

# Capacity Building for Irish Commonages

A report on Leonardo Da Vinci VETPRO Mobility to  
UK

June 12

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those we meet on our visit to Scotland and Northern England, in particular the Scottish Crofting Federation, Federation of Cumbrian Commoners, Foundation for Common Land, Natural England and the Friends of the Lake District. We would particularly like to thank the local crofters and commoners who gave so graciously of their time and highlighted the practical issues involved in managing common land in the UK. We would also like to thank Gwyn Jones and Patrick McGurn of EFNCP for organising and ensuring the smooth running of the programme. This work was made possible through funding provided by the LEONARDO DA VINCI VETPRO programme of DG Education and Culture administered in Ireland through Leargas.

## Introduction

LEONARDO DA VINCI VETPRO (VET Professionals) is part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme, aimed specifically at raising the professional capacity of persons responsible for knowledge transfer through vocational training by means of transnational training programmes.

The specific aim of this VETPRO mobility experience was to improve the ability of professionals working in the Irish countryside, to transfer knowledge and build capacity by:

- Increasing awareness of the existence and scale of common land in another EU state;
- Improving knowledge of the legal frameworks for common land in another EU state, including the implementation and delivery of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and biodiversity policy;
- Improving knowledge of structures for governance of commonage and co-operation between commonage users in another EU state;
- Improving knowledge of the agricultural systems involved in commonage and of approaches to adding value in another EU state.

Commonage is a major feature of land management in Irish less favoured areas (LFA) which have natural/other constraints which limit intensive agricultural production. These areas deliver significant benefits not only for livestock farmers who live there but also deliver in terms of public goods (Box 1). The LFA as a whole faces significant challenges (economic viability; the difficulties posed by conservation designations; ageing population and a reduction in activity) and some opportunities (increasing livestock prices; availability of rural development schemes; recognition of value of carbon sequestration and storage and other regulatory and support ecosystem services). While these challenges are intensified on commonages, so too are the difficulties in taking advantage of the opportunities.

### **Box 1: What are public goods and ecosystem services?**

**Public goods** are described in economic terms as goods and services of interest to society and not delivered through the market. The characteristics of public goods mean that if the good is consumed by one person it does not reduce the benefit to others and if it is available to one it does not exclude others from benefiting from it. Examples include biodiversity, cultural landscapes, water quality, climate stability, resilience to flooding, etc. If there is a particular demand for a public good by society and it is not provided in sufficient quantity then there must be policy intervention to secure the delivery of that good. Public goods can be seen as a subset of all the ecosystem services provided by the earth. For more details see

[http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app\\_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=875D2197-B61D-D700-8EE2-B21C04AB9B59](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=875D2197-B61D-D700-8EE2-B21C04AB9B59).

**Ecosystem services** are services provided to society by the earth and are all the outputs from the earth's ecosystems. They can be divided into:

Provisioning services which are the material outputs such as food, raw material (fuel and construction), water and medicines;

Regulating services which include climate and air quality regulation, carbon sequestration and storage, moderation of extreme floods, waste water treatment, erosion prevention, pollination, biological control regulating pests and diseases;

Support services which underpin all other services providing habitats for species and maintain genetic diversity providing a gene pool for development of crops and livestock;

Cultural services which are the non-material benefits that people gain from contact with nature e.g. recreational, mental and physical health; aesthetic appreciation and inspiration for culture, art and design; spiritual experience and a sense of place (TEEB, 2010).

Irish commonage has many similarities with common land in the rest of these islands – a common Gaelic tradition with Scotland and an inheritance of English legal concepts. Similar issues face common graziers under both the English and Scottish legal systems, and the response has been distinctly different in the two cases. Both sets of experiences have potential lessons for Ireland – good and bad. This mobility experience gave professionals engaged in knowledge transfer and capacity building in communities where commonage is an important resource, the experience to raise questions; to stimulate debate; encourage grassroots collaboration and promote innovative approaches.



Figure 1: Participants in Leonardo Da Vinci (VETPRO) Programme – Capacity Building for Irish Commonages

The mobility took place over seven days (20<sup>th</sup> May to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012) in Scotland and Northern England. The mobility experience dealt with building capacity for common land management, policy frameworks and encouraging collaboration on common land.

