livestock Units/ ha_UAA	Score L	Field boundary density (m/ha)	Score B
91-100	**0.5**	>2.26	**0.3**	<100	**0.2**
81-90	**1**	2.01-2.25	**0.6**	101-125	**0.4**
71-80	**1.5**	1.76-2	**0.9**	126-150	**0.6**
61-70	**2**	1.51-1.75	**1.2**	151-175	**0.8**
51-60	**2.5**	1.26-1.50	**1.5**	176-200	**1**
41-50	**3**	1.01-1.25	**1.8**	201-225	**1.2**
31-40	**3.5**	0.76-1	**2.1**	226-250	**1.4**
21-30	**4**	0.51-0.75	**2.4**	251-275	**1.6**
11-20	**4.5**	0.26-0.5	**2.7**	276-300	**1.8**
0-10	**5**	0.15-0.25	**3**	>300	**2**

Step 3. Overall score

Total Score (G+L+B) =	

Score	HNV status
<4.5	Non HNV
4.5-10	HNV

Based on work at IT Sligo and NUI Galway. *Boyle, P., Hayes, M., Gormally, M., Sullivan, C. & Moran, J. (in prep.) Calculating the nature value of pastoral farmland – a rapid farm-level assessment.*

European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

IT Sligo