



*An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta*

*Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*

Burren Farming for Conservation Programme

Programme Report No. 2

(March 1st – Nov 30th 2011)

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Glossary of Terms:

AEOS – Agri Environment Options Scheme

BFCP – Burren Farming for Conservation Programme

BLP – BurrenLIFE Project

CAP – Common Agricultural Policy

DAFM - Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

DAHG - Dept. of Arts, Heritage the Gaeltacht

FMA – Field Monuments Advisor

Ha – hectare (2.42 acres)

HNVF – High Nature Value Farming

HNVS - High Nature Value Services Ltd

LU – Livestock Unit

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service

REPS – Rural Environment Protection Scheme

SAC – Special Area of Conservation

SPS – Single Payment Scheme

1. Executive Summary

The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) is a pioneering agri-environmental programme designed to conserve and support the heritage, environment and communities of the Burren. It is based on the findings of the BurrenLIFE Project (2005-2010) and is jointly funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (of the Dept. of Arts, Heritage the Gaeltacht (DAHG)) and the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The BFCP is managed by a core team of Dr Brendan Dunford, Dr Sharon Parr and Dr Bryony Williams who are based in Carron in the central Burren.

Year 1 of the BFCP officially ended on April 30th 2011. Final payments totalling €641,019 were issued to 117 farmers (an average of €5,479) in early July 2011. This included a €500 payment to cover the cost of farm plans, and also included an 8% deduction for modulation. Year 2 of the programme has been shortened to an 8-month year (May 1st – Dec 31st 2011) in order to realign BFCP with the calendar year. This report summarises the progress of the BFCP since the submission of the Year 1 report (March 1st, 2011) to the end of November 2011.

The number of farmers participating in the BFCP has increased from 117 in year 1 to 143 in Year 2, with 31 additional places being offered by DAFM in July 2011 and 26 of these being taken up. The total amount of funding allocated to these farmers in Year 2 was €997,461. The average allocation per farm was €6,975 (range €710 to €14,997) which is an increase of 18% on the Year 1 payment (before modulation). However the final amount paid to participants in Year 2 is likely to be less than this.

The BFCP impacts on a very impressive 13,256 ha of the Burren including 39% of the Black Head/ Poolsallagh Complex SAC, 60% of Moneen Mountain SAC and 38% of the East Burren Complex SAC (Table 1). This area also includes 1,196ha of state-owned land (Burren National Park and Slieve Carron National Nature Reserve). The average area of SAC & Annex I habitats per farm was 92.7ha, only 64.7% of which is deemed 'eligible' under SPS rules.

	BFCP Area (ha)	SAC Area (ha)	% SAC in BFCP
BFCP	13,256*		
Black Head – Poolsallagh SAC	2,183.22	5,572	39%
Moneen Mountain SAC	3,620.16	6,070	60%
East Burren Complex SAC	7,106.33	18,820	38%

Table 1. Areas (ha) of the three main Natura 2000 (SAC) sites within the BFCP

(* the overall area also contains 310ha non SAC Annex 1 land and 36.5ha of other SAC land)

Farm plans were prepared for each farmer by one of 12 trained advisors (down from 15 in year 1). Two advisors planned 46% of all plans, while three others had three plans or less. In year 2 a new Excel format workbook template was developed for use by advisors to prepare BFCP plans. All subsequent modifications to the Draft plan could be made using this workbook before the final word-format Farm Plan was prepared. This proved to be a more user friendly and efficient system.

BFCP Payments fall under three main measures - Measure 1: the production of species rich grassland, Measure 2: Site enhancement works (including scrub removal) and Measure 3: Protection of designated land and other areas of Annex 1 habitat. Most of the budget is allocated to Measures 1 and 2 as many farmers already receive 'SAC payments' through REPS or AEOS (Table 2).

	Total €	% of total (Year 2)	Year 1 allocation
BFCP Total	€ 997,461		
Measure 1	€ 420,114	42.1	(€295,361 or 44.7%)
Measure 2	€ 521,962	52.3	(€325,332 or 49.2%)
Measure 3	€ 55,385	5.6	(€40,344 or 6.1%)

Table 2. Payments allocated under the three main Measures of the BFCP

There was, as expected, a significant increase in Measure 2 work planned in Year 2 as the allowance for M2 work was based on ‘digitised’ (or gross) area of SAC/Annex 1 in Year 2 as opposed to ‘eligible area’ in Year 1 (on average, c.65% of all ‘digitised’ area is ‘eligible’). The increase in M2 allocations is also a result of farmers and advisors becoming more familiar with the BFCP and the work involved.

The increase in M2 work is particularly evident with regard to scrub control (Table 3). Almost 60% of the entire Measure 2 budget was allocated to scrub removal work (50.31ha removed in total), up from 43% in Year 1. Stone wall repair was the next most popular measure (though less so than in Year 1) followed by water provision and access provision. Farmers contributed 25%, 50% or 75% to the cost of M2 works amounting to an additional estimated input into the BFCP from the farming sector of €337,497 in Year 2 (equating to an overall BFCP Year 2 budget allocation of €1.335m). A welcome number of innovations have also been introduced in Year 2 of the BFCP – a new Burren gate design, the installation of solar pumps and the use of brushcutters and strimmers for scrub work.

Measure 2 Works	Allocated	M2 € % Year 2	M2 € % Year 1	Type of work planned in Year 2
Scrub Removal	€303,908	58.9%	43.0%	45.4ha of scrub, 23.6km of paths
Wall repair & fencing	€74,823	14.4%	20.8%	19.4km wall repair, 7.6km fence
Gate installation	€21,593	4.1%	7.5%	134 gates with posts
Water Provision	€59,632	11.4%	15.1%	96 troughs, 141 roll pipe, 7 pumps
Feeding equipment	€6,525	1.3%	3.2%	24 feed bins, 38 troughs
Vehicle Access Tracks	€39,766	7.6%	5.8%	7.8km new track, 5.4km upgrades
Habitat Restoration	€11,999	2.3%	4.6%	Works done on 22 farms

Table 3. Payments allocated under Measure 2 – Site enhancement works

The Measure 1 payment for the production of species rich grassland continues to be a key innovation in the work of the BFCP. Based on field-level assessments of habitat condition by the farm advisor, each SAC/Annex 1 field is given a score from 0-10. This score is the basis on which an area-based payment is made. In year 2 of BFCP, 908 fields (7,178ha) were ‘scored’ (up 26.6% from 717 in Year 1).

€420,114 was allocated in Year 2 to farmers under Measure 1 on the basis of the M1 habitat condition assessment – an average allocation of €2,938 per farm which represents an increase of 16.4% on Year 1. This significant increase is as a result of a 20% increase in payment bands in Year 2. There was a noticeable increase in ‘0’ scores - a direct consequence of the feeding of silage on M1 fields – but in general there appears to be a gradual increase in the M1 scores between Year 2 and Year 1 (Fig. 1).

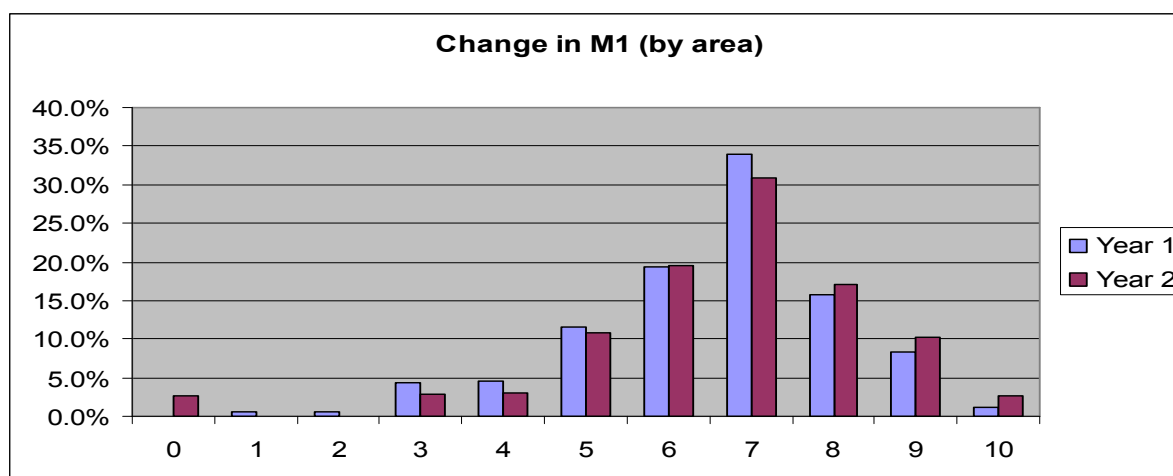


Figure 1. Comparison of M1 scores (by % of M1 area per score) between Year 2 and Year 1

The main work of the BFCP team in Year 2 has been the compilation of Farm plans for the 143 participating farmers. The increased number (43% above the initial projection of 100 farmers) combined with the shortened Year 2 timeframe (33% less time) meant a period of extremely high pressure work between July and October. To alleviate this situation, two support workers were employed. Sarah O'Loughlin assisted with Farm Plan checks while Michael Lynch (Field Monument Advisor for Co. Clare) assisted with farm visits and the compilation of archaeological reports for planned M2 works. With this additional support and the changes to the farm plan workbook, plans were completed in a much shorter time but to a consistently high standard. The BFCP also enjoyed the support of Rachel Barrett who works part time with the BFCP as part of the local FAS programme.

The BFCP team organised several Training events in Year 2 including refresher training for Farm Advisors (May 2011), induction training for the 26 'new' participants (July 2011) and a two-part training course for all Year 2 farmers (November 2011). Feedback from these training programmes was extremely positive and showed that the BFCP team enjoy a very positive relationship with its partners on the ground (98.4% of farmers felt that the BFCP was well managed). Regarding site visits and monitoring, in Year 2 the project team conducted over 200 site visits with 96.5% of farms visited on at least one occasion and a new 'lowland grassland assessment' was conducted on 54 sites.

The BFCP was invited to Brussels on two occasions this year – once through an invitation issued by the EU Environment Commissioner as part of a Round table meeting on Financing N2000, then again to accept a 'Best of the best' award for The BurrenLIFE Project. Other dissemination work included a paper at the national conference on conserving farmland biodiversity, hosting visits of the BSBI, of the Colloquium of International Geographers and of the Canadian Ambassador, Mr. Loyola Hearn.

At a local level, the BFCP have been centrally involved in the development of a 'Community Charter for the Burren' with other local organisations including Burren IFA, Burrenbeo Trust and the Burren Connect Project. BFCP have delivered a module on 'Farming for conservation' in four Burren schools as part of the Eco Beo Heritage Education Programme and also delivered numerous lectures. BFCP have also been involved in the development of the AranLIFE proposal and have visited farmers in the Wicklow uplands.