This report outlines the knowledge gained and lessons learnt by participants during this mobility experience. This included an introduction to common land in UK, set in context of legal frameworks, organisational structure, constraints, CAP and Rural Development. In each area visited, there were indoor sessions which included an introduction to local geography, systems, initiatives, etc., delivered by local administration, landowners, professionals engaged in common land management and the host organisation (European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism). This was followed by visits to local graziers on common land for training on farm systems and local land management. This enabled participants to learn about practical issues, local solutions and projects.

## **Background**

Common land is land that is owned collectively or by one person over which others have rights exercised in common with other individuals (common rights), which may include inter alia pasturage (rights to graze), turbary (right to cut peat for burning as fuel) and estover (right to take timber such as firewood) (Aglionby et al., 2010). In Ireland, this land is referred to as commonage and is dominated by land owned in common but grazed collectively by shareholders. The grazing right is proportionate to the share of the land owned. The commonage is considered as the common property of the shareholders and its use by other requires their approval (Van Rensburg et al., 2009). The total estimated area of commonage in Ireland is 422,415 ha accounting for 8.5% of the total utilised agricultural area in 2010 (CSO, 2012).

## **'Leonardo Da Vinci Mobility May 2012**

The mobility programme (Appendix 1) involved both indoor and field sessions on common land in Scotland and England. Days 1-3 were spent investigating common land in Scotland, while days 4-6 were spent in Northern England.

## **Common land in Scotland**

Common grazing is a significant land use in Scotland accounting for 9% of the utilised agricultural area and is a substantial provider of environmental public goods (accounts for 13% of Special Protection Areas under EU Birds Directive, over 15% of High Nature value farmland, 20% of peat >2m deep) and accounts for 10% of the total carbon in Scottish soils (Jones, 2011). The total area of common grazings in Scotland is 591,901 ha. In contrast to Ireland, the common land is generally owned by a landlord (private individual, company, National Trust) and not by the graziers. However, security of tenure, control of rents and oversight by government is ensured via various legal interventions e.g. Crofters' Common Grazing Regulations (Scotland) Act 1891 and various Crofting Acts 1886-2010. This allow for the setting up of grazing committees to administer grazings and implement regulations on common land. Crofting Acts essentially led to a rebalancing of the control of the management of common land from landlord to crofter (Box 2).

Despite the fact that crofters have the right to purchase their croft at nominal rates since the 1976 Act, only approximately 15% of crofters are owner occupiers. The Crofters Act 1993, Crofters Reform Acts 2007, 2010 provides for the setting up of grazing committees, regulation of common grazings, use of common grazings for other purposes e.g. forestry etc. However, despite this possibility of self regulation, which in theory enables improved management, 1 in 5 common grazings remain

unregulated and capacity to administer and implement regulation among crofters is low in others (Jones, 2011).

**Box 2: What is a Crofter/Croft?**

A crofter is a person who occupies a small holding known as a croft, normally tenants but under provision of Crofting Act 1976, crofters can acquire title to their croft (holding). The average size of a croft is 5 hectares and often contains a share of hill grazing common land associated with the township in which their croft is located. The croft is usually owned by a landlord. The majority of crofters are dependent on off-farm employment for the main part of their income. Some crofters have also diversified their croft enterprise to include small scale tourism, forestry and renewable energy. Further details are available at [www.crofters.org](http://www.crofters.org).

Public support for farming in Scotland includes:

- Common Agricultural Policy direct payment (Single Payment Scheme (SPS) and Less Favoured Areas support(LFA))
- Agri-environment measures as part of the Land Managers Options and Rural Priorities Programmes (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP>)
- Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Schemes (CCAGS-Capital Works)
- Bull Scheme

In a small number of cases crofters in a township have come together and work cooperatively to form sheep stock clubs. Here the flock is managed as one flock but collectively owned. The sheep stock club is considered the legal entity for application for support payments. A major issue in claiming support payments on common grazings is unclaimed shares. Currently 33% (360,360ha) of all common grazings in Scotland is unclaimed. These can be reallocated by the grazing committee but these areas are currently ineligible for payment under SPS. The agri-environment measures, CCAGS and Bull Scheme are claimed by the grazing committee on common land. This gives rise to some issues in regards to questions of allocation of money and recognition of effort in managing common land. It also requires the written consent of the majority of crofters ordinarily resident in the township and sharing the common grazings. This usually leads to problems for shareholders in common grazing availing of agri-environment support in comparison to their hill farming colleagues with no common land. Uptake as a result is low with approximately 5% of common grazings availing of the agri-environment options.

Weaknesses in the current policy pertaining to common land in Scotland include a lack a truly integrated territorial targeted vision for common land, no recognition of transaction costs of grazings applications, no strategy to increase capacity of grazing committees, monitoring hampered through inability to separate out common grazings in wider datasets and a general lack of consideration of the importance and needs of common land in policy documents (Jones, 2011). However, ongoing work in Wales was cited as a possible means of addressing some of these issues through the use of CAP technical assistance funds to support the setting up of grazing associations.

Field visits to a number of commons in Scotland included a sheep stock club, cattle only commons and sheep grazed commons. Each common grazings is allocated a total stocking rate called a souming. Each crofter will have shares of this total souming attached to his/her croft.

In general, there are very few active graziers on each common and there has been a decline in grazing in recent years, particularly of cattle. The costs of keeping cattle on common grazing is seen as prohibitive, particularly when feed costs, pollution control and lack of labour is taken into

account. A characteristic of some of the common grazings is the away wintering of animals, both cattle and sheep. It was acknowledged by graziers that in the past the common grazings were overgrazed due to availability of high headage payments in the 1980s. There are still some cattle only common grazings in use (Box 3). Smaller cattle are recommended for the hill (500kg). Cattle are kept on in bye (fields bounded by a fence) until calved on some cattle only commons. Shareholders can rent a bull between them under the bull scheme.

**Box 3: Example of a cattle grazed common**

One of the cattle grazed commons visited was referred to as a cattle only common where no sheep were allowed apart from wintering of hoggets which could be used to generate additional income for the shareholders. There were 61 shares in the common grazings and a total of 32 crofts. Only 14 of these were active. Three of the 14 were retired and the other 11 had off farm employment. Thirteen had cattle and were using the common grazings. Shares were held by the grazing committee and were allocated to active shareholders. This was governed by a local bye law and regulated by the grazing committee comprising all active shareholders. Inactive shareholders could activate their share once they owned cattle. This was seen as a mechanism to prevent shares lying dormant. An important part of enabling the grazing committee was the additional income generated by a phone mast present on the site. This additional income could be reinvested in the common grazings e.g. fencing, renting of bulls.

There were a total of 48 cows on the commons with 2 bulls rented in each year. Selection of bull to be rented each year is a source of considerable debate among the shareholders and they are currently using a Beef Shorthorn and a Simmental. Bulls are fenced off in two bull parks on the common and cows are put to the bull. There is a third bull park which is currently grazed by replacement heifers. The total souming on the 367ha common is 61 cows and their followers (includes calves, yearlings and replacement stock). The old rule of thumb was 1 cow to 5 hectares. There are also certain areas within the common which have been limed and fertilised. Cattle preferentially graze these grassland areas reducing pressure on adjacent heath vegetation. Key factors in the success of this common were extra income generated from phone mast to support common grazings; structure for allocation of dormant shares; innovative people involved; opportunities for off farm income in area including tourism, local hydro electric station and wind energy facilities.

Despite the fact that it was agreed among the participants that the areas visited were in good environmental condition, the common is not in an agri-environmental scheme as the payments are very low under LMO (e.g. option 11: summer cattle grazing = £1.95/ha/year) and there was some local issues among shareholders that prevented the grazing committee from applying. The area is not designated as part of the Natura 2000 network (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas). It had a diversity of habitats and species including a number of orchid species, birds of conservation concern including Skylark and Curlew, and Marsh fritillary butterfly.