On the communications front BFCP produce quarterly updates which are posted on the website – which itself is updated weekly. The BFCP has been filmed as part of the Eco Eye series and also as part of an EC-commissioned documentary 'Biodiversity on a plate' as well as a Belgian TV website broadcast. BFCP have contributed to a large number of brochures, reports and publications across Europe and have featured regularly on local and national radio and in newspapers.

In summary the BFCP continues to grow from strength to strength. It is likely that some minor additional changes will be made to the BFCP in year 3, and that the number of participants will increase, but the BFCP model seems to be performing very well thus far. Overall, the BFCP has had a very successful two years of operation and continues to set a new standard for the management of HNVA areas in Ireland.



2. Background to the BFCP

The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) is a unique, research-based agri-environmental programme targeted specifically at the Burren. It aims to conserve and support the heritage, environment and communities of this internationally important landscape.

The BFCP grew out of the findings of the BurrenLIFE Project (BLP) (2005-2010). The BLP had developed a new model of sustainable agriculture for the Burren to conserve and renew the region's priority habitats. The success of the BLP in terms of its impact on habitats, its generation of cross-sectoral support, the solid research and value for money generated, led to the Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF – subsequently DAFM, Dept of Agriculture, Food and Marine) and the Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) funding a new programme with the aim of mainstreaming the BLP approach to c.100 Burren farmers. The new Programme – the 'BFCP' - was launched in April 2010.

The stated objectives of the BFCP are:

- To ensure the sustainable agricultural management of high nature value farmland in the Burren.
- To contribute to the positive management of the Burren landscape and the cultural heritage of the Burren.
- To contribute to improvements in water quality and water usage efficiency in the Burren region.

The BFCP is funded under Article 68.1 (a) (i) of Council Regulation (EC) 73/2009 which makes provision for the use of unused Single Payment Programme funds for specific types of farming which are important for the protection or enhancement of the environment. A total of up to €1 million will be made available through Article 68.1 to eligible Burren farming participants in respect of each of the years - 2010, 2011 and 2012. This has since been extended to include 2013 due to delays in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). As this funding was ringfenced for farmers, no resources could be made available for the administration of this funding, so this burden has been borne by NPWS.

The reference area for the BFCP is shown in Figure 2. This area indicated is c. 72,000ha in size and includes: 12 Special Areas of Conservation (three main sites), one SPA, a National Park and three National Nature Reserves. It is estimated that up to 1,000 farmers are located within this area, though a significant number of these would not be farming Burren-type land and would not be relevant to BFCP.

Entry to the BFCP is voluntary and was based on a call for applications issued by DAFF in April-May 2010. By the May 17th 2010 deadline DAFF had received a total of 340 applications for entry to the BFCP, far in excess of initial expectations. These applications had to be assessed and ranked according to a number of environmental criteria which were agreed by the Project Steering Committee. These criteria included history of participation in REPS, area and proportion of designated land on holding, listed National Monuments situated on holding and proportion of total holding situated in Burren.

Each application was allocated a score, and these scores ranged from a minimum of 10 points to a maximum of 318. In Year 1 of the BFCP all farmers with a score of 220 or more were offered places. 117 farmers accepted their place and these farmers have now (almost) completed two years of the BFCP. An additional 26 farmers who were offered places in year 2 (due to budget underspend) have now (almost) completed their first year of the BFCP.

15 BFCP farm advisors were recruited and trained to develop concise farm plans for all BFCP farmers. These advisors are often REPS or AEOS planners and have a very good working knowledge of the Burren. A number of on-line resources were developed by BFCP to enable these advisors to complete the farm plan and on-going training is also provided. In year 2, the number of advisors was 12. This report builds on the report from Year 1 (May 1st 2010 – March 1st 2011) and covers the period between March 1st and November 30th 2011.

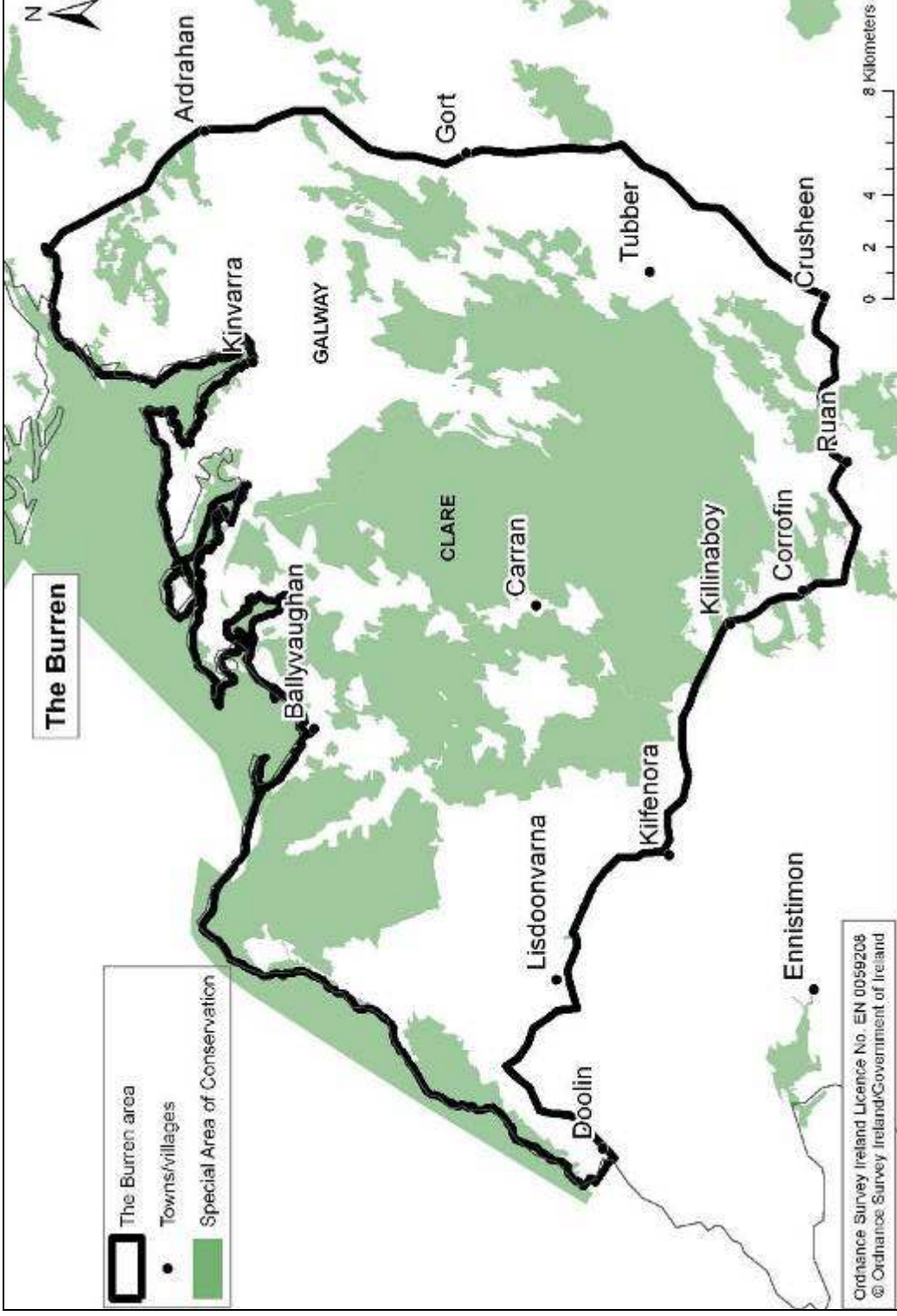


Figure 2. The Burren Region as defined for the purposes of the BFCP

3. Year 2 – New Developments

Here follows a summary outline of some of the main changes that took place in the BFCP Year 2. For more detailed information on the operational basics of the BFCP please see the Year 1 report.

3.1 Timeframes

Year 1 of the BFCP ran from May 1st 2010 to April 30th 2011. Payments to farmers for BFCP Year 1 were issued in early July 2011.

The timeframe for Year 2 of the BFCP was shortened to run from May 1st to Dec 31st 2011. This was done in order to align the programme timeframe with the calendar year. This reduced timeframe resulted in a compressed period for the compilation and submission of plans, as well as for the completion of works. It is anticipated that payments for Year 2 works completed will be issued in February 2012 (DAFM). The year 3 timeframe will be Jan 1st – Dec 31st 2012. The duration of the BFCP has also been extended to include 2013 (Jan 1st – Dec 31st) as a result of delays in CAP reforms.

3.2 Funding

In Year 1, a total of €641,019 was paid out to farmers by DAFM. This was different from the 'allocated' amount of €661,037 cited in the Year 1 report because:

- DAFM deducted 8% of farmer payments as part of 'Modulation' (€51,704)
- DAFM paid a sum of €500 per farmer to cover the cost of Year 1 planning
- The Year 1 allocation wasn't fully utilised as some M2 work was not completed
- DAFM applied cross compliance and other penalties where necessary'

Given the underspend in Year 1, it was decided to increase the number of farmers (Section 3.4) but also to increase the payment bands. Two main changes were made in regard to the latter:

- Measure 1 payment bands were increased by 20% (€100 to €120, €50 to €60 and €25 to €30 per hectare);
- Measure 2 allowances were calculated on 'digitised area' as opposed to 'claimed area'. The digitised area is the 'gross' area of the field, the claimed area is the net area of 'grazeable land' within this. On average within the area of the BFCP, only c.65% of the digitised area of land is 'claimed', or eligible for payment.

The overall funding allocation for Year 2 of the BFCP stands at €997,461. The average allocation per farm is €6,975 (range €710 to €14,997). However, this Year 2 allocation will vary from the final payment which is eventually issued to the farmer because of:

- Measure 2 works incomplete;
- Modulation of 9%;
- Cross compliance and other penalties;
- Payment for farm plans (if any).

One other funding change relating to Year 2 was that the Measure 3 payment had to be based on an eight month period (rather than on 12 months in Year 1 – and in future years). As a result, these payments were significantly reduced in Year 2.

3.3 Staffing

The administration of the BFCP is paid for by the NPWS as part of a three year contract which runs from April 30th 2010 to April 29th 2013. The contract is being delivered by High Nature Value Services (HNVS) Ltd the directors of which are Dr Brendan Dunford, Dr Sharon Parr and Dr Bryony Williams. These three individuals form the core project team charged with the successful delivery of the BFCP. Their main roles are as follows:

- B. Dunford (Project Manager): Liaising with project partners, chairing meetings of the PSC and PAG, site assessments, farm plan checks, education and communication work.
- S. Parr (Project Scientist): Site visits, on-site liaison with farmers and advisors, Meadow assessments, Scrub work, Monitoring, compliance – felling licences, notifiable actions etc.
- B. Williams (Project Technical Officer): Liaise with farm advisors, manage office and project finances, farm plan admin checks, database management, updating farm plan workbook and final template.