One of the sheep stock clubs visited involved 8 shareholders who employed one full time shepherd. They started with 1200 sheep on approximately 7,700 acres. They have dropped back in ewe numbers to 500 in recent times due to drop in sheep prices. They aim to get back to 1000 in next 5 years but there is debate among the shareholders on how this is to be achieved, as considerable cost involved in buying in stock. The club was originally set up for labour saving and practical reasons. Each shareholder also can have 6 cows and followers on the common grazings, but cattle are managed by individual crofters and are not part of stock club. Sheep stock club members are paid a dividend at end of year from profits from club. A second sheep stock club visited operated a slightly different system. There were 9 shareholders, with 2 actively helping in managing the 1000 black face ewe flock, on approximately 500 acres (1500 ewes in past). They had a contract system to hire in

labour when additional labour was required at particular times of year. The lambing percentage of these flocks is about 60%. Each crofter would have about 4 acres of in by land.



Figure 2: Participants visiting Common land in Scotland

### Common land in England

Common land in England is diverse in terms of its geography, livestock systems, recreational interests, role of owner and stakeholder involvement (Natural England, 2009). Before the enclosure of land, concept of private property and associated modernisation of agriculture, customary grazing grounds dominated England. The manor courts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries played an important role in defining the entitlement to grazing and associated rights on common land. Today the management of common land is governed by a combination of statute (Commons Registration Act 1965, Commons Act 2006) and custom (Natural England, 2009). Property rights on common land in England include both seigniorial rights (rights of the land lord) and use rights (rights of the tenant). Seigniorial rights include ownership of soil, minerals, game and right to enclose as long as tenants use rights are not infringed. The use rights are usually appurtenant (attached to house/land) and include common rights of pasture, turbary and estovers. They are limited to supporting the holding. Common land is managed along the principles of “good neighbourhood” and used tools such as quantitative and spatial restrictions, and seasonal limitations. The rule of levancy and couchancy applied on many common land areas, e.g. only allowed to graze in summer the livestock that your holding (in bye) could support in winter. This common land without quantified rights can lead to problems e.g. how do you take into account away wintering, buying in forage/supplementary feed, etc. Stinted commons were a feature of some common land areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and this was equivalent to souming in Scotland, where proprietors and farmers agreed to stint common and assign a rate of use to common (stint).



The governance structure of the manorial courts was gone by the 1850s and many common land areas were enclosed. On those that remained there was little attention paid to management, leading to issues of overgrazing. Some stinting was put in place via committees. From 1860s onwards these areas were also seen as valuable recreational areas by society. Figures from the Commons register (Commons Registration Act 1965) indicate that there are a total of 14,683 commons covering 398,414 ha of common land in England. 87% of the commons are under 10Ha and rights registered include pasturage for sheep, cattle, horses and ponies; estovers; turbary; common in soil; piscary and pannage.

323,739ha (88%) of the common land in England has some form of designation e.g. National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation, Ramsar Site. This covers 8% of all designated land in England highlighting the value of common land to society.

General trends on common land in Britain highlighted by Natural England report 2009 include: tendency towards fewer active graziers on each common and increase in farm size; management of common land increasingly time consuming; commons increasingly managed through commoners associations and subject to agri-environment schemes; widely different views of appropriate grazing levels; stock number decline with shift away from native breeds; vegetation undergoing long term change; reasons commoners continue to graze commons are complex and involve personal values and not solely economically motivated; commons still an economic asset despite depressed state of pastoral farming.

In Cumbria there are approximately 300 commons and 90% of these have pasturage rights. The Federation of Cumbria Commoners is a representative organisation which aims to: establish an organisation that will support graziers; increase collaboration between graziers; manage land in an environmentally positive manner; and increase economic returns ([www.cumbriacommoners.org.uk](http://www.cumbriacommoners.org.uk)). This group is part of a wider national umbrella called the Foundation for Common land that brings together existing commons grazier organizations (Dartmoor Commons Council, Federation of Cumbria Commoners, the Yorkshire Federation of Commoners, Gower Commoners Association and Scottish Crofting Federation among others), along with organizations with European links and professionals with significant knowledge and experience in the sector ([www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk/](http://www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk/)). One of the initiatives of this group is the Hill Farming Training Scheme for Conservation Professionals which equips professionals to work effectively with farmers to support the delivery of agri-environment schemes, part funded by Leader.

Agri-environmental supports were introduced in England in 1985. The initial pilot evolved through successive stages: Environmentally Sensitive Areas 1987; Countryside Stewardship 1991; Agri-environmental Schemes under Rural Development Programme 2000. Today agri-environment scheme are delivered by the tiered Environmental Stewardship Scheme and include Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), Uplands Entry Level Stewardship (Uplands ELS, note replaced LFA payment) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). There are also Organic ELS and Organic Uplands ELS but these are not applicable to common land (Natural England, 2011). There are generally less suitable options for Upland areas making it difficult to meet points requirements for entry. There is one to one advise under HLS and a requirement for a farm plan to be drawn up, carried out by an independent agent. For current schemes a commoners' or graziers' association must register with the Rural Payments Agency before applying for agri-environment scheme. In Ireland, individuals are able to draw down

agri-environment payments. ELS are 5 year voluntary agreements across the whole farm and HLS are 10 year voluntary agreements targeted at part of the farm. The average payments for ELS are £33/ha and for HLS £173/ha. Over 70% of England is now covered by some form of agri-environment scheme. Under the Upland ELS there is a £5/ha group supplement on common land. There are over 100 land management options in the HLS. The Restoration of Moorland Option includes grazing following an agreed stocking calendar, a “shepherding supplement” to encourage targeted grazing for particular identified vulnerable sites, a “difficult sites” supplement and a “group” supplement. HLS can also fund capital works. For more information on the management of common land and support payments in England see

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/commonland/default.aspx>.

Facilitating agreements among commoners association and applying for HLS can take a considerable amount of time and effort and takes a minimum of one year. The requirement for a grazing association to be established for AES application is seen as an important incentive to initiate governance measures for common land in England. Guidance documents for governance structures on common lands in England are available on the Natural England website at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/commonland/commoncouncils.aspx>. This can be quite a bureaucratic system and requires an internal agreement which details the rights and responsibilities of all parties with property rights on particular common. The final draft is drawn up by a solicitor. The main clauses in an agreement include stocking calendar; land management and burning prescriptions; divisions of payments; responsibility for capital works; successors in title; breaches-remedies and penalties; grazing rules and association governance.



Figure 3: Hands on experience of difficult terrain on Cumbrian common

Field visits to a number of commons in England highlighted the reduction in stocking rates that have taken place over the last 20 years and a reduction in active graziers. On one common visited the stocking rate has been reduced from 2.35 ewes/ha to 0.5 ewes/ha in 2006. 70% of stock also have to be off wintered. This results in sheep straying off their heaf in winter and more sheep are now turned out in summer creating a further imbalance in summer heafs (Box 4). This common had 23,753 grazing rights registered on 5565ha. On over registered commons the active graziers have seen a major reduction in direct payments in the change over from headage to Single Payment Schemes. A high percentage of the direct payments go to non-active graziers. Less active graziers leads to the work of shepherding being borne by fewer individuals. This leads to labour shortages particularly around gathering. A strong message from active graziers was that their “hardy hefted flocks provide the optimum extensive, naturally organic, sustainable system of food production. In the hands of skilled shepherds, this can be adjusted to serve the needs of food production, nature conservation and to mitigate the effect of climate change” (Pauline Blair pers. comm.). Another common visited covers 2,788ha, owned by United Utilities. One of the activities on this common was planting and maintaining native woodland as part of United Utilities Sustainable Catchment Management Project. This common is governed by the Bampton and Askham commoners association whose constitution covers use, management of animals, gathering, weed and bracken control, animal welfare, problem solving, promotion of communing, serving commoners interest, meetings, election of officers, voting procedure etc. The main concerns of commoners are the sustainability of ES payments, and if these payments finish will they be able to derive an income from livestock alone?