An updated Organigramme outlining the roles of the project team members in delivering various project actions is found in Appendix 3.3

This year the project team expanded – partly due the opportunity offered by the local FAS programme, partly in response to urgent needs identified:

- **Rachel Barrett** works with BFCP on a 2.5 day week basis as part of a FAS placement. Rachel works on data input, reception and general office support.
- **Sarah O'Loughlin Irwin** worked on a contract basis with BFCP during August-October 2011. Sarah was recruited to deal with the bottleneck of farm plan checks during the shortened planning period. Sarah worked 2-3 days per week with the BFCP during this period.
- **Michael Lynch** is the Field Monument Advisor for Co. Clare (funded by the Heritage Council and the Burrenbeo Trust). Michael has worked closely with BFCP in year 2 advising farmers on archaeological issues and compiling almost 30 reports on planned M2 works and their impact on local archaeology, including mitigation measures. He works 80 hours per month. HNVS Ltd will be making a financial contribution towards the FMA position in acknowledgement of this input.

3.4 Participating Farmers

All 117 farmers who participated in Year 1 continued into Year 2 of the BFCP. Given the underspend in Year 1, it was agreed to increase payment levels (Section 3.2) and to offer additional places to the next highest scoring applicants on the Applicants database (originally compiled in 2010).

On July 5th 2011 DAFM issued offers to 31 farmers who had scores above 205 points. On July 13th 2011 these farmers attended an introductory training session in Carron. Five of the farmers subsequently decided against entering the BFCP and so the total number of new entrants was 26, yielding a total number of Year 2 BFCP participants of 143.

4. Farm Advisors

A panel of farm planners, referred to as 'BFCP Advisors', are responsible for liaising with BFCP farmers, planning Measure 2 work, carrying out Measure 1 assessments, and collating and submitting information required by the BFCP office. The project team then completes checks, calculates payments and finalises the annual farm plans.

4.1 Farm Advisor Panel

The farm advisor selection process was described in the first annual report and resulted in 15 successful candidates being appointed to the panel last year. DAFM approval of the BFCP farm advisors is on the basis of a BFCP farm plan being approved by DAFM. As all 15 advisors on the panel submitted at least one BFCP farm plan in 2010, all of these advisors received written approval from DAFM in May/June 2011.

From last year's panel of 15 approved advisors, 11 were available to draw up farm plans this year. Of the four who stepped down, three were Teagasc advisors who were replaced by a colleague of theirs, bringing this year's panel to a total of 12 advisors. The extra advisor met the selection criteria and has completed a number of BFCP plans; consequently, he can expect to receive approval from DAFM in early 2012.

143 plans were produced this year, for which there was a wide distribution of plans per advisor, listed as follows (min to max): 1, 2, 3, 7, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 15, 32, 34.

A BFCP survey (November 2011) found that 45.9% of BFCP farmers considered their advisor 'excellent', 47.3% 'good', 12.3% 'OK', 2.3% 'poor' and 0.8% 'awful'. This was generally a very positive and welcome response. *(Image – BFCP farmer training 2011)*



4.2 Farm Advisor Training

The BFCP team hosted an intensive one-day refresher training course in May 2011, followed by a one-to-one Excel workbook workshop to guide the 12 advisors through the planning process. The training course was developed to remind and update the advisors on the desired conservation outcomes, the various management techniques that can be used, and how to produce a BFCP farm plan.

Training was delivered through a combination of presentations, demonstrations, discussions, handouts, and workshops. Most of the training was delivered by members of the project team; Brendan Dunford, Sharon Parr and Bryony Williams, with some additional input from Christine Grant, an Archaeologist with the National Monuments Service.

The training course agenda included: a review of Year 1 of the BFCP; feedback and any issues arising from advisors, farmers and Programme partners; proposed changes for Year 2 payments and their rationale; improvements to the farm plan and other templates; alterations to Measure 1 assessments; differences for Measure 2 tasks; updates on Measure 3, AEOS, REPS and commonage issues; information on training for advisors, farmers and contractors; outlining timeframes; issuing electronic resource packs; troubleshooting and discussing issues raised.

A new Excel-based 'Workbook' template (Appendix 4.2.1) was devised earlier this year to make it easier for advisors to compile and submit the information BFCP staff required to complete checks, calculate payments and produce farm plans. During the one-to-one Workbook workshops, advisors were trained in the use of this new Excel template and how to transfer maps to it from eREPS (software available to all farm planners in Ireland). This template and adjusted planning process were introduced as a result of advisor feedback from Year 1 of the BFCP. It worked reasonably well and an updated version will be used for Year 3.



(Image – farmer demonstrating bladed strimmer)

This year's Word-based farm plan template was almost identical to last year's (Appendix 4.2.2). Minor adjustments were made as a result of feedback from BFCP participants, advisors and Programme partners, such as adding the field number column to the Measure 1 box, adding the funding rate column to the Measure 2 box, updating logos and adding a space for the advisor's signature. An updated version of this template will be used for Year 3 plans, with the most notable change being to switch the maps with the aerial photos so that the aerial photos appear on the first page, making planned Measure 2 work easier to locate.

A BFCP survey (November 2011) found that 95.3% of BFCP farmers thought that their farm plan was clear and easy to follow while 3.9% felt it could be better and only 0.8% had no opinion. This shows that the current template works very well for farmers.

4.3 Farm Advisor Liaison

Ongoing liaison between the project team and advisors to address specific questions took the form of: phone conversations, email correspondence, office meetings, site visits, one-to-one workshops and updating 'Advisor FAQs' on the project website. The BFCP Project Scientist made 23 advisor support visits in Year 2 to assist advisors in the field.

Another innovation introduced in Year 2 was the development of an on-line 'Farm Plan Update' which allowed farmers and advisors to check the status of any farm plan that had been submitted. This was updated daily.

Advisors were informed of each team member's area of expertise to assist in targeting queries that arose and expertise from outside the project team was facilitated by staff where necessary (e.g. to seek clarification from DAFM on specific issues).

During this year's farmer training course held in November/December 2011, participants were encouraged to consider and prioritise works to carry out in Year 3 (2012) and to contact their advisor straight away to start drawing up their next farm plan. Advisors were contacted to expect this and to schedule BFCP Year 3 advisor training in Jan 2012.

4.4 Data Management

A series of databases has been set up and is being maintained to manage and store the wide variety of data and additional information generated by the BFCP. This includes Microsoft Excel format databases of successful applicants and appellants, advisors, workers (available to assist participants with Measure 2 works), contacts, farm plan checks and site visits, farmer training bookings and attendance, receipt of signed plans, Measure 2 declaration forms (Form D1 and Form D2; Appendix 4.4a,b) and receipts requested, farmer and advisor feedback, summary data from farm plans (including areas (ha), REPS/AEOS participation, payments, length/area/number for Measure 2 tasks and M1 scores), payment checks, detailed Measure 1 assessment records for monitoring purposes, distribution of Best Practice Guides, education events, meetings, and media work.

GIS databases have been set up and include spatial data such as DAFM land parcels, Ordnance Survey Ireland maps and aerial photos (for which a third party licence request via NPWS was applied for in June 2010), farm boundaries, field boundaries, SAC designated areas, and national monuments.

All practical precautions are in place to protect sensitive data, such as BFCP participants' contact and payment information. Measures include keeping the office and laptops secure, using password protection on electronic files that contain sensitive data and issuing passwords only to those who need them (under separate cover). As it was unclear whether HNVS Ltd was required to register with the Data Protection Commissioner, an application for registration was completed in 2010, this was considered and registration deemed to be unnecessary. *(Image – rainwater collection harvester, constructed under BFCP)*



5. Implementation - BFCP work on the ground

BFCP Year 2 farm plans were somewhat delayed as a result of Advisors availability and the reluctance of many farmers to begin plans for Year 2 until Year 1 payments had been received. Most plans were received in a three month period between mid July and mid October 2011. All plans were approved by the BFCP office by October 20th 2011. Year 2 farm works have been underway since mid summer 2011 and must be completed before the end of 2011.

5.1 Areas impacted by BFCP

The area of designated land and other Annex 1 habitat which is part of the BFCP is 13,256ha, of which on average 64.7% or 8,581ha is deemed 'eligible' for payment under the Single Farm Payment System (SPS). In turn, 7,179ha or 83.65% of this 'eligible' figure was considered 'assessable' under Measure 1 of the BFCP (Section 5.4). The remaining areas of designated land which are not considered to be 'M1 assessable' would generally be improved agricultural grassland and, in a few cases, scrubland.

The overall BFCP area is, surprisingly, only slightly greater than that listed in the Year 1 report (12,887ha). This can be explained by the fact that the gross area of commonage rather than the gross area of the *farmer's share* of the commonage was inadvertently used in the year 1 area calculation. When this is accounted for, the actual Year 1 area should have read 11,571ha, of which 7,435.3ha are eligible (64%).

Thus, the Year 2 figure represents an increase in area of 14.56%. The corresponding increase in the number of participants was 22.2%. This indicates that the average area of the 26 new entrant farms was much lower than that of the initial 117 farms - 98.9ha for Year 1 farms (n=117) compared with 64.8ha for Year 2 new entrants (n=26), showing that Year 1 farms had 53% more land on average. This relates to the original scoring system within which the area and proportion of SAC on a farm earn scores.

Within the BFCP area most of the land is privately owned except for:

- Commonage: 615ha (gross area of commonage *shares* in BFCP)
- Public land: 1,196ha (gross or 'digitised' area)

Most of the BFCP area is designated as SAC except for 309.56ha (gross) or 2.3% of the total.

One additional item of interest is that for the areas of public land, only 29% of the gross area is considered eligible for payment under SPS rules as compared with an overall average of 64.7% for all farms. This discrepancy probably relates to the rougher nature of the public land in question (Burren National Park, Slieve Carron Nature Reserve).

5.2 Payments allocated under BFCP

The number of farmers participating in the BFCP has increased from 117 in year 1 to 143 in Year 2, with 31 additional places being offered by DAFM and 26 of these being taken up. The total amount allocated according to plans signed in Year 2 was €997,461. The average payment per farm was €6,975 (range €710 to €14,997) which represents an increase of 18% on the Year 1 payment (*before modulation of 8%*). This averages out at approximately €75.25/ha of SAC/Annex 1 land.

There was a noticeable difference between payments allocated to existing farmers compared with new entrants. The latter were allocated an average of €4,633 compared with €7,496 for the former, equating to 62% more money allocated for the 'Year 1' cohort. This relates to the larger areas (by 53%) of the existing farmers (n=117) and is particularly acute in terms of the M2 allocations (81.5% more for Year 1 farmers) and less so on M1 allocations (54% more for Year 1 farmers).

There is a wide distribution of payments between farmers (Figure 3). It is also important to note that in many cases BFCP funding is paid *in addition* to REPS or AEOS funding. Some 85 (59%) BFCP farmers are currently also availing of REPS/AEOS funding.