**Box 4: What is a heft/heaf?**

Hefting refers to the natural homing instincts of animals, in particular hill sheep kept under range conditions without fencing. Lambs born into a flock learn the boundaries of their home ground (heft/heaf) from their mothers and the learnt behaviour goes back generations in anyone flock (Hart, 2004). The shepherd reinforces the hefting behaviour by regular shepherding and guiding sheep back to home ground or heft. This is an important management tool in upland areas as hefting brings controlled grazing. In its absence there is a requirement for fencing or sheep will simply concentrate on more palatable herbage and sheltered areas leading to overgrazing/undergrazing and animal health issues (e.g. concentration of worm eggs). The instinct to live on one particular part of the hill for the hefted flock does not correspond to the more desirable parts as seen through the human eye. Blackface sheep in particular have this remarkable characteristic of “this love of home, that bit of bleak, stony moorland where they were reared” (Blackfaced Sheep Keepers Guide, 1924 cited in Hart 2004).

The current trends in common land management in England are expected to continue: the number of full time commoners expected to decline with some abandonment; landscape quality will be effected; payments for agri-environmental schemes and single payment scheme underpin the system; the provision of a range of public goods from common land is dependent on continued grazing and collaborative management (Natural England, 2009).

## Lessons Learnt and Conclusions

### Scottish Days

A number of questions were posed during the discussion at the end of the Scottish days including:

- Who chooses to have a governance structure and why?

- What is the practical consequence of not having one? Are there financial reasons for doing it?
- Can you 'unchoose'?
- If you have a governance structure, what is the quantum necessary for agreement (majority/unanimity....)?
- How are total stocking levels and the split between shareholders set?
- Can stocking levels and the split between shareholders be changed?
- How are financial matters dealt with (expenditure, incomes)?
- How are the rights of inactive shareholders treated?
- What is/should be the role of the State?
- Is the governance structure a legal person able to enter into contracts?

These were set in the context of the Irish situation on commonages (Box 5). One of the issues discussed was how would sustainable stocking levels be implemented on commonages? In particular, where individuals want to increase their numbers to meet overall sustainable levels on commonages, how is this to be achieved? There are issues around dormant shares with some areas having as much as 80% dormancy. What is the role of dormant or inactive shareholders? – In England, it was possible that the inactive shareholders receive some of the agri-env payments but this depended on the internal agreement on that common drawn up by the shareholders involved.

**Box 5: Current Situation on Irish Commonages in brief**

In general 60% of Irish commonages have some form of nature designation (i.e. SAC, SPA or NHA). Destocking was required on many commonages in Ireland following the findings of commonage framework planning process, which was completed in 2002. There are approximately 4,500 commonage framework plans covering approximately 440,000 ha (note: largely than figure from CSO 2012). These have been re-monitored over the last 10 years and commonages vary in terms of their grazing condition (i.e. overgrazed, undergrazed and sustainably grazing). There is a general acceptance that the commonage framework planning process needs to be applied in a fairer way. There has been considerable effort employed in recent years in establishing sustainable stocking levels at LPIS level (town land) for commonages. There is an ongoing engagement process between government departments and farm organisations to develop recommended stocking levels. The big issue will be once sustainable levels have been agreed at LPIS level, how will this be applied and implemented on the ground?

Take home discussion points from Scottish days included:

- Grazing committees?
  - Need communal structure
  - Committees developed for walks scheme In Ireland
- Dormant shares with few individuals managing common grazings
  - Local bye law to allocate shares?
  - Don't use right, can be allocated
  - Difficult in Ireland
- Shareholder/community participation
  - Ownership of freehold separate situation
  - One person can hold up agreement
  - Allocation of dormant shares difficult
  - Managing grazing rights rather than reallocation
- Breeds-need suitable animals for hills
- Design of suitable agri-env schemes

- Availability of off-farm incomes/additional income from farm diversification
- Burning: It was noted that the dates for burning season in upland areas (also applicable in England under the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2007) are 1<sup>st</sup> of October in one year to the 15<sup>th</sup> of April in the following year. This is regarded as being much less restrictive than in Ireland (1<sup>st</sup> September to 28<sup>th</sup> February), allowing for more flexibility in planning muir burns (burning of heath on a moor).

## English Days

The final session of the week discussed the common land management in England and was followed by a discussion of the lessons learnt for capacity building for Irish commonages.

Take home discussions point from England included:

- Grazing Associations and grazing agreements (application for agri environment incentive)
  - Legal grazing management agreement drawn up by shareholders
  - Problems with rights register (some commons have rights over registered and some under registered, the process involved self declaration and a range of methods were employed on different commons to calculate rights)
  - Can take up to 3 years to get agreement
  - Pretty flexible
  - Cost element in getting community together
  - Big change to Irish situation in dealing with community as collective
  - In some cases inactive graziers were paid (lower rate)
- Stocking rates and implementation of agri-env (ELS/HLS)
  - Enough suitable upland options?
  - Setting of overall sustainable stocking rates questioned by farmers but follow because of monetary incentive rather than understanding (buy in-sustainability in absence of agri-env?)
  - Need clear objectives, indicators of success
- Farm size much larger than Ireland but similar legal system
- More full time farmers and not as dependent on off-farm income
- Issues around communication and mutual understanding between different stakeholders involved in common grazing
- Different uses of commonage and different sheep grazing systems on hills, accommodate all systems provided keep to overall average, facilitate existing management system.

## Lessons learnt for capacity building on Irish Commonages

In discussions on the lessons learnt for capacity building for Irish Commonage the following points were raised:

1. Common grazings:
  - Governance of commons (how to have working commonage with active farmers supported by inactive: collective shareholders group);
  - Need for collective buy in by commonage shareholders and the necessity for a robust internal agreement between them.
2. Sustainable management:
  - Different livestock types in ewe equivalents facilitated;
  - Have system devised by NPWS for proposed overall stocking levels;
  - Need monitoring of existing stocking levels and relationship to favourable condition;
  - Need adaptive management structure;

- The timing of the grazing is also important, as the sheep will graze different vegetation during the winter (more heather as there is very little else available) than during the summer (more grassy areas);
  - The control of heather & scrub through burning/swiping is also a necessity on a lot of commonages especially where under grazing has been an issue in the past;
  - Bracken control is an issue not necessarily solved by changing the stock numbers;
  - There may need to be lead-in periods for changing stocking levels. This is not something that can be changed overnight, especially if stock are to be grazed at different times of the year and also if they have to be increased;
  - The whole farming system on farms may need to be looked at. This may involve a change in the breeding and systems of sheep production (e.g. away from spring lamb production and towards producing light hill lamb or breeding replacements for lowland flocks). This will develop long-term farming systems that utilize commonages rather than have farmers chasing short-term market trends;
  - The impacts of recreational users, also has an effect on the sustainable management of some of these commonages.
3. Agri-env:
    - Phrased as payment for positive management;
    - Collective approach;
    - Top up for commonage for increased transaction costs;
    - Scheme that targets commonage.
  4. Need for overall rural development actions for commonage areas:
    - Additional income opportunities;
    - Sustainable communities (balance between society, environment and economy).
  5. Capacity building:
    - Leadership and organisational skills required e.g. training on how to develop a committee for commonage shareholders;
    - Mentorship programme for commonage areas – Teagasc discussion groups may be an appropriate model;
    - Would need to include technology adoption programme (both agriculture production and environment technology);
    - Financing of a capacity building programme may be possible through RDP but needs investigation;
    - As well as building capacity among farmers also need to build capacity among advisors;
    - A pilot capacity building programme with clear objectives was suggested;
    - There is a real need for ongoing monitoring and research to inform the development of sustainable practical management programmes for commonage areas in Ireland.

## Next Steps

In order to build on the momentum of this mobility experience the following next steps were suggested for wider commonage management in Ireland and for this group (Appendix 1 - Participants list):

### Wider commonage management in Ireland

- Need to engage with Government Departments in any future development.
- Suggested that a formal submission of joint report be made to relevant Departments before the next stage of the CFPs.
- Pilot capacity building programme for farmers need to be developed and implemented on commonage areas.

- Pilot needs to include/develop mechanism on how sustainable commonage management is to be achieved.
- Pilot should be developed in liaison with farmers on trial LPIS parcels across the country.
- Successful pilots should become flagships for knowledge transfer and best practice.
- The next two years are a crucial period in the development of the CAP. Time is needed to investigate approaches for the management of common land; the benefits to farmers and to their commonages; along with the changes in payment systems that new approaches may bring. Time is needed by government departments to evaluate how a scheme, potentially involving several thousand commonages could be set up, financed and administered. It is important that this time is used effectively if progress is to be made. In this regard pilot projects in developing governance structures could play a key role for all stakeholders.