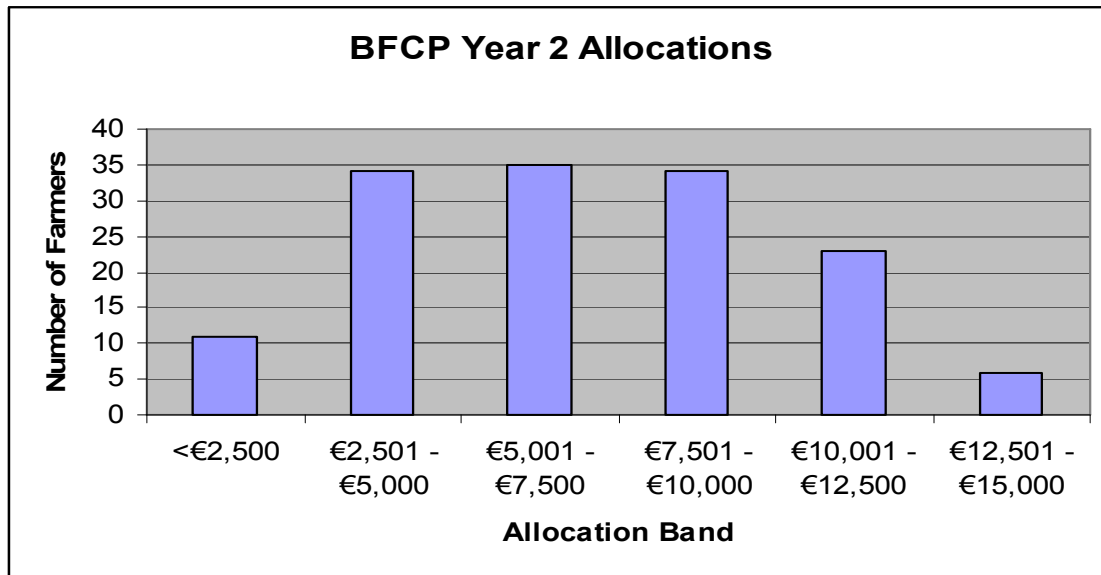


Figure 3. Payments allocated to BFCP farmers in Year 2 (n=143)

It should also be noted that participating farmers contributed 25%, 50% or 75% of the cost of Measure 2 works. This amounts to an additional estimated input into the BFCP from the farming sector of €337,497 in Year 2, or an additional €25.46/ha. This means that the overall BFCP Year 2 budget is c. €1.335m or c.€100.7/ha of Annex 1 land.



5.3 Measure 3: Protection of designated land and additional areas of Annex I habitat

Funding is allocated under Measure 3 of the BFCP for the protection of designated land/other Annex 1 habitats. Payments are based on three bands: €42/ha (0-40ha), €24/ha (40-80ha) and €18/ha (80-120ha). As this is an annual payment and as Year 2 of the BFCP extends over a shortened 8-month period, M3 payments had to be reduced accordingly.

There are some restrictions on Measure 3 payments. They only apply to 'eligible' areas of land (on average <65% of the gross area figures). They cannot be paid on designated land which is receiving N2000 payments under REPS or AEOS, though non designated land may be paid for even if the farmer is in REPS/AEOS. Measure 3 payments are also not issued on fields where silage feeding took place – M3 deductions of on average €90 were made on 20 farms for silage feeding.

The BFCP covers 42.4% of the three main terrestrial SACs in the Burren:

- Black Head – Poulsallagh: 2,183ha out of 5,572ha (39%)
- Moneen Mountain: 3,620ha out of 6,070ha (60%)
- East Burren Complex: 7,106ha out of 18,820ha (38%)

In addition, the BFCP covers 309.56ha of other Annex 1 habitats.

The total allocation under M3 in Year 2 was €55,385 (5.6% of total BFCP payments). This was c.31% of the maximum possible M3 budget (€178,947) based on area (mainly because many farmers were in receipt of SAC payments under REPS/AEOS). Overall:

- 43 farmers received no M3 (as they are in REPS 4 or joined AEOS in 2010);
- 11 farmers received full M3 (no deductions), an average of €1,339 each;
- 89 farmers received partial M3 payment (exiting REPS 3 or joining AEOS in 2011) – on average €456.78 each;



5.4 Measure 2: Site Enhancement Works

An enormous amount of work was undertaken under Measure 2 of the BFCP in year 2. The total amount of money allocated was €521,962, over half (52.3%) of the BFCP total.

Funding is allocated for Measure 2 works based on the extent of designated land and additional Annex 1 habitat on the farm. In year 1 this figure was based on the 'eligible area' but in year 2 DAFM agreed to allocate M2 funding based on 'digitised' or 'gross' area of SAC/Annex 1 habitat. This is a much more logical method of allocating M2 funding and gives a significant boost to farmers with small amounts of Annex 1 land.

The bands per hectare (gross) under M2 are €100/ha (0-40ha), €50/ha (40-80ha) and €25/ha (80-120ha). The M2 allocation for any job is based on costs developed under the BurrenLIFE project. The allocation only covers a proportion of the cost of an agreed job. In general, scrub control, stone wall work and habitat restoration jobs are funded at 75% as these offer significant environmental benefits but limited agricultural benefit (relative to the cost). Durable goods (troughs, feed bins, pumps, tanks, gates etc), erection of wire fencing and watering facilities are 50% funded as these are considered to offer both agricultural and environmental benefit. Vehicle access provision is funded at 25% (up to a maximum of €3,000) as this is of great agricultural benefit but may offer less direct environmental benefit and requires a higher level of scrutiny.

Unit costs (per ha, per metre, etc) developed by the BLP for all of the activities carried out during that Project have been adopted by the BFCP. A funding menu has been developed for most durable goods and wall repair (Appendix 5.4) and this was revised and updated after Year 1. A scrub calculator was developed to calculate scrub costs. This was also slightly modified after Year 1. What works need to be done, where and how, is clearly specified in the farm plan along with the net payment for this work.

Farmers are encouraged to consult the BLP Best Practice Guidelines before undertaking work. All necessary permissions including written consents must be secured from the relevant authority and work must be completed by Dec 31st 2011. Farmers are advised that failure to secure the necessary consents or to complete the tasks successfully within the given timeframe will result in reduction or loss of payments under this Measure.

Under Measure 2, the maximum available budget (based on the full area-based allowance being used by all farmers) was €767,365. The reasons why only 68% of the 'maximum Measure 2 budget' was allocated (up from 60% in Year 1) are as follows:

- Timeframes: Many farmers felt that they did not have enough time to complete a lot of M2 work by Dec 31st 2011.
- Some farmers felt that there was very little work to do on their Annex 1 land.
- Some farmers claimed they could not afford the matched funding.
- Permissions for jobs were not always forthcoming in time.

The work done under M2 falls under a number of categories which are summarised in Table 4. It is clear that there was a big increase in scrub work (up from 43% to 59% of total M2 allocated) with wall repair, water provision and access provision also proving popular among participants.

Measure 2 Work Category	Allocation	% of M2 Year 2	% of M2 Year 1	Funding rate
Scrub Removal	€303,908	58.9%	43.0%	75%
Wall repair (fencing)	€74,823	14.4%	20.8%	75%
Gate installation	€21,593	4.1%	7.5%	50%
Water Provision	€59,632	11.4%	15.1%	50%
Feeding equipment	€6,525	1.3%	3.2%	50%
Vehicle Access Tracks	€39,766	7.6%	5.8%	25%
Habitat Restoration	€11,999	2.3%	4.6%	75%
Total	€325,331.9			

Table 4. Payments allocated under M2 in Year 2 compared with Year 1 % allocation

5.4.1 Scrub work

Scrub removal was the main action undertaken under Measure 2. This work was funded at 75% of the cost, and the cost was estimated using a scrub calculator which took account of the area of scrub, the percentage cover and the methods used to remove the scrub.

A total of €303,908 was allocated for the removal of 50.42ha of scrub from 112 farms, equating to an average of €2,713.5 per farm for the removal of an average area of 0.45ha per farm. Various techniques were used depending on a range of circumstances including the terrain, the presence of archaeology or sensitive habitats, organic status of farmers etc. Costs ranged from €1,100 per ha of scrub (using tractor mounted brushcutter) to €13,300 per ha (using chainsaws with stump treatment), though the latter includes the cost of gathering, piling and treating areas of cut scrub.

Scrub removal work was broken down into two main categories:

- Scrub Pathways: 4.92ha* or 23,634m of paths on 54 farms (average 438m/farm)
- Encroaching Scrub: 45.4*ha on 105 farms (average 0.43ha/farm)

*Note: Areas listed are areas of 'compressed scrub' (100% cover of scrub)

A number of different methodologies, or combination of methodologies were employed:

- 47 farmers cut with chainsaw and treated stumps (only);
- 35 farmers cut with chainsaw and didn't treat (only);
- 5 farmers used machine mounted brushcutter only);

The remainder used a combination of methods or various alternatives (pulling, topping, notching etc).

Approximately 57% of the area cut in Year 2 was to be stump-treated (28.6ha across 70 farms) with

Roundup biactive. The remaining area was not to be treated but may be subject to future treatment (e.g. wiping of regrowth).



(Image – Grassland area post scrub removal)

This average cost of scrub removal across all farms using all methods was €6,040/ha (of 'compressed' scrub). Scrub work was funded at 75%, so in effect farmers contributed €101,303 in additional work under this action.

The quality of scrub work done in Year 1 varied widely. One common problem was the failure to properly gather and pile scrub brushings. In some cases, where the quality of



work was deemed to be very poor in this regard, the job (gather and pile properly) was put in the Year 2 plan with a zero allowance.

In other cases the wiping of stumps was either not done or done very ineffectively. In some cases this may have been as a result of weather conditions. In some cases the wiping of the regrowth was put in the Year 2 plan with a zero allowance. It is hoped to reduce such incidences in future years by better skills

training and awareness. *(Image – carefully piled scrub brushings to the side of a new path)*

5.4.2 Wall Repair

The repair of internal stone walls continues to be a very popular measure under the BFCP. During year 2 of BFCP, c. €66,400 was allocated for the repair of 19,358m of wall (similar to the Year 1 figure of 18,503m) on 54 farms (average 358m per farm). This figure refers to lengths of wall requiring repair (gaps etc) so the extent of wall impacted is likely to be many times this figure. Repair costs were based on a unit rate of €3.43/m.

In addition, c. €8,425 was allocated for 7,576m of wire fencing (up from 1,650m in Year 1) on 18 farms (421m per farm), mainly on green field sites, at an average cost to the project of €1.1 per metre (50% funding applies). Three electric fencer units were purchased to improve stock management.

The overall allocation for wall repair and fencing work was €74,823 (slightly up from the Year 1 total of €67,715). This equates to an average allocation of €1,247 for each of the 60 farms involved. As stone wall repair is funded at 75%, and fencing at 50%, participating farmers would have made a contribution worth €30,558 to this task.

As with the scrub work, the standard of wall work in Year 1 varied widely – from some really exceptional work to some very poor quality wall repair. In some cases wall repair



jobs were put back into the BFCP Year 2 plan at zero cost. It is hoped to reduce such incidences in future years by providing skills training and improving awareness.

(Image – well repaired wall)

5.4.3 Gate Installation:

The installation of farm gates to facilitate improved grazing management was funded under BFCP at a rate of 50%. A fixed rate of €150 per gate regardless of size (covering purchase of gate, metal posts and 1 days labour) was allocated for this task. This flat rate encourages the use of smaller gates which are more appropriate in many cases.



In Year 2 of BFCP, a traditional style of gate was identified and a local tradesman is now producing these traditional 'Burren gates'. BFCP offered an enhanced payment of €200 per Burren gate in order to incentivise the use of these gates. *(Image: traditional style of Burren gate installed on BFCP farm)*

During year 1, €21,593 (down slightly from €24,428 in Year 1) was allocated for the installation of 134 gates (down from 159 in Year 1) on 71 farms (€304 per farm, range 1 to 6 gates). As this was funded at 50%, this equated to an additional €21,593 being invested by farmers in this task. 28 of the gates were Burren gates, so this will result in an enhanced local economic impact.

5.4.4 Water Provision:

The provision of a clean supply of fresh drinking water is critical for the targeted grazing of Burren winterages, particularly given the karst hydrology of the area. It is also important to protect sensitive water supplies to avoid pollution by livestock.

In total, €59,633 (up from €49,023 in Year 1) was allocated for water provision on 56 farms (€1,065 per farm, ranging from €75 to €7,000).

This allocation covered a range of works:

- 96 drinking troughs installed on 44 farms (down from 131 in Year 1);
- 141 rolls of pipe (21,150m total) installed on 41 farms (down from 175 in Year 1)
- 14 storage tanks on 12 farms;
- 9 rainwater harvesters;
- 8 jobs where springs were cleaned out and protected.
- 7 pumps including two heavy-duty, solar-powered pumps;

(Image – work done to protect water source)



Water equipment was funded at 50% under BFCP, with a menu of drinking troughs, pipes and pumps available for the farmer to choose from (with a fixed allocation for each). One-off work such as the construction of rainwater harvesters and installation of solar pumps was funded on the basis of quotes supplied (to be validated using receipts). As water provision work was funded at 50%, an additional €59,633 was invested by farmers under this task.



In general this work was done to a very high standard. The main problem seen was where a solid base was not found for water tanks and the tanks ended up leaking water. In a few cases the farmer had neglected to connect the tank. In all such cases the farmer was alerted to the situation and asked to address it.

(Image: new solar water pump, BFCP farm)

5.4.5 Feed Equipment:

One of the greatest impacts of BFCP in its first year was the striking reduction in the levels of silage feeding on Burren winterages. Only 18 farms had any deductions based on silage feeding in their Year 2 plans (an area of 193ha or 2.7% of M1 assessable area).

To encourage the continuation of the shift away from silage feeding, BFCP subsidises the cost of purchasing feed storage bins and troughs.

In Year 2, BFCP allocated €6,525 (down from €10,250 in year 1) to 19 farmers (average €295.5 per farm) for:

- the purchase of 24 feed bins
- the purchase of 38 feed troughs

As this was funded at 50%, an additional investment equating to €6,525 was made by participating farmers under this heading.

5.4.6 Access Provision:

The provision of vehicular access for herding livestock and for helping with animal feeding continues to be a high priority for many farmers. However this is a very sensitive issue as it may also result in damage to priority habitats. Therefore a high level of planning and a number of permissions are required. If a proposed track has the necessary permissions and is considered to offer additional environmental value, the BFCP may decide to fund it but at a reduced rate of 25% and with an upper limit of €3,000.

A total of €39,766 (double the amount allocated in Year 1 of €19,026) was allocated for access provision in Year 2 of the BFCP.

This covered work under 2 areas:

- Upgrading tracks:
5,399m of track was planned for upgrading tracks on 8 farms (675m per farm), with a total allocation of €12,516 (€2.3 per metre).
- Constructing new tracks:
7,764m of new track were planned on 21 farms (370m per farm), with a total allocation of €27,250 (€3.5/ metre).



As access work was funded at 25%, an additional €119,298 was invested by farmers under this heading. In general work was done to a high standard though there has been a tendency to use more limestone chip than is necessary.

5.4.7 Habitat Restoration:

A number of works were suggested by farmers and advisors under the theme of 'habitat restoration'. These included:

- Cleaning out springs and building walls or fences to protect them from poaching and fouling by livestock (11 farms).
- Controlling bracken by hand cutting (3 farms).
- Fencing off an area to enclose goats to control scrub (2 farms).
- Removing rubbish from sites (2 farms).

€11,999 (down from 15,008 in Year 1) was spent on habitat restoration work on 22 farms (average €545 per farm). As this was funded at 75%, this equates to an additional farmer contribution of €4,000. *(Image: goat fence erected to help control scrub)*



5.5 Measure 1: Production of species-rich limestone grasslands & other grazed habitats

One of the most innovative and eye-catching aspects of the BFCP is the Measure 1 payment system which rewards farmers for the standard of agricultural and environmental management on a field by field basis. This measure seems to have worked very well so far and farmers appear to appreciate the flexibility and fairness of the output based payment system. In cases where some advisors may struggle with the scoring system, the BFCP team have been able to offer support as required.

In year 2, some slight modifications to the calculation of M1 payments were made:

- Measure 1 payment bands increased by 20% (€100 to €120, €50 to €60 and €25 to €30 per hectare);
- For farms with non SAC Additional Annex 1 habitat, these areas were scored *after* the designated areas in the farm plan. This was done so that farmers would be more likely to include such non SAC areas (which normally have a lower score) in their plan as they would not lose financially by doing so.
- In another slight change, on six farms with M1 assessable area in excess of 120ha, the scores were adjusted to correspond with a 120ha total and the payment bands were then applied. This was done so that we could show these farmers that all of their land had a value under Measure 2 (under the old system areas over 120ha were not paid on).

5.5.1 M1 funding allocated

The total amount of funding approved under Measure 1 in Year 2 of the BFCP was €420,114, a very significant (42%) increase on the Year 1 sum of €295,361. The increased payment is a reflection of:

- A 20% increase in payment bands in Year 2 of the BFCP
- The inclusion of 26 additional farmers;
- The gradual improvement in the condition of management units.

Measure 1 payments ranged from '0' (in three cases where all M1 areas were paid for under the AEOS spp-rich grassland measure) to a maximum of €6,698.49. The average payment (n=143) was €2,938 and equated to an average payment of €58.53 per ha of M1 assessable land.

Another interesting statistic is that in Year 2 of the BFCP, 64.4% of the total available M1 budget (i.e. if all fields scored a max '10' score) was utilised as compared with 63% in Year 1. When the increased number of '0' scores for silage feeding is considered, this shows that there has been a slight increase in the condition of the habitats assessed.



5.5.2 M1 assessable areas

The M1 payment is paid on the 'eligible' area of the field. A total of 7,178ha of the SAC/Annex 1 area in BFCP was considered appropriate for M1 assessment and payment. This equates to 83.65% of total BFCP 'eligible' area. The remaining 16.35% would be composed of species poor habitat such as improved agricultural grassland.

A total of 908 fields were scored in Year 2 (up from 717 in Year 1). This was made up of 122 fields from the 26 new farms as well as an increase of 69 'new fields' from the Year 1 farms (accounted for by newly subdivided fields and fields which were overlooked for scoring in Year 1). The average field size was 7.9ha (eligible) or c.12ha/30 acres (gross) reflecting the extensive nature of Burren winterages.

5.5.3 M1 Scores

Measure 1 scores are allocated on a field by field basis by farm advisors and are 'double-checked' in some cases by BFCP staff. Figure 4 below shows the total eligible area of land per M1 Score (0-10). This clearly shows that, Class '0' notwithstanding (a score of 0 is given to any field where silage feeding is taking place), most M1 assessable area has score in the range 5 -9 with the largest area scoring 7.

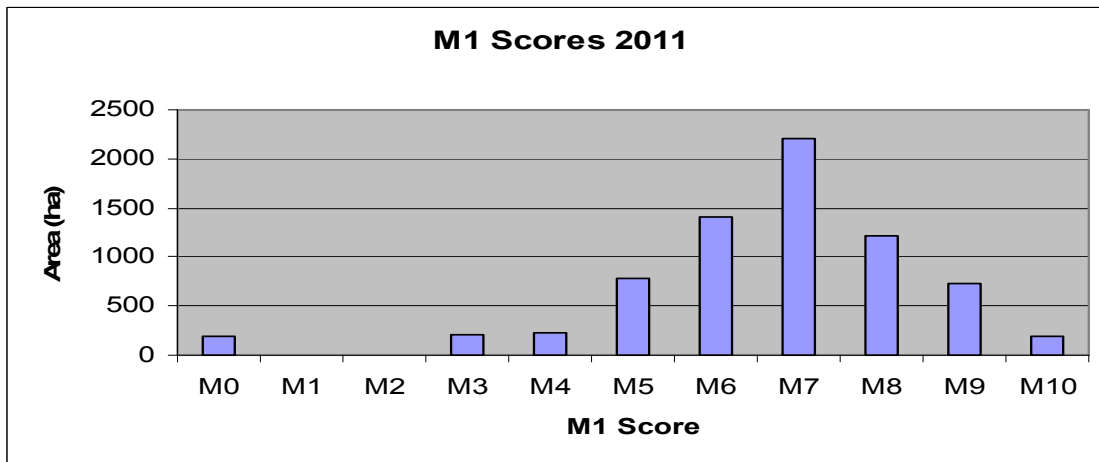


Figure 4. Total 'eligible' area of land per M1 Score (0-10) in BFCP Year 2.

The range of scores can also be presented according to the number of fields per M1 score (Figure 5). This graph is slightly more 'rounded' compared to Fig.4 – possibly an indication of smaller fields tending to have slightly lower scores.

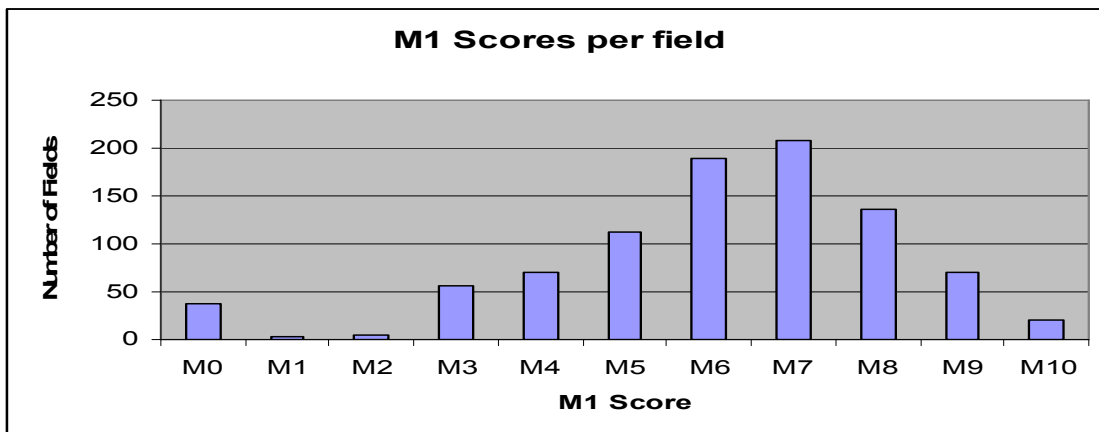


Figure 5. Total number of fields per M1 Score (0-10) in BFCP Year 2.

Even though the BFCP is a very new programme, it is interesting to reflect on the changes in M1 scores from Year 1 to Year 2. However, any direct comparison is difficult as:

- year 1 and year 2 assessments took place at different times of the year, due to a number of factors. In future years all assessments will take place in summer.
- M1 assessment methodologies were slightly different year on year – for example a new lowland grassland assessment system was developed and implemented in Year 2 (Section 6.3.1.2)
- there is an amnesty for silage feeding for new entrants
- the number and area of M1 assessable fields has varied between years (even within individual farms).

Given these caveats, when we plot (Figure 6) the percentage area (of the overall M1 assessable area) per M1 Class for Year 1 (blue) versus Year 2 (purple columns) we can see a slight shift away from lower scores (1- 5. 7) and towards higher scores (8-10) (leaving the '0' scores for silage feeding aside). This would indicate a general improvement in scores year on year.

This year on year improvement (notwithstanding the caveats listed above) may be explained by improved levels of grazing, reduced levels of silage feeding and the investment in Measure 2 works. While not definitive, this is very positive. This improvement would be even more apparent if the farms of new entrants (n=26) were removed as fields on these farms tended, in general, to score lower than the fields of their counterparts who were in BFCP from Year 1 (n=117).

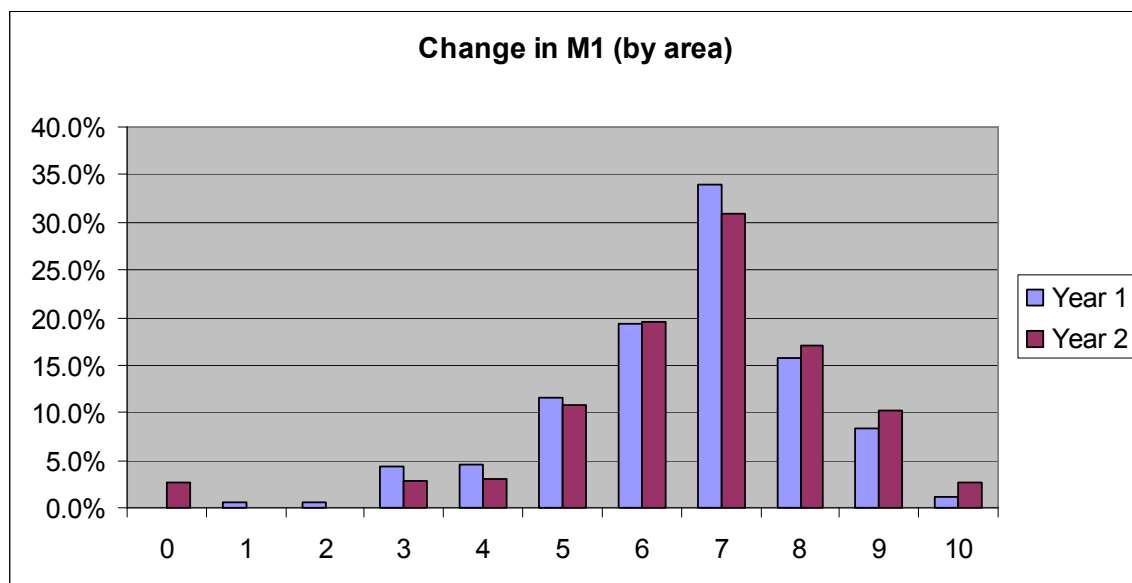


Figure 6 Percentage area (of the overall M1 assessable area) per M1 Class for Year 1 (blue) versus Year 2 (purple).

6. Farm visits, compliance & monitoring

6.1 Farm Visits

Farm visits are a very important part of the BFCP which fulfil many purposes, the most obvious being compliance checks and monitoring. However, another significant reason is to liaise with the farmers and advisers to discuss any issues or ideas they have in situ, thus ensuring that the BFCP is seen as an inclusive process which recognises their knowledge and experience and is not some faceless bureaucracy.

The Project Manager & Project Scientist made at least one visit to 140 of the 143 programme farms between 1st May (start of the 2011 planning period) & 30th November 2011. Multiple visits to some farms resulted in over 220 visits being made in total.

6.2 Farm Compliance Checks

A total of 138 of the 143 (96.5%) BFCP farms were visited on at least one occasion by the Project Manager or Project Scientist in order to check compliance under at least one of three areas. This level of compliance checks outweighs the 30% required (under contract). The breakdown of the compliance checks is as follows:

6.2.1 M2 works carried out in Y1 (2010 Plans)

Inspection of completed M2 works carried out under the 2010 farm plans is reported here as the checks had only just begun at the time the Y1 report was submitted.

M2 works were inspected on 37 of the 117 (31.6%) farms then participating in the BFCP, with findings recorded on Form A1 (Appendix 6.2.1) which are held in the BFCP office. In addition, many more M2 works were checked on the remaining 110 farms where M2 work was carried out in Year 1 when BFCP staff were on site to check Year 2 draft plans.

M2 compliance checks for work carried out under the Year 2 farm plans will be carried out in 2012 once the completed D1 'Declaration of Work Completed' forms are received (closing date for receipt 6th Jan 2012).

6.2.2 Validity and costing of proposed M2 works in Year 2 Plans (2011).

A large proportion of proposed M2 works were checked on the 138 farms visited in Y2 in order to verify their validity and estimated cost. Following these visits, the farm advisers were asked to make amendments to the proposals or costing where and when the BFCP staff felt it was necessary to do so, and then to submit a revised farm workbook.

6.2.3 Accuracy of the M1 condition assessments Year 2 Plans (2011)

A proportion of the M1 scores for individual fields were checked on 129 farms (90%) and the scores amended as necessary. The focus was on fields whose score had changed by several classes as well as those not checked in Y1 and those in receipt of large payments.



6.3 BFCP Monitoring

An overview of the M1 scores has already been provided in section 5.5.3. This section focuses on modifications to the M1 assessment for Burren winterages and the development of a new M1 assessment for Burren lowland grasslands.

6.3.1 M1 Assessment for Burren Winterage-type Pastures.

A novel 'health' assessment was developed in 2010 for scoring Burren winterage-type pastures and whilst it proved relatively successful and easy for the BFCP farm advisers to use, a few small modifications were made prior to M1 assessments being carried out for the 2011 plans. In terms of the scoring the changes were as follows:

- A1. Grazing Level: Two additional score options (0 and -5) were added to the 'grazing below optimum' category as the difference between the original categories (9 & -25) was too drastic.
- The score for the worst case scenario's under A3. Feed Site Damage, A4. Impact on Natural Water Sources and B3. Weeds & Agriculturally-favoured Species, was reduced from -5 to -7. This ensured that the lowest score would pull down the overall field score by 2 classes.
- C1. Ecological Integrity: an additional score option of 0 was introduced for fields that showed slight modification.

The scoring instructions were revised to accommodate the above changes but mainly to clarify the scoring criteria and so reduce the potential variability between individual assessors. The revised score sheet and scoring instructions for winterages are included in Appendix 6.3.1 (a,b).

6.3.2 M1 assessment of species-rich Burren Lowland Grasslands (Pastures & Meadows)

While the health assessment developed in 2010 worked well for typical winterages it fell down badly when it came to scoring fields containing lowland-type grasslands. The winterage health assessment is based on the supposition that management plays a significant role in determining the ability of the Burren pastures to achieve their potential in terms of botanical richness and diversity. Consequently, its main focus is on assessing management with an adjustment being made for the ecological integrity where necessary. This approach is possible as winterages tend to be species-rich, with the expected range of species present except where modified by reclamation or overgrazing.

In contrast, the floral diversity of Burren lowland grasslands (BLG) varies widely irrespective of current management, it being very much a product of past management. In this case, a health assessment based largely on management is not viable as, for example, a field whose management fits the criteria deemed good in terms of maintaining or enhancing the floral diversity may actually be of low conservation interest (or unhealthy) as past management has resulted in the loss of the majority of species associated with unimproved pastures or meadows. Hence, a score based mainly on management would overestimate the true conservation value of the field. Conversely, the value of a very species-rich lowland grassland which has significant 'health' issues could be significantly underestimated. In light of this, a new M1 assessment method has been developed specifically for scoring fields that fall into the Burren lowland grassland category.

The main physical difference between winterages and Burren lowland grasslands is the soil depth and type. Winterages are typically characterised by thin humic soils overlying limestone bedrock although some limestone heaths are present on relatively deep peat. In contrast, the Burren lowland grasslands are characterised by a deeper rooting medium of mineral soil overlying deep glacial till and, as such, are more productive. Historically, many would have been highly species-rich meadows and pastures but their inherent amenability for agricultural improvement means that the majority are now of little or no conservation interest. Those that remain are some of the rarest grassland types in the Burren.

As the conservation value of Burren lowland grasslands varies widely along a spectrum from those that have a high plant diversity to those with relatively few key meadow plants it was necessary to develop a method to evaluate and quantify the 'conservation value' of each grassland unit. However, as positive changes in the conservation value of a field are likely to be relatively slow in terms of increased plant diversity it was felt that payments linked to conservation value alone were not likely to encourage farmers to try to improve their conservation value at the expense of agricultural productivity. One of the primary aims of the BFCP is to foster good management in order to deliver conservation so it was decided that a solution was to include an appraisal of management within the new Burren lowland grassland M1 assessment method. By doing this, positive management can be rewarded as it will result in increased health scores and thus increased payments which should make managing these lowland grasslands for conservation more attractive to the farmers.

The first step was to find a means of calculating the conservation value of a Burren lowland grassland unit. After long consideration, a method was developed that has its origins in the guidelines given for the evaluation of hay meadows in the Peak District national park (Meadows Beyond the Millennium, Hay Meadows Report First Edition, January 1998 p69-71 <http://resources.peakdistrict.gov.uk/pubs/hmp/hmp.pdf>). The evaluation is based on the presence of indicator species which are broken down into five groups, running from the first that contains common species normally found in improved pasture through to the final group of 'high quality' species. The groups of indicator species given in the Hay Meadows Report were used as the basis of the BFCP groups (Appendix 6.3.2.1) but adapted by the Project Scientist based on accumulated field knowledge and reference to a variety of published sources detailing plant characteristics and traits. The method for collecting the field data and how this is used to establish which of 7 conservation classes the grassland belongs to is outlined in 'C1: Conservation value' of the scoring instructions for Burren Species-rich Lowland Grasslands (Appendix 6.3.2.2). A conservation calculator has been developed in excel which calculates the conservation value of a grassland unit automatically when the field data is entered (calculator available electronically on request).

The second step was to develop a scoring system relating to the management of the site and to any undesirable species present. The resultant system is along similar lines to that developed for assessing winterages and can be seen in Appendix 6.3.2.2.

One draw back of the M1 assessment for Burren lowland grasslands is that whilst anyone can carry out the management assessment with a little training, calculating the conservation value requires good plant identification skills and must be carried out by a

competent field botanist. Most of the conservation values calculated to date have been carried out by the Project Scientist which allowed the methodology to be assessed and modified as necessary. The only BFCP farm advisor with sufficient botanical skills to carry out the conservation assessment was given training by the Project Scientist and carried out the assessments on his client's farm.

A total of 54 Burren lowland grassland fields spread across 18 farms were assessed using the new methodology in 2011, and the distribution of field scores is shown in Figure 7. The average score was 5 which is lower than that for the winterages and reflects the impact of agricultural improvement on their conservation value.

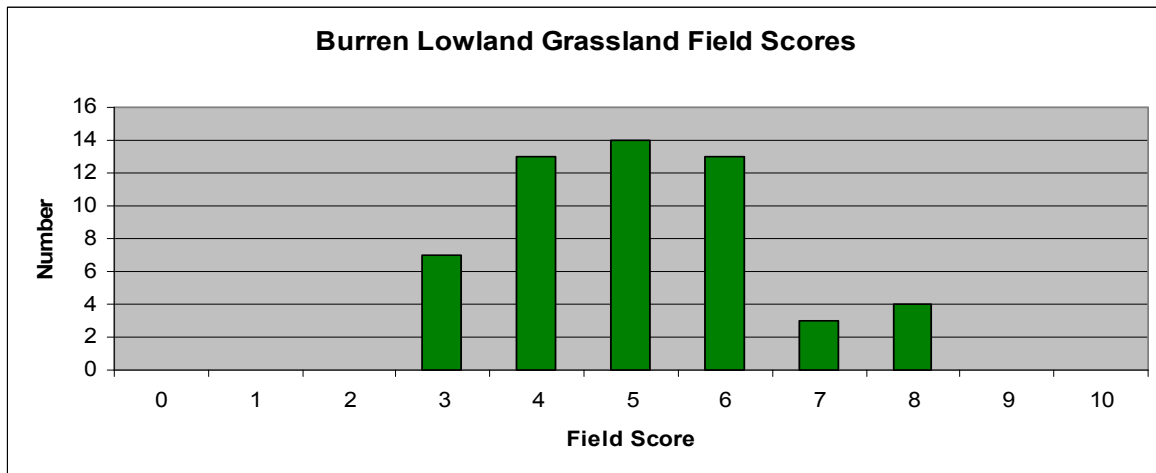


Figure 7 Field Scores on lowland grasslands (n=54)

The distribution of the conservation values of the 54 fields is shown in Figure 8. Only 15% of the fields assessed were classed as 'A – very high conservation value', 5 out of the 8 occurring on the same farm. The most common classification was 'B2 – good conservation value' at 26% of fields but nearly half (48%) fell into groups 'C1 or C2 – limited conservation value but have potential' or 'D – low botanical conservation value but some value for invertebrates (such as butterflies and bees)'.

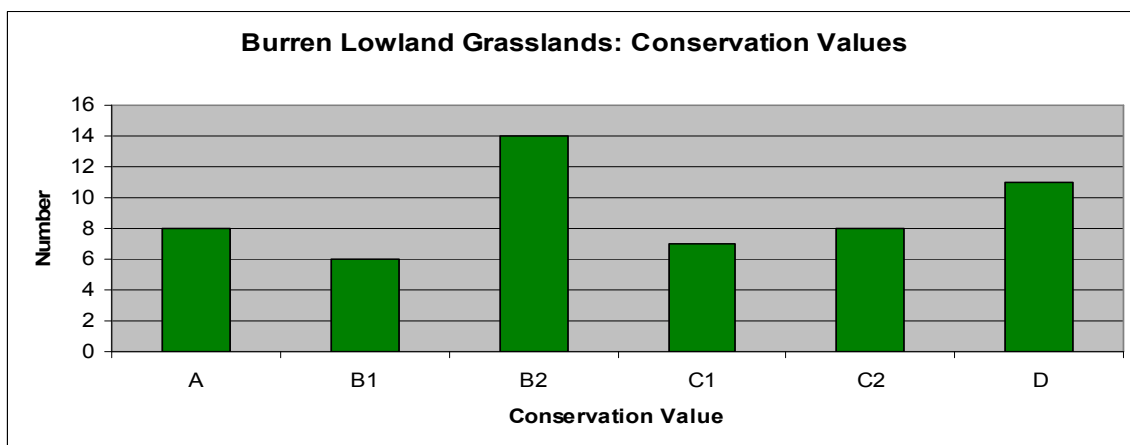


Figure 8 Distribution of lowland grassland conservation values (n=54)

The 54 fields assessed are only a proportion of the Burren lowland grassland fields on which M1 payments are being made. Now that the new specific M1 assessment method has been developed and tested it will be used to assess the rest of the Burren lowland grassland fields in 2012. The majority of this work will be carried out by the Project Scientist but it hoped to train in another person should the possibility arise. One advantage of the relatively slow change in the botanical composition of the lowland grassland swards is that the C1 conservation value assessments, which take significantly longer to do than the rest of the assessment, need only be carried out every few years.

6.3.3 M1 Assessment of Turloughs & Associated Grazed Habitats

Although the development of assessment methodology for the Burren lowland grasslands was the main focus in 2011, considerable thought was put into trying to develop a suitable method for turloughs. This is proving extremely difficult as the turloughs vary so much that it is difficult to come up with a method that can be applied across the board consequently further examination of this problem is necessary.

6.4 Additional BFCP Monitoring

A very limited number of panoramic photographs have been taken to act as a record of scrub removal and numerous photographs have been taken showing a selection of the M2 work that has been carried out on the BFCP farms.

The intention to instigate detailed vegetation monitoring on a limited number of the new BFCP farms in 2011 was outlined in the Y1 report. In practice, this did not prove possible as the limited time available for monitoring in 2011 was spent on the development of the new Burren lowland grassland assessment. These assessments will occupy a considerable portion of the Project Scientists time in 2012 as many are outstanding so it is unlikely to leave sufficient time to set up the detailed monitoring that was envisaged. Whilst this may seem disappointing, it should perhaps be considered in terms of the potential of the M1 assessments of winterages and lowland grasslands to form part of the EU's SAC monitoring requirement. Detailed monitoring is interesting from the point of scientific knowledge but the length of time needed to do it means that it can produce data for only a limited area so concentration on M1 assessments that cover a significant proportion of the grazeable habitats in the designated areas may be a more valuable use of time.

6.5 Continuation of BLP monitoring

In the tender document it was proposed that monitoring sites set up under the BLP would be revisited in 2011 and 2012 if time allowed. To date, this has not proved possible as all of the time available for monitoring has been spent on developing and refining the M1 assessment methodologies. Furthermore, the possibility of having sufficient time to revisit a proportion of the BLP monitoring is compromised by the fact that there are now 143 farms participating in the BFCP rather than the 100 originally envisaged. This means that considerably more time has to be spent on advisor and farmer support, and checking the validity of the plans to ensure that the BFCP is operating at a high standard.

In view of the above, the NPWS and HNV Services need to consider this aspect of the original tender.

7. Stakeholder liaison

7.1 Project Steering Committee (PSC)

A PSC was established to support and guide the work of the BFCP team. The PSC includes representatives from DAFF, NPWS, Teagasc, Burren IFA and the National Monuments Service. The group met five times in Year 1 (to March 2011) and have met three times subsequently (on April 21st, July 15th and October 21st 2011).

The current composition of the PSC is as follows:

Dept of Agriculture:	Paul Evans, Noel Dinneney, Peter Cleary, Eddie O'Doherty.
NPWS:	John Cross, Andy Bleasdale, Enda Mooney.
Teagasc:	Declan Murphy, Catherine Keena.
Burren IFA:	Michael Davoren, Michael Collins.
Nat. Monuments Service:	Christine Grant.
Other:	Sean Regan.

All PSC meetings are minuted and minutes are circulated by email.

7.2 Project Advisor Group (PAG)

The PAG includes representatives from a wide range of organisations with an interest in the Burren. Only one meeting of the PAG has been held thus far (19-10-10) mainly due to difficulties agreeing a suitable date. However, all Advisory Group members have been kept fully up to date through meetings of the Burren Community Charter, the High Nature Value Farming Project, the AranLIFE project (Section 7.3) and the meetings of the PSC (with which there is an overlap of membership).

The next PAG meeting will be held in early 2012.

7.3 Other institutional stakeholders

The BFCP has been centrally involved with three other Burren organisations – the Burrenbeo Trust, the Burren Connect Project and the Burren IFA – along with representatives from Local Authorities in Co.s Clare and Galway, to explore the development of a Community Charter for the Burren region. It is envisaged that the output of this initiative, supported by the Heritage Council, will be a shared vision and agreed management plan for the Burren.

Project Manager B Dunford has represented the BFCP at monthly meetings of the Management Group of this project, at public consultation events (x 8) and at other related events (Agricultural shows, world café sessions etc). A Draft Charter report is being prepared for submission by the end of the year. This may have significant relevance for the BFCP in securing additional funding and in exploring the possibility of a landscape feature designation for the Burren, among other things.

The BFCP has also played an active role in the development of the AranLIFE project (which is based on work undertaken during BurrenLIFE and the BFCP) and in the High Nature Value Farming Project, with the Project Manager attending Steering Group meetings for both projects. BFCP also sit on the Clare Heritage forum, the Clare Biodiversity Group and the steering group for the Burren Connect Project. BFCP also convene Steering Group Meetings for the Field Monument Advisor Programme for Clare.

7.4 Stakeholder Liaison: Regulatory & Compliance

In order to try to ensure that farmers are not in breach of any restrictions or legal requirements pertaining to M2 works, the BFCP team continues to liaise with the relevant departments as and when issues arise or clarifications are needed. In most cases, the procedures that were put in place for obtaining approval for various M2 activities during the first year of the BFCP have proved sufficient.

The following summarises the current situation with the various departments:

Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine

An issue arose regarding stone walls in the BFCP & AEOS. The AEOS section of DAFM sent a letter to farmers who had carried out wall work in Y1 of the BFCP and who had subsequently opted for traditional stone wall maintenance when applying for admittance into AEOS in 2011. The letter stated that stone wall work could only be carried out under the BFCP. As this dictate has negative implications for some of the farmers in question and was issued without any communication with the BFCP team or DAFM's Single Payments Unit, the Project Manager sought clarification as soon as it came to his attention. The Single Payments Unit is currently in negotiation with the AEOS section and we await the final decision on the matter.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

The BFCP continues to liaise with the local NPWS office and Conservation Rangers on a regular basis with regard to notifiable actions. The working relationship has been very successful and the agreement as to the authorisation for various activities put together in 2010 has worked well. However, this agreement needs revisiting in light of the new European Communities (Birds & Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the BFCP will be seeking guidance from the Regional Manager and others who are better acquainted with this document.

National Monuments Service

The BFCP team is very aware that some M2 works could impact negatively on the archaeological and cultural features of the Burren. Although legislation exists with regard to Recorded Monuments there has been a certain amount of confusion as to the procedures needed to carry out work in the vicinity of previously unrecorded archaeological features especially field walls. This has led to significant communication between the BFCP and NMS. The availability of the Field Monuments Adviser, Michael Lynch, has been of great help to the BFCP as he has gone out on request and assessed features that M2 works could impact upon, advised the farmer as to their importance and measures they should take to avoid damaging them.

A meeting is due to take place in December 2011 with the local NMS archaeologist, Christine Grant, to draw together the lessons of the past year and look at possibly drawing up best practice guidelines for unrecorded monuments and cultural features.

Forest Service

The streamlined application process for BFCP farmers applying for felling licences has worked well especially with the designation of Marie Duffin as the Forest Service contact point for the BFCP applications.

7.5 Stakeholder feedback

7.5.1 Project sponsors

BFCP staff met with NPWS staff and with DAFF staff on a number of additional occasions to discuss the BFCP. Some of these meetings were informal, other formal, including planning meetings at DAFF Offices in Portlaoise in March 2011 and November 2011.

7.5.2 Farm Advisors

In November 2011, after all 143 farm plans had been finalised, the advisors were invited to take part in an anonymous questionnaire-based survey (Appendix 7.5.2). This provides the opportunity for advisors to give feedback (e.g. on how they rate the advisor training course and support from the Programme team) and to make suggestions (e.g. improvements to the management of the BFCP and the Workbook template, and what to include in the next training course). At the time of writing, only two of the 12 advisors have returned their forms, more responses are expected in due course. These two have given positive feedback on seeing environmental improvements in the Burren, the advisor training and the support available from the project team.

7.5.3 BFCP Farmers

As part of the farmer training course conducted in November 2011 we asked all BFCP farmers to complete a short, anonymous, hand-written survey. The following questions were asked and the response levels are shown below:

1. *What do you think of the BFCP as an agri-environment programme?*

Responses: 132 (92.3%):

Awful (0%) Poor (0%) OK (2.2%) Good (22%) Excellent (75.8%)

2. *Do you think the BFCP will improve the Burren's environment?*

Responses: 129 (90.2%):

No (0%) Maybe (0.8%) Yes (98.4%) No Opinion (0.8%)

3. *Do you think the BFCP is well managed by the team in Carron?*

Responses: 128 (89.5%):

No, I don't (0%) Yes, I do (98.4%) No opinion (1.6%)

4. *Do you think the BFCP payment system is fair?*

Responses: 132 (92.3%):

No, I don't (9.8%) Yes, I do (86.4%) No opinion (3.8%)

5. *How do you rate the BFCP Training course?*

Responses: 131 (91.6%):

Awful (0%) Poor (0.8%) OK (9.9%) Good (47.3%) Excellent (42%)

6. *How do you rate your BFCP Advisor/Planner?*

Responses: 133 (93%):

Awful (0.8%) Poor (2.3%) OK (12.3%) Good (38.3%) Excellent (45.9%)

7. *Do you think your Farm Plan is clear and easy to follow?*

Responses: 129 (90.2%):

No, I don't (0%) Could be better (3.9%) Yes, I do (95.3%) No opinion (0.8%)

These responses are tremendously positive. We also asked farmers to list what, if anything, they most and least liked about the BFCP, as well as what, if anything, they would like to add (idea, criticism, suggestion etc). The responses to this – which are again very positive - are outlined in Appendix 7.5.3.

7.6 Media

The BFCP continues to be very successful in garnering media coverage for its work. Events covered by the National newspapers included the publication of the Year 1 report and the issuing of payments to BFCP farmers. BFCP have contributed regularly to Clare FM and the main newspapers the Clare People and Clare Champion and attended the National Ploughing Championships in Athy.

The BFCP were featured in a number of Articles, including an article in Burren Insight 3 by Michael Viney and an 'Investing in Natura 2000' brochure produced by the EC. An EC commissioned documentary 'Biodiversity on a plate' focussed on the BFCP as did a Belgian TV web piece. A list of media coverage of the BFCP is contained in Appendix 7.6.

Upcoming Media outputs will include:

- Nature Matters – an EC brochure on conservation in Europe funded by WWF
- Eco Eye – RTE series which will feature BFCP
- EC Publication on the 'Best of Best' LIFE Projects
- RTE Radio 1 documentary on Ireland's wildlife

The programme website www.burrenlife.com is updated regularly, in particular the 'News and Events' section as well as the 'Phase 2 – Resources' section. The latter contains a 'Farm Plan Status Sheet' which shows the status of all farm plans at any point in time and was updated on a daily basis during the planning period. One page project updates are issued on a seasonal basis to a mailing list which includes local NPWS staff and this update is also posted on the website and circulated locally.

7.7 Education

The BFCP has carried out a large number of public engagements over and above the training work done with Burren farmers. Highlights included:

- An invitation to attend a round table meeting on *Investing in Natura 2000* in Brussels;
- Collecting a 'Best of Best' award for the BurrenLIFE Project in Brussels;
- Delivering a plenary paper at the 'Conserving Farmland Biodiversity' Conference in Wexford

The BFCP hosted a large number of visiting groups including:

- University Groups from Dublin, Galway & Aberystwyth
- Four local schools as part of the Burrenbeo Eco Beo Programme
- The Botanical Society of Britian and Ireland (on their field Trip)
- The International Colloquium of Geographers (on their field trip)

Over 1,000 people have had first-hand briefing of the work of the BFCP from a member of the project team between April and December this year. A list of Educational events undertaken is contained in Appendix 7.7.

7.8 Training

The BFCP have provided a number of training events over the past 7 months:

Year 2 Farm Advisor Refresher Training:

This one day course was held in May 2011 and was supplemented by one-to-one field based training on request (see Section 4.2).

Year 2 New entrants Induction Training

An evening course was held in July 2011 for the 31 farmers who were offered places in the BFCP in 2011.

Year 2 Farmer Training Programme:

Held over two weeks, this mandatory Training Course was composed of a three hour classroom session (3 separate events) followed by a three hour field trip (four separate events). There was 98% attendance at the classroom sessions and 96% at the farm walk which were held over three weeks in late Nov-Dec 2011.

In addition, the BFCP have applied to the Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) for funding to provide four, one-day, skills training courses for BFCP farmers and contractors. It is hoped to hold these courses in early 2012.

7.9 Register of Workers

To assist farmers complete farm works such as scrub removal and stone wall repair the BFCP compiled a register of 63 skilled and semi skilled workers (Appendix 7.9). Any person with relevant previous experience was invited to register their details. This database is available on-line for farmers, advisors and the general public to access and is continually updated.

(Image: Farmer training course field trip, Nov. 2011)



8. Budget

8.1 DAFF Allocation to BFCP Farmers

The total funding allocated in year 1 was €997,461 which is very close to the available budget of €1m per annum. In fact, if as is likely DAFM pay a €500 planning fee to the 26 new entrants, then the allocation will rise to €1,010,461.

This compares well with the final amount of €641,019 paid to BFCP farmers in July 2011 for the completion of Year 1 works. In fact the average Year 2 *allocation* of €6,975 represents an increase of 17.8% on the average Year 1 *payment* of €5,921. However it is likely that the final amount paid will fall under the allocated amount for the following reasons:

- M2 Works incomplete due to poor weather and other factors;
- Cross compliance and penalties;
- Payment for farm plans (if any).
- Modulation of 9%;

It is expected that any underspend in Year 2 will be addressed by the inclusion of additional farmers in Year 3.

Year 2 payments are scheduled to be issued by DAFM in February 2012 subject to 5% inspection being completed. All Year 2 works must be completed by Dec. 31st 2011 and all paperwork (D1, D2 forms and receipts) must be submitted by January 6th 2012.

(Image; restored rainwater collection tank, BFCP farm, 2011)



9. Conclusion

This report covers 9 months of the second year of operation of the BFCP, the period from March 1st 2011 to Nov 30th 2011.

In general, this has been a very successful year and has built on the promising start made in Year 1 of the project. The maximum amount of funding available has been allocated, a large amount of Measure 2 work has been done and more is planned, and the M1 scoring system has worked well with gradual improvements in habitat condition already evident.

The quality of the work being done by farmers has been extremely good, and their understanding of how best to do this work and what standards are expected is improving all the time. A number of new innovations have been introduced – mainly by the farmers themselves – which bodes well for the future development of the programme.

There has been a very positive response from farmers to the BFCP – this has been evident from office visits, field visits, training sessions and the farmer survey undertaken in Nov 2011. Equally, the funding partners have been very supportive over the year as have been all other stakeholders, while the BFCP continues to attract strong interest from other geographical areas, media outlets and the European Commission.

The major challenges faced this year were the shortened timeframe combined with the increase in participants which placed a huge strain on the BFCP team, the farm advisors and the farmers themselves. Very poor weather conditions made this task even more difficult. The increasing burden relating to the securing of permissions for Measure 2 works also presented a challenge, particularly with regard to the protection of unrecorded monuments. Support from the Field Monument Advisor has been critical in addressing this.

As with Year 1, a review of the operation of the BFCP will be undertaken by the project team and any required changes will be made where possible. Problems encountered in Year are already being addressed: farmers are being encouraged to submit plans from January onwards, meetings are taking place with National Monuments Service etc. All proposed changes to the BFCP will be presented to the PSC for approval.

The BFCP team look forward in the coming year to continuing to build on the good work done so far in Years 1 and 2 of the BFCP and hope to create a programme that will really create a long term improvement in the Burren's environment and help to sustain the local community.



10. Appendices

3.3 Updated Organigramme – Year 2

4.2.1 New Excel-based BFCP ‘Workbook’ template

4.2.2 Revised MS Word BFCP Farm Plan Template

4.4 (a,b) Form D1 and Form D2

5.4 Revised Measure 2 Funding Menu

6.2.1 Form A1 – BFCP ‘30% Audit’ Control Sheet

6.3.1 (a, b) Revised M1 score sheet and scoring instructions for winterages

6.3.2.1 Burren Lowland Grassland Species Groups

6.3.2.2 M1 Scoring Instructions for Burren Lowland Grasslands

7.5.2 BFCP Advisor Survey 2011

7.5.3 BFCP Farmer Satisfaction Survey Results

7.6 Register of Media Work

7.7 BFCP Educational Events and Meetings

7.9 BFCP Workers Database