### Group

- It is important that the current group of participants maintain communications and they could potentially act as a country wider commonage management support /advisory group.

## **References**

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## Appendix 1 - Programme

Date	Day	Time	Activity
21st	Mon	1400	indoor session
			>introduction to common grazing - Gwyn Jones, EFNCP
			>introduction to Scotland - Gwyn Jones, EFNCP
			>the legal framework for common grazing in Scotland - Derek Flynn, Scottish Crofting Federation Chair and crofting lawyer
			>CAP support and common grazings in Scotland - Gwyn Jones, EFNCP
			>some thoughts on the future of common grazing - Derek Flynn, SCF
			>introduction to Lochaber and its common grazings - John Mackintosh
			>discussion
		1830	field session
			>Cuilcheanna CG
		2000	meal
22nd	Tue	900	field session
			>Banavie CG
			>Muirshearlich CG
			>Stronaba CG
		c.1230	meal
			>Inverroy CG
			>Galmore CG
		c.1530	coffee break
			>Bohuntin CG
23rd	Wed	900	depart Ballachulish
		1000	field session
			>Taynuilt CGs
		1200	lunch
		1400	depart
		1800	arrive Newton Rigg
		1900	supper, meet Viv Lewis, Federation of Cumbrian Commoners
24th	Thu	930	Indoor session
			>brief discussion of Scottish days (if not poss. Wed evening)
			>Welcome: Wes Johnson, Principle Newton Rigg College
			>'Taking the long view: common land in England and Wales since the middle ages' - Angus Winchester, University of Lancaster
			>Recent developments on English commons - Andrew Humphries, Foundation for Common Land
		1230	lunch
		1400	field visit
			>Buttermere, Brackenthwaite and under Derwent commons
		1900	supper with Dave Smith Chairman FCC and local commoners etc
25th	Fri	930	Indoor session
			>AE schemes, past present and future - Simon Humphries and Rob Vatcher, Natural England
			>Negotiating agreements on commons - Julia Aglionby
			>discussion
		1230	lunch
		1400	field visit
			>Bampton Common
			supper with Will Cockbain Director Natural England and local commoners
		1900	commoners
26th	Sat	930	Field visit
			>Little Asby Common- Jan Darrall, owned by Friends of the Lake District
		1200	Lunch
		1500	Discussion at Newton Rigg
		1800	Depart



## Appendix 2 - Participants

Name		Organisation	Commonage areas/region
Andy	Bleasdale	National Parks and Wildlife Service	National
Declan	Byrne	Teagasc	Wicklow/Carlow/Wexford
Brendan	Connolly	Teagasc	Westmeath / Offaly / Cavan / Monaghan
Declan	Feeney	IT Sligo	National
Pat	Flannery	Teagasc	Cork West
Catriona	Foley	Teagasc	Waterford / Kilkenny
Tim	Hyde	Teagasc	National
Gwyn	Jones	EFNCP (Host Organisation)	National
Catherine	Keena	Teagasc	National
Tom	Kelly	Teagasc	Mayo
Roisin	Lavelle	Achill Local Development and Udaras	Mayo
Conor	Lee	Teagasc	Galway/Clare
Michael	Martyn	Self-employed	National
Christy	McCafferty	Teagasc	Donegal
Patrick	McGurn	EFNCP (Host Organisation)	National
Fergal	Monaghan	Self-employed	National
James	Moran	IT Sligo	National
Niall	O Lamhna	Teagasc	Louth/Meath/Dublin
Sharon	O' Mahoney	Teagasc	Cork East
Sue	O Toole	Leader-South West Mayo Dev. Company	Mayo
Enda	O'Hart	Teagasc	Roscommon/Longford
Kevin	O'Sullivan	Teagasc	Kerry/Limerick
Gordon	Peppard	Teagasc	Tipperary
Ben	Wilkinson	Teagasc	Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal