

European Innovation Partnerships - Agriculture (EIP-AGRI) in Ireland 2014-20 – lessons and recommendations for policy post-2020

Gwyn Jones, James Moran & Mark Robins



Inishowen, Co. Donegal Corinna Schleiffer, Creative Commons Licence)



European Innovation Partnerships - Agriculture (EIP-AGRI) in Ireland 2014-20
– lessons and recommendations for policy post-2020

(2019) Gwyn Jones¹, James Moran², Mark Robins³

¹European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
Penygraig, Llanfair Clydogau, Lampeter SA48 8LJ, UK

²Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Dept. of Natural Sciences, Dublin Rd., Galway H91 T8NW, Ireland

³Naomh Seosamh, Rathcool, Schull, Co. Cork P81 X983

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



This report was funded as part of the Heritage Council's support to EFNCP in 2019. The opinions within do not necessarily reflect those of the funder nor those of the authors' employers.

Contents

Contents.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction	10
1 EIP-Agri in the 2014-20 RDP.....	11
2 Methodology.....	13
3 The EIP application process	15
3.1 Outline of the process.....	15
3.2 The need to innovate.....	15
3.3 The need for clear guidance	16
3.4 Going from EOI to full application	18
3.4.1 Short timeframe.....	18
3.4.2 Interaction during the process.....	19
3.4.3 What does a good application look like?	20
3.4.4 Bringing in external consultants for bid development	20
3.5 Dealing with the unsuccessful	22
4 EIP project implementation	23
4.1 Clear guidance.....	23
4.2 Response times	23
4.3 The challenge of administration and governance	24
4.4 Contractor and Operational Group.....	25
5 EIP in wider policy development and delivery.....	26
5.1 What does the RDP say?.....	26
5.2 What happens to current EIPs?	27
5.2.1 Roll-over?.....	27
5.2.2 A call for new EIPs in next policy cycle?.....	28
5.2.3 Roll-out?.....	28
5.2.4 Further reflections after the Winterage School workshop.....	29
5.3 EIP as part of a wider policy map?.....	30
5.3.1 Post-EIP steps?	31
5.3.2 Pre-EIP steps in developing partnership within multi-actor projects?.....	35
Annex 1 – interview structure template.....	38
Annex 2 – examples of comments gleaned from the interviews	41
Annex 3 – Outputs from the EIP Workshop at the Burren Winterage 2019, ‘Lessons Learned Through Shared Experiences’	43



Co. Leitrim (Eric Jones, Creative Commons Licence). Are the experiences of EIP something for rolling over in 'special' places or rolling out on 'ordinary' farmland over large parts of the country?

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following interviewees: Declan Byrne, Tom Byrne, Francis Cusack, Patricia Deane, Brian Dunne, Pat Dunne, John McConway, Matthew McGreehan, Patrick McGurn, John Moran, Henry O'Donnell, Brendan O'Malley, Mary O'Malley, Gerry O'Neill, Peter O'Reilly, Vincent Roddy, Martin Shannon, Donal Sheehan, Ciaran Sheelan. And to Ryan Wilson-Parr, Alessio Volpata and Sara Ruas, Julien Carlier, Naomi McMorrow and Verena Berard for their note-taking during the Burren Winterage workshop.

Executive Summary

One of the biggest and potentially most significant developments in Ireland's agricultural policy landscape in recent years has been the way the EIP-Agri has been rolled out. Choosing to deliver programmes to benefit the hen harrier and freshwater pearl mussel using a tendering mechanism under the EIP banner was itself innovation, but widening the net to fund local projects, developed locally – 21 of them so far - set a whole range of new challenges for civil servants, civil society and the desk officers in Brussels.

In this report we begin to offer some understanding of how the EIP-Agri mechanism works in Ireland and how it fits into the wider CAP process. Most Operational Groups (OG) are still in the very early stages, but there are emerging lessons at this early stage that could inform Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan post 2020.

We look first at the EIP process itself. A lot of things have worked well and been rightly and publicly celebrated, but what poses challenges? What could be done better and how? Then we move beyond the day to day challenges of current EIPs: where do EIPs, and 'open call' EIPs in particular, fit into the wider policy picture? What happens when an EIP project comes to an end? How might roll-out happen? Should there be more EIP operational groups? How does it all fit into the EU policy timetable?

The factual basis of our report is the answers we were given in a number of interviews with local group representatives and in a workshop held in October 2019 at the Burren Winterage School. The report puts the comments into a narrative framework, to tease out the broader questions raised and to formulate recommendations where there seems to be a broad consensus.

Having set out the background to the EIP, as set out in Ireland's Rural Development Programme for 2014-20, we look at the constraints and challenges of the current EIP application procedure.

- We point out the gap arising where local needs call for responses which are not in any other way innovative
- We highlight the needs for clearer written guidance from DAFM for applicant groups, including on those issues which the groups will need to face immediately should they succeed. How to ensure that OGs are true partnerships possessing all of the necessary skills and capacity emerges as a key issue.
- The short time between success at EOI stage and submission of the full application raises particular challenges – some help is available, but the difficulty of retaining local ownership and responsibility is something which is perhaps overlooked at present. Prompt feedback is essential but not always provided. Ironically, it seemed that groups which really needed external help found it most challenging, while groups with considerable experience had the capacity to use external input as a new and objective way of testing the narrative and proposed actions
- Failing to secure an EIP project can be a debilitating-disappointing experience for a local group, all the more so if local partnership and collaboration had been encouraged through the application process, yet there is no aftercare whatsoever for such groups – this is the opposite of joined-up policy-making

We then look at those aspects of EIP delivery which are common to all of the groups:

- We note the absence of clear and consistent guidance from Government and the delayed response times to what can be urgent queries, noting of course that this measure is new for all involved.
- Administration and governance are vital aspects to every EIP, but are often aspects which are poorly considered or ones where there is little prior capacity amongst members of the OG. Government would show better risk management were it to engage more proactively on this issue.
- We noted a rather puzzling and potentially troubling distinction in many EIPs between the OG and the legal person responsible for the contractual aspects of the project, with some of the more experienced OG corporate members seemingly unwilling to take any of the legal burden

We looked then to the future. Since EIPs are vehicles for innovation, they are unlikely to be anything more than short-term at the local level (unless new innovations are developed). Innovation in HNV farming may on occasion be transferable into market conditions without further State support, but this is the exception.

We noted that the RDP seems to intend for the two large species-focussed EIPs to be rolled out yet further as they become mainstreamed, if the EIP experience is positive. We also note that the locally-led EIPs are intended to inform the development of future mainstream RDP measures. In both cases, 'rolling over' or 'rolling out' successful actions or approaches means finding alternative vehicles in the next RDP, which demands planning and proactive engagement with OGs on the part of Government within the constraints of the CAP programming timetable and taking into account the time needed for discussion and feedback.

Current experience (i.e. Burren Programme) shows one possible model for mainstreaming. We found however a strong willingness among EIP groups to consider the possibilities of combining their best practices into a wider programme, both in terms of the suite of actions and in terms of geographic applicability.

Most of challenges arise from how to achieve the scaling-up of pilots, benefiting from economies of scale and reducing administration costs, while retaining flexibility and the ability to adapt to local variation. It was striking that the OGs' red lines concerned not so much local *autonomy* as local *applicability* (down to individual parcels) on the one hand and the involvement of skilled advisors and project officers at the local level on the other. There was a strong feeling against a 'GLAS-style' approach which was seen as lacking those elements. In this context, the models provided by the Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel EIPs is one that should be fully explored.

There needs then to be a clear direction from policy on possible roll-out mechanisms; this should involve a process of proactive engagement with OGs to explore the options and the issues arising from the CAP timetable.

In the context of mainstreaming, it was striking that there was very little consideration amongst OGs of the potential role of new eco-schemes and in particular a lack of awareness of the potential scale of money involved. This will be a very political discussion reflecting the current distribution of Pillar 1 direct payments. Nature-friendly and socio-economically marginal farmers need to avoid the trap of focussing only on the relatively small elements of the CAP budget.

There was a strong call for more EIP operational groups to develop, engage and empower new local partnerships. The need for a more integrated design of policy support across agri-environment, education, knowledge sharing, cooperation and innovation is clear. How can a scheme deliver multiple objectives in a coherent fashion e.g. climate action, water quality, biodiversity co-benefits, minimising trade-offs as much as possible?

Finally, we looked at the factors which lead to successful local partnership – can the factors which produce a more conducive environment be translated into changes in policy and in interaction with local communities and individuals at the grassroots? There is a clear need to develop mechanisms that enable common purpose across the partnership at local level. There needs to be time and space to build trust while maintaining excellent communications within the partnership.

All of these findings fit into an overall narrative which calls for a more joined-up approach to policy in general, and not only within the CAP.

Concluding this summary there is a full list of recommendations from the report in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. List of recommendations – application process

EIP phase	Topic	Recommendations
Application process	Innovation focus	1 There is a need for other mechanisms in the EU Regulations which could fund continuously adaptable locally-tailored action without necessitating a focus on innovation
	Guidance	2 There should be a comprehensive and up-to-date set of guidance documents covering the whole process available online, including mandatory templates where appropriate and illustrative proformas where useful. These should cover general issues like governance; GDPR; financial management; funding drawdown procedures and so forth and be framed around a clear formulation of what 'locally-led' implies for the make-up and operation of the OG.
	OG formation	3 There needs to be clear guidance from the outset as to the expertise and capacity required within operational groups for successful implementation of an EIP locally led project.
	OG formation	4 There is a clear role for community partnership funding as a preparatory stage to enable rural communities to develop the capacity and enable them to seize further opportunities such as locally led EIP projects.
	Guidance	5 Non-binding advice should be available to any potential applicant from the DAFM EIP team, which should extend explicitly to proposed actions.
	Guidance	6 Oral guidance should be available and followed up an email.
	Guidance	7 Guidance on general issues should be added to an FAQ section.
	Feedback and support	8 Feedback on EOIs should be as detailed as necessary to allow for either resubmission of an EOI or for successful submission of a full application in future
	Guidance	9 Full applications should, except for limited elements, follow a similar pattern to EOIs – set questions, word limits etc. The tendency to rich illustrations, smart presentation, expensive bindings etc. should be actively discouraged and be ignored in the assessment process.
	Application assessment	10 The assessment panel should visit each OG which reaches the second stage, visiting the field and discussing possible actions, as well as giving an opportunity to understand fully the detailed feedback given on the EOI. i.e. a government innovation support service integrated into the process.
	Support for project plan development	11 While a development resource is very often important to high quality applications bids, the application of this resource should be made very flexible with choice at the local level to blend local knowledge with local capacity (this can come from many sources at the local level) or to take on an external consultant.
	Second chance	12 All applicants should be allowed to reapply (but only receive financial assistance once) where the EIP measures remain open for applications.
	Assistance to succeed	13 As a default, all applicants who pass the EOI stage should be expected to receive contracts at the second stage. Guidance proffered (see above) should be much more specific on issues which are known to cause issues – a specific budget range should be indicated; guidance such as 'be more focussed' should be avoided in favour of specific recommendations (and the EOI should be rejected if it is too vague for those to be made).
	Assessment	14 If criteria outwith the current scoring system are being used (how many contracts are likely to go to upland areas, how many to 'the West', how many to biodiversity topics, etc.), they should be incorporated clearly into the system.
	Feedback and support	15 Even if the overall framework makes failure after huge effort less likely, DAFM should as a priority not only contact but visit all failed applicants to give full feedback and to outline possible next steps.

Table 2. List of recommendations – project implementation and roll-out post 2020

EIP phase	Topic	Recommendations
Project Implementation	Guidance	16 Full guidance documents must be online, with mechanism for highlighting changes for visitors to the site. The same information must be emailed to project managers for dissemination to operational group partners as part of DAFM’s engagement (communications plan) with participants.
	State supports	17 DAFM to initiate an assessment of the seriousness of delays in the statutory permissions processes linked to EIP actions
	State supports	18 NPWS to explore a clear protocol on meeting the needs of EIP groups regards consents required under legislation, appropriate assessment etc
	Administration and governance supports	19 DAFM (or other appointed body e.g. NRN) to produce a ‘competency framework’ which describes the skills, capacities and experience necessary for sound administration and governance for EIP operational groups.
	Administration and governance supports	20 DAFM to provide clear guidance on the expected relationship between OG and contracting body and DAFM, and conversely with other bodies with no legal responsibility, e.g. steering groups (see recommendation re ‘competency framework’.)
EIP-AGRI operational groups post 2020	Roll out of successful innovations post 2020	21 EIPs should produce an exploratory short ‘roadmap to the future’ as part of their dissemination and communication activities. Thus expressing a preferred way forward.
		22 DAFM to map out possible delivery mechanisms and work out next steps for locally led environment and climate measures, setting out a clear timetable compatible with the drawing up of the documentation of the future Irish CAP implementation.
		23 Similar EIP operational groups should be encouraged to work together to look at synergies, opportunities for consolidation and roll out of successful innovations.
		24 Needs to be overhaul of the agriculture knowledge and education system in terms of delivery and knowledge base to address environment and climate challenges.
		25 Needs to be clear objectives and targeting for any roll out of measures coming from EIPs in relation to locally adapted climate and environment actions. There needs to be a more integrated approach to design of policy support across agri-environment, education, knowledge sharing, cooperation and innovation in the CAP strategic plan post 2020.
		26 Needs to be proactive engagement by DAFM with EIP operational groups as part of the CAP Strategic Plan drafting process. This needs to allow sufficient time to discuss issues of compatibility, collaboration, further roll out, fit within proposed agri-environment and AKIS related measures, etc.

Introduction

EFNCP has been fortunate once again in 2019 to receive funding from the Heritage Council. Working hand in glove as always with James Moran, now in GMIT, our challenge every year is to find ways to contribute to the wider awareness of the significance of High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems and their policy needs and thereby to increase their long term sustainability, both environmentally and socio-economically.

As always, we try to find gaps in the work carried out by much larger institutions and organisations which we can usefully fill; something which can feed into the policy cycle at a time when it could make a difference.

While not minimising the importance of nationwide programmes and the decision-making associated with them, no-one would deny that one of the biggest and potentially most significant developments in Ireland's agricultural policy landscape in recent years has been the model chosen for the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) operational groups .

The way the EIP-Agri has been rolled out in Ireland has itself been truly innovative and has been deservedly feted at home and abroad. Choosing to deliver programmes to benefit the hen harrier and freshwater pearl mussel using a tendering mechanism under the EIP banner was itself the mark of a confident Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). But widening the net to include projects developed locally through a two-step application process went more than a few steps further than that, setting challenges for both civil servants and civil society; that the European Commission was willing to accede to a Member State taking such risks is also a credit to the desk officers concerned.

The authors start from a perspective that supporting innovation is important if HNV farming is to thrive. In terms of HNV farming we see 'innovation' as: *a change in the institutional, regulatory, market or farming approach that is better able to conserve HNV farming characteristics*. This notion of "HNV innovation"¹ distinguishes it from "general" innovation that aims at economic and/or social and/or environmental goals, but that are not necessarily consistent with the conservation of a significant proportion of semi-natural vegetation (SNV) within the farming system. In general we see four broad innovation themes:

- a. Social and Institutional (often the organising frame of HNV innovation)
- b. Regulations and Policy
- c. Products and Markets
- d. Farm Techniques and Management.

EIP OGs in Ireland offer a range of potentially useful and more widely-applicable innovations:

- in the way they benefit, involve and listen to the key players in locally-led work.
- in the way they use evidence, experimentation and information/feedback.
- in the way they exploit new delivery methods (including new technology).

¹ HNV Innovation first described as part of the H2020 thematic network HNV-Link (<http://www.hnmlink.eu/>)

Our goal initially was to improve the evidence base for what works when it comes to innovation in HNV farmland settings. Twenty three EIP-Agri projects are now under way across Ireland, 21 of which emerged from the grassroots in response to the open calls. Most are still in the very early stages, with many yet to make contracts with local farmers. Although we can see in some cases which innovations, whether techniques or approaches, are likely to prove workable and more widely relevant, the required detailed to allow for an overall assessment of the various project innovations will be further down the road.

What *was* possible, and very timely, was considering those questions of most immediate importance for the writing of the CAP Strategic Plan and RDP:

- How should current EIP projects or their innovations be carried forward and/or rolled out in the upcoming programming period?
- Should there be new locally-led EIPs and if so, how could the process be improved?
- What is the wider policy framework, especially but not only in the CAP, which is needed to support not only the delivery and roll-out of innovation and locally-adapted policy but the development and growth of local partnerships and innovation-favourable environments?

We look at the EIP process itself, both from the perspective of successful applicants and of some of those who didn't get accepted. What has worked well and what proved challenging? What could be done better and how? Many of the recommendations in this report could of course only be arrived at with the benefit of hindsight, as we observe how the first cycle of EIP OG have been progressing.

We also lift our eyes beyond the day to day challenges of application, start-up and delivery to start to consider the questions of wider policy – where do EIPs, and 'open call' EIPs in particular, fit into the wider policy picture? What happens when an EIP project comes to an end? How might roll-out happen? Should there be more EIPs? How does it all fit into the EU policy timetable? And so on.

We wish to thank those who gave us their input, listed earlier; we hope this report captures some of your messages. In all cases we use the plural to help anonymise the feedback.

1 EIP-Agri in the 2014-20 RDP

In this section extracts from the Ireland's RDP that describe the measure dealing with the implementation and intervention logic of EIP-AGRI operational groups in Ireland are outlined to set the context for the subsequent discussion.

The RDP² points out that 'although significant progress has been made in the past decade, biodiversity loss has not been halted in Ireland'. It suggests that 'one possible approach identified was a tiered agri-environment scheme addressing general environmental needs at a basic level and more targeted environmental needs at a higher level dealing with particular needs such as uplands

2

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/ruralenvironment/ruraldevelopment/ruraldevelopmentprogramme2014-2020/August19ApprovedProgramme060919.pdf>

conservation for commonages, conservation of selected endangered bird species and farmland habitat conservation’.

It points out that ‘not all environmental challenges can be addressed at the national level. Rather a more focused approach based on local circumstances and conditions is appropriate in certain instances.’ It is in this context that ‘in the interest of identifying the most environmentally beneficial investments a competitive process will be put in place to identify a number of other specific projects.’

‘By their very nature, these EIP operational groups will act as a catalyst for change in helping to bring grassroots innovative ideas to implementation using an interactive and bottom up approach. EIP operational groups will establish linkages between cutting edge research and technology and mobilise stakeholders to develop innovative solutions aimed at enhancing productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. The operational groups will also be required to disseminate their findings, thus ensuring that innovative approaches become more widely accessible and available.’

Under the ‘Co-operation’ (Measure 16), four elements were proposed:

- M16.1, European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups – General EIPs
- M16.1, European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups – Locally Led Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Projects (relevant for the discussion in this report)
- M16.1, European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups – Locally Led Environmental and Climate Projects (the focus of this report)
- M16.3, Collaborative Farming

‘EIP Operational Groups are clearly linked to supporting innovation and best practice. Specifically they will be intended to address all or some of the following:

- promoting a resource efficient, productive and low emission agricultural sector, working in harmony with the essential natural resources on which farming depends,
- improving processes to preserve the environment and agricultural landscapes, address biodiversity challenges, enhance water quality, adapt to climate change and mitigate it, and
- creating added value by better linking research and farming practice and encouraging the wider use of available innovative practices.’

‘Summary of innovative characteristics common to all sub-measures include:

- regional/localised co-ordination and new approaches to project delivery
- bottom-up approach to design of interventions, with collaborative inputs from an array of stakeholders including farmers, advisors, administrators, researchers, ecologists, NGOs, businesses, government departments and agencies
- be-spoke locally-tailored solutions to problems
- strong focus on networking and collaboration to achieve objectives
- dissemination and cross-learning of sustainable best practices
- harnessing community involvement, ownership, and goodwill to achieve mutual benefits and RDP objectives’

‘The Locally Led Environmental and Climate Projects submeasure is targeted at environmental priorities for biodiversity, climate and water quality, and envisages testing out an innovative locally-led approach.’

‘The locally-led approach will employ a bottom-up approach to environmental and climate project development and implementation, with a network of suitable stakeholders including farmers, government departments, non-government agencies and other local interest groups collaborating to achieve common local environmental and climate objectives. A network of stakeholders acting at local level will be central to the design and implementation of activities under this measure. This will allow for, among other things, the development of result/output-based actions to address specific threats as an alternative to generic prescription-based actions. Moreover the measure will provide a mechanism to build on the research outputs of LIFE and other similar projects, but in a manner which will allow the results to be translated and applicable at a wider landscape scale. This will be achieved by encouraging clusters of farmers and other stakeholders to act in a collaborative manner i.e. at wider catchment/regional scale. It will also provide for projects which introduce innovative solutions targeted at energy and water efficiency and climate change issues.’

‘The intervention logic for these measures is justified as follows:

- on-going biodiversity, climate and water quality issues related to agriculture that cannot be readily addressed through national agri-environment measures. A wide range of habitats and species are in “unfavourable conservation status”.
- the inability of a generic top-down scheme to adequately respond to local challenges
- the need to develop tailored innovative solutions at holding level, which have greater local buy-in and are more result orientated
- the need to foster community involvement, ownership, goodwill and better networking to promote sustainable agri-ecosystems’

‘The approach also seeks to determine whether the locally-led approaches, applied elsewhere in similar measures across Europe, can be better addressed by fostering community-led solutions to local environmental challenges across a range of different habitats and situations through small scale pilot projects. Applications will be invited to interested networks through theme-based calls, one of which will specifically address upland peatland conservation. The outputs will be monitored and disseminated with a view to informing the design of new schemes under the next Rural Development Programme.’

2 Methodology

We have used a combination of interviews, workshops/focus group combined with review of relevant online documentation. This information has been collated and analysed in the context of the two main focus areas: the EIP-AGRI process in Ireland and possible mainstreaming post-2020.

Our fieldwork focussed on those EIP projects we felt we knew least about in practice but which, from the context of High Nature Value (HNV) farming and indeed the wider provision of high levels of public goods, are of extremely high potential significance, namely the locally-led EIPs in the HNV

farming areas. We decided not to include the Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel projects in our formal interviews since, although the delivery mechanism is innovative, both the targets and requirements had been laid down in some detail by DAFM. One of the authors (JM) is also involved in the design and implementation of both these projects supervising PhD projects on the projects and as a member of the steering committee and scientific advisory committee of the pearl mussel and hen harrier projects respectively, while another (GJ) is also a member of the hen harrier project scientific advisory committee.

Initially, we planned to have two themes:

- the procedural and administrative aspects of applying for and delivering an EIP project
- the innovation aspect both in regard to how innovation is conceived and incubated locally, and in regard to the actions developed and implemented

These are the basis of the interview structure we developed (Annex 1), and this was the pattern followed by MR in his discussions.

During the course of interviews and discussions it became apparent that an adjustment of focus might be beneficial. It seemed rather premature to be asking which of the actions being developed and implemented were likely to be successful and would prove worthy of being rolled forward or disseminated.

On the other hand, it was clear that we *should* be considering the actual mechanisms by which rolling over or rolling out might take place. And that the question of how finding and using those mechanisms could and would happen in the context of the lifetimes of the EIP projects on the one hand and the timetable of the CAP reform and CAP implementation process on the other. This is very much something of interest and concern not only to the authors but to the EIP community. With this in mind, GJ allowed his discussions to range more widely and focussed less on the on-the-ground activities of the group unless they were particularly interesting.

We had formal meetings with representatives of 7 EIP groups, 6 of which are focussed on HNV farmland. The seventh group was BRIDE, where we felt that the truly grassroots genesis of the project could have wider lessons. Some interviewees had wider experience of other EIP groups. Given that one of our foci was the EIP application process, we also interviewed representatives of two groups which had failed to access the measure.

We also held a workshop as part of the day dedicated to EIPs at the 2019 Burren Winterage School. In three breakout groups (see Annex 3) we discussed some of the key issues arising from three broad questions – what happens to the current EIPs and their innovations after the projects end; what framework should the next RDP provide not only for the roll-over/roll-out of the EIP innovations themselves but in terms of wider development and integration of coherent approaches to the type of issues they address; what is needed in terms of State action to encourage and nurture local cooperation and innovation?

The workshop was attended not only by almost all of the groups we interviewed, but by a number of other EIPs as well as people not involved in EIPs, thus both allowing the interviewed groups to reflect

back on some of the questions arising from our discussions and the input of completely new perspectives to confirm or challenge our initial perception of the issues.

The factual basis of our report is solely the answers given and comments made in the interview and workshop discussions; they are not the independent observations of the research team. The answers sometimes did indeed reflect our own observations, but there was more than one occasion where the comments were surprising to us either in terms of their context or the vehemence with which they were expressed. We realise that sometimes, the messages will be difficult to hear; we didn't feel it was our role to avoid transmitting them so as to avoid irritation. Annex 2 gives a flavour of the type of comments we gleaned.

Our role has been to put the comments into some sort of framework, to tease out the broader questions they raise for further discussion and to try to formulate a series of recommendations where the groups seem to have a broad consensus on specific issues.

3 The EIP application process

3.1 Outline of the process

The RDP provides for a two stage process:

Stage 1: An initial call for the submission of ideas/proposals from potential Operational Groups will be made. At this initial stage the Operational Group will be required to submit an outline of the objectives, scope and function of their proposed activities, including administrative aspects. Prospective Operation Groups will be evaluated by an expert evaluation committee for relevance to the EIP programme and its compatibility with Rural Development Priorities (4 and 5).

Stage 2: Successful first stage applicants will then be requested to compile and submit a complete detailed Operational Group plan. This plan will detail the scope, administrative arrangements, all associated costs and schedule for the Operational Group, and it will list the participants and detail their respective roles. Preparation costs for this detailed stage 2 submission will be covered.

A final approval process will take place with assessment based on the Operational Group's plans, projected costs and timeframes based on established principles. This process will also involve assessment by a committee of relevant experts based on experience and existing research.

3.2 The need to innovate

Which need does the EIP programme address? The obvious answer for the EU institutions is the need for farming to innovate to begin to meet emerging challenges and to better meet existing ones. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Regulations are in fact in general rather short on possible options for the testing and trialling of innovations. While local agri-environment measures in the

zonal programme or environmentally sensitive area are perfectly in order, the regulations require that they are fully described in the Rural Development Programme (RDP), necessitating at least some preliminary stage of local discussion and development, presumably during the previous RDP. EIP-Agri provides a mechanism which gets round this chicken-and-egg issue, allowing projects to be initiated and developed within the lifetime of a single RDP.

At the grassroots level the imperative is often somewhat different, with a low priority given to innovation per se. Here the question might be ‘what funding can we access to address a long-running issue, and which allows us to do so in an adaptable, locally-tailored way?’ Ireland’s EIP-Agri programme goes some way to responding to this grassroots reality in that it allows OG not only to develop completely fresh innovations, but also to test the local applicability of approaches developed elsewhere.

While some groups start off with a desire to innovate, others come to it later on in the process. Some eventually find the process stimulating, for example making them raise their heads to think about cost-effectiveness or auditability when roll-out happens some day and leading to trying out new approaches and techniques.

But others struggle: some groups still habitually describe themselves as ‘locally-led’ and ‘pilots’ with little focus on innovation in the way they describe themselves. Some question the focus on innovation when the problems in their area seem not to require innovation, just action – the fact that Innovation is in the name of the programme is to them the wrong answer to the wrong question.

We return to this issue when considering how EIPs fit into the wider suite of instruments and especially into ways of developing locally-tailored policy. It would seem that having the ability to develop local initiatives where the innovation element is less central but the process essentially revolves around the implementation of adapting known solutions to ongoing challenges would be welcomed, though this undoubtedly raises further practical issues.

Issue for discussion: Are there mechanisms in the EU Regulations which could fund continuously adaptable locally-tailored action without necessitating a focus on innovation?

Recommendation 1: There is a need for mechanisms in the EU Regulations which could fund continuously adaptable locally-tailored action without necessitating a focus on innovation

3.3 The need for clear guidance

There needs to be clear guidance at the very start of the process on what is meant by locally-led. Careful reading of measure 16 of the Irish RDP gives some clarity on this. In the case of nationally selected priorities of the Hen harrier and Pearl mussel, locally led refers to the delivery of locally adapted actions which are co-designed and implemented by a range of local and national actors comprising researcher, advisors, local farmers and other local actors.

In the case of the locally led environment and climate project EIP operational groups, it is clear that the process should be primarily driven by innovative ideas coming from the bottom-up but again there is a specific need to collaborate with a range of stakeholders including farmers, advisors, administrators, researchers, ecologists, NGOs, businesses, government departments and agencies. It is very much based on the experience of the Burren programme in Ireland, which has been cited at EU level as an example of how an EIP operational group might function.

This saw the coming together of the local community led by local farmers supported by advisors, researchers and government departments to develop innovative solutions to ongoing local challenges. It is neither a top down nor a bottom up process but a marrying of the best of both. It requires time to develop trust, understanding and capacity between the different actors.

We can see that the successful OG are characterised by relationships which had been established between the various actors at the local level prior to the application process. Locally-led can thus be defined as combining the experience and knowledge from a range of stakeholders both local and national with the specific target of finding locally-adopted solutions to identified local challenges.

Beyond that, an almost universal plea from both successful and unsuccessful groups, and one of relevance for both application and implementation stages, was for fuller and clearer guidance from DAFM. As was noted, 'The Department keep pressing us for the Terms and Conditions we offer our farmers, but at no point did they give us their Terms and Conditions'.

Many of the difficulties which had arisen subsequently – not knowing what was allowed and what was not in terms of actions; not being clear about what is expected in terms of administration and governance; not having a clear picture of what level of extra detail is required between EOI and full application; and so on – could be eased or at least foreseen by the OG were there to be a clear but comprehensive 'welcome pack' to the locally-led measure.

The experience from this EIP-operational group funding process should be built on in the next round of CAP post 2020. In the case of best practice, the availability of proforma templates which groups could choose to use, should give a further indication of expectations and would be helpful at the beginning of the application process.

Issue for discussion: Is there any reason *not* to provide a full set of documents and available publicly?

Recommendation 2: There should be a comprehensive and up-to-date set of guidance documents covering the whole process available online, including mandatory templates where appropriate and illustrative proformas where useful. These should cover general issues like governance; GDPR; financial management; funding drawdown procedures and so forth and be framed around a clear formulation of what 'locally-led' implies for the make-up and operation of the OG.

3.4 Going from EOI to full application

3.4.1 Short timeframe

The short time between an EOI being accepted and a full application being submitted is seen as a major challenge and one which has other knock-on effects, such as increasing the pressure to hire an outside consultant. The point was made that it was a very short time for genuine farmers' groups to develop innovative proposals in detail, given the vagueness of the EOI stage. Administrative issues also have to be dealt with in this time (see below). Timing with regard to busy periods in the farming year needs to be taken into account.

Some of the issues here might again be explained by some confusion about the target for the funding and the envisaged process of how it should work, from the formation of the OG to project concept to project planning and implementation. If, as discussed above, the OG should be a mix of farmers, advisors and researchers, farmer groups would not be making the application on their own, the OG are constituted with the required range of expertise, and the timeframe becomes more realistic. In other words, were the expectations for an operational group to be made explicit from the start, then this should not be as much of an issue.

It is therefore vital that at the EOI stage an operational group is constituted that at least has capacity to develop a plan or at least lead the process of developing a plan with relatively minor external assistance. If it hasn't got this capacity it may suggest that there would be a capacity issue for implementation of the project. Making this clear should be a key element of the guidance from DAFM.

This raises a more important issue that the local rural communities or areas in most need of innovation and a locally led project might be the ones with the least support from advisory and research services or be remote from where these services exist. Such a situation leads to the same groups who have the capacity always winning the funding. Mechanisms need to exist that can be used to assist fledgling groups that struggle with the process. A typical example may be the successful Blackstairs Farming Futures EIP, where a farming group with the assistance of an NGO (EFNCP) and with the support of Heritage Council funding was able to conduct prior work that enabled them to be in a position to build an operational group partnership to successfully apply for funding.

The role of enabling and capacity building in rural areas cannot be underestimated and there is a clear role for community partnership funding as a preparatory stage to enable local community to seize further opportunities. Example of enabling initiatives in Ireland that could be used to build capacity among local communities include the uplands community group initiative of the Heritage Council and the Public Participation Networks of local authorities. There is also a clear role for the wider Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) to support this enabling and capacity building work in CAP post 2020.

Issues to discuss: Is there clearer guidance needed as to what constitutes the minimum requirements for the make-up and responsibility sharing within an operational group?

Recommendation 3: There needs to be clear guidance from the outset as to the expertise and capacity required within operational groups for successful implementation of an EIP locally led project.

Recommendation 4: There is a clear role for community partnership funding as a preparatory stage to enable rural communities to develop the capacity and enable them to seize further opportunities such as locally led EIP projects. (This has clear implications for wider thinking on the pre EIP stage see section 5.3.2.)

3.4.2 Interaction during the process

The scope and consistency of interaction with DAFM, and the degree of detail on offer, had clearly been a big influence on the process.

There was a feeling that feedback was not necessarily consistent over time. Some of this could be filed under ‘programme guidance’ and is remedied in the first instance by having a set of publicly-available documents (see above). However, there will always be a need for follow-up guidance, and any given orally should be followed-up immediately with an email to ensure clarity on both sides.

The more difficult issue concerns proposal-specific feedback. Groups need it and welcome it. However, many felt that the feedback they got was insufficient or seemed not to lead to the desired result. It would be good to move to a situation where EOIs received as detailed a feedback as would be necessary to ensure success in the full application stage.

Some groups were more confident, had phoned DAFM for informal feedback on a range of possible actions and had received very helpful responses orally. Others would have thought of the process as more akin to tendering than to applying for a grant and avoided discussing any such details with the Department. The former approach seems quite proper, but it should be clearer that it is open to all, with the usual caveats that only the actual written application will be taken into consideration.

There was a feeling from both successful and unsuccessful applicants that projects can, or are encouraged to, undergo considerable alteration between the EOI and the final application. This created some unease: at what point does finessing and tweaking cross the line so that the final application is for a quite different project? Might not the runners-up in the EOI stage also have changed their projects to a similar or lesser degree and achieved success? There was a feeling that this flexibility was perhaps being pushed too far and that applicants who were for some reason favoured (previous record, falling or not falling into particular type or geographical location etc.) could thus receive a second chance, while the disfavoured could be ‘justifiably’ excluded.

Issue for discussion: What would be the most useful and transparent and fair way to operate a feedback process between the initial call and the submission of the full application?

Recommendation 5: Non-binding advice should be available to any potential applicant from the DAFM EIP team, which should extend explicitly to proposed actions

Recommendation 6: Oral guidance should be available and followed up an email;

Recommendation 7: Guidance on general issues should be added to an FAQ section.

Recommendation 8: Feedback on EOIs should be as detailed as necessary to allow for either resubmission of an EOI or for successful submission of a full application in future.

3.4.3 What does a good application look like?

The groups were positive about the simplicity of the EOI stage of the application process. They liked the step-by-step questions and the word limit for each one. They felt it was something well within their abilities and consistent with the intention that the projects be locally-led.

The leap to the full application in the relatively short time available, posed considerable challenges, ones particularly difficult to reconcile with the need to keep farmers on board and feeling that they were in charge (see discussion of 'locally-led' above).

Groups felt that a carry-over of the systems of headings and word limits wherever possible would have been most welcome. Having SUAS's application held up in a DAFM information meeting as, by implication at least, a template to follow was, groups felt, pushing them towards a glossy document heavy with detailed background information – there was a feeling that quantity and presentation were valued in and of themselves.

There was a feeling also that since the strength, depth and coherence of the OG is a major factor in likely future success, and since the understanding of the OG as a whole, as opposed to the person who might have written most of the application, is essential for true local ownership, it would be very worthwhile for the assessment panel to meet the OGs who had made it to the second stage, preferably in the field as well as round a table.

Issue for discussion: Does the leap from EOI to full application need to be so big? What could make it smaller or more manageable while keeping local ownership and providing the necessary detail? Can the assessment committee gain something from meeting the OG?

Recommendation 9: Full applications should, except for limited elements, follow a similar pattern to EOIs – set questions, word limits etc. The tendency to rich illustrations, smart presentation, expensive bindings etc. should be actively discouraged and be ignored in the assessment process.

Recommendation 10: The assessment panel should visit each OG which reaches the second stage, visiting the field and discussing possible actions, as well as giving an opportunity to understand fully the detailed feedback given on the EOI. i.e. a government innovation support service integrated into the process.

3.4.4 Bringing in external consultants for bid development

Nascent EIP operational groups (OG) felt encouraged to take on an external consultant to help write their application. In large part this was in response to the short timescale between success at the Expression of Interest (EOI) stage and the deadline for the full application, further encouraged by the

availability of money from DAFM to facilitate the process. Some groups also felt that they were pushed firmly in that direction by DAFM in a national seminar in which the SUAS project was held up as an example to follow, and that this was also encouraged by Teagasc.

Some found the need to explain the project to a fresh observer a useful way of sharpening the logic of the proposal, finding on occasion that the consultant's experience and knowledge contributed more to the process than mere skill in application writing.

But others questioned the usefulness of this external input. On the one side there was a feeling that the consultant added little except extra work – the need to spend time getting them up to speed was resented. When this was the case, their cost, although covered by DAFM, was an additional irritant.

A perhaps more fundamental issue is how to fit local processes of engagement with the injection of an external actor whose time is limited and costly. Sometimes the local partnership is one drawn together with difficulty, overcoming local tensions between individuals or a history of conflict between stakeholder groups. In almost all cases the local partnership is itself one where progress is already entrusted to a small group of leaders; both this group and possibly the relationship with the wider local community can be disrupted by an incomer, especially one with strong opinions or poor diplomatic skills. It might be noted in passing that some sensitive issues might be covered by a clear set of guidelines from DAFM (see below).

Groups noted that the step of engaging a single external contractor was one of high risk in the whole process – more groups made this point than made positive comments, suggesting that some way of allowing groups to alleviate the risk locally might be useful. On the other hand, managing a transition from local volunteer to paid project developer is also fraught with potential resentments.

Having said that, it is not clear what if anything needs to change. Perhaps the weakness is the 'all or nothing' approach? Could some 'light touch' mentoring be the answer and what might that look like? It is clearly a good thing for groups to be *able* to engage help from outside; they certainly need to be clear that they don't *have* to do so to succeed. Whether any changes to the rules of the programme are needed is something for further discussion.

Issue for discussion: What, if any, changes should be made to the payment for engaging a facilitator?

Recommendation 11: While a development resource is very often important to high quality applications, the application of this resource should be made flexible with choice at the local level to blend local knowledge with local capacity (this can come from many sources at the local level) or to take on an external consultant.

3.5 Dealing with the unsuccessful

Perhaps the biggest weakness of the current EIP process when seen from the outside is the way it deals with, or fails to deal with, unsuccessful applicants who had got through the EOI stage.

Getting to that point would often have been the culmination of years of patient building work, sometimes starting in contexts of conflict or crisis. So groups feel that being knocked back after the huge work of putting together of a second stage application – itself something which may bring new tensions to the surface – sends them back to a place which is worse than what it was before embarking on the EIP process.

Sometimes that application had been drawn up with strong support from local agency officials and addressed issues which they say needs urgent attention. When the same bodies are represented on the assessment panel which turns down the application, this can be confusing to the applicants and undermine the sense of working together locally towards a common goal.

Being unable to reapply after failure at the full application stage may make sense to DAFM – the group has had financial support for assistance; time to move on. But from the applicant's point of view, it is a disaster. Not only is there the sense of failure and frustration, but there is now no incentive to regroup, learn and move on to success.

From DAFM's perspective, it makes sense to give minimal feedback – what would be the point of making subjective statements which would only lead to argument, when the group can't in any case make use of the feedback to improve its resubmission? Better just to give the breakdown of application scores from the assessment. But again, from the applicant's perspective this just creates more bitterness – low scores which to them make no sense invite comparison with other, successful, applicants who, to their eyes, seem equally deficient, or more so.

There is no personal contact made by the Department. Again, this might seem prudent – why open staff up to possible anger or resentment. And groups could always take the initiative if they were really interested. But groups are often too bruised and depressed to take the initiative, falling into a malaise which has actual rural development impacts in real communities across Ireland.

The cost of failure is so high by the second stage that the obvious solution is to eliminate failure at this point except in the most extraordinary circumstances and/or to make reapplication possible for those who are rejected at this stage.

Maybe not all of the answers lie within EIP, but for as long as EIP is the only game in town, it really needs to take the impact of failure much more seriously and to mitigate it.

Issue for discussion: What framework and procedures would minimise the impact of failed applications?

Recommendation 12: All applicants should be allowed to reapply (but only receive financial assistance once) where the EIP measures remain open for applications.

Recommendation 13: As a default, all applicants who pass the EOI stage should be expected to receive contracts at the second stage. Guidance proffered (see above) should be much more specific on issues which are known to cause problems – a specific budget range should be indicated; guidance such as ‘be more focussed’ should be avoided in favour of specific recommendations (and the EOI should be rejected if it is too vague for such recommendations to be made).

Recommendation 14: If criteria outwith the current scoring system are being used (how many contracts are likely to go to upland areas, how many to ‘the West’, how many to biodiversity topics, etc.), they should be incorporated clearly into the system.

Recommendation 15: Even if the overall framework makes failure after huge effort less likely, DAFM should as a priority not only contact but visit all failed applicants to give full feedback and to outline possible next steps.

4 EIP project implementation

4.1 Clear guidance

The clarity which would benefit the applicant (see above) would also benefit the successful applicants during delivery. The EIP OG process and in particular the delivery of environment and climate action through locally led initiatives is novel and an iterative learning approach and updating of guidance/best practice is to be expected throughout this first cycle of implementation. Change is to be expected and reflects a process which adapts to new challenges, but should be kept to a minimum and disseminated publicly and immediately and clearly. If guidance contradicts previous material, this should be made especially clear and be proactively transmitted to all applicants by DAFM. A ‘what’s new’ section on a guidance web page could quickly direct stakeholders to the latest changes in the guidance documents.

Issue for discussion: Are there any specific recommendations for improving the communication of guidance?

Recommendation 16: Full guidance documents must be online, with a mechanism for highlighting changes for visitors to the site. The same information must be emailed to project managers for dissemination to operational group partners as part of DAFM’s proactive engagement (communications plan) with participants

4.2 Response times

Closely linked in some cases is the need for prompt responses from the State. The set timescales are short, whether between EOI and full application, or between contract and getting systems in place, or between award and making contracts with farmers. Groups have the feeling that they have to meet deadlines while DAFM can take its time getting things right; it feels like an unequal sharing of risk. Some truly-farmer-led groups have additional difficulties in terms of fitting the timetable

around their farm work – any delays from the official side can easily be magnified and become unmanageable.

Projects often also need responses from other official bodies – NPWS or local planning authorities, for example. These may have limited capacity and take the view that EIP-Agri isn't 'their' scheme and that no-one thought to consider their workloads. DAFM should look into the scale of the issue within EIPs and engage in honest discussions with the other public bodies to find workable solutions, perhaps in terms of extra stages to the application or the process of assessing the overall project (as opposed to the 'plan or project' in terms of the Habitats Directive). The result should be a streamlined process which enables projects to deliver within the contract timetable while safeguarding legal requirements and the objects of the rules which are in place (species, habitats, water quality, etc.).

Issue for discussion: How can consent and approval steps involving state bodies be made streamlined?

Recommendation 17: DAFM to initiate an assessment of the seriousness of delays in the statutory permissions processes linked to EIP actions

Recommendation 18: NPWS to explore a clear protocol on meeting the needs of EIP groups regards consents required under legislation, appropriate assessment etc.

4.3 The challenge of administration and governance

Of all the difficulties facing successful applicants, few seem to cause as many headaches as administration and governance. Although all groups need to put structures and procedures in place, these are very often the last thing they consider during the project incubation process, even leaving them until after the second stage application in some cases, it would seem. Stakeholders are focussed on the actions and later the payments; things like e-tendering are strange and unfamiliar; administration can seem like a tedious necessity, while governance is a vaguely-understood abstraction. But such attitudes can lead to problems and even conflict later.

Running projects requires conforming to certain ways of thinking, one to which organisations become accustomed. One such experienced OG member, when asked whether the revealing of more demanding conditions had created problems for them, replied that they were already expecting that such rules would eventually apply. There is a case for saying that the more 'grassroots' and fresh the group, the greater the difficulty with this challenge. Participation can easily become limited to those with access to help by agencies or NGOs. This reflects back to earlier discussions on the meaning of 'locally-led'.

It is not necessarily that the skills are absent from the wider community – local accountants etc. may have the experience or may be able to easily acquire it. The issue is rather clarity over what a group must do and what costs it has no choice but to incur.

Given this repeating pattern, it is particularly important that DAFM makes its requirements and recommendations vis-à-vis administration and governance clear throughout, giving them separate prominence in all its materials and awareness-raising activities – guidance, templates, proformas and information meetings. It should also be a specific focus within all stages of the application and assessment process, whether EOI or second stage, in any meeting with the OG and in the detailed feedback to the application (see previous recommendations).

It was suggested that DAFM (or suitable bodies such as the National Rural Network or contracted Local Development Companies) could offer to provide some administration functions for a fixed percentage of the contract amount.

Issue for discussion: What could DAFM do to make the needs of sound administration and governance provision less of a ‘surprise’ for applicants?

Recommendation 19: *DAFM (or other appointed body e.g. NRN) to produce a ‘competency framework’ which describes the skills, capacities and experience necessary for sound administration and governance for EIP operational groups.*

4.4 Contractor and Operational Group

A specific issue relating to governance also links back to the previous discussion of the role(s) of various state and semi-state actors. The initial simple picture that each OG needs to set up and work through a legal entity which is able to contract with DAFM and hold and distribute money in a way which keeps it identifiable but which also represents the whole partnership seems in practice to be more complicated.

Some groups have been permitted to use one of their member organisations to set up a separate bank account. Where this is a local development company this seems eminently sensible; such bodies are already partnership organisations which run a variety of projects on behalf of local stakeholders. But where this is an NGO or similar body, eyebrows might justifiably be raised and a reason for the exception sought. This creates a situation where the OG has no legal connection to the contract or monies – is it reasonable to expect them to provide governance in such a situation? Who is responsible in case of fraud or negligence? Are they in fact just an advisory group to the contractor? Guidance from a steering group is valuable, but it is distinct from governance.

Elsewhere, the converse has arisen – certain OG members refuse to be members of new legal entities set up to be the EIP contractor. In many cases these are state bodies – NPWS or Teagasc, for example. Their unwillingness suggests that there is risk to be avoided on their part, but if there is a risk being avoided that implies a greater responsibility on the part of the remaining members of the OG who are members of the legal body. Meanwhile the public body representatives on the OG could advise the contractor (acting like de facto directors) to take actions which could lead to cashflow crises or personnel disputes but try to avoid any of the liabilities arising.

It might be argued that some of these bodies also sit on the assessment panel, but if that is a real issue, then some way to resolve that needs to be found, e.g. NPWS, as an example, sitting outwith the OG and the OG being required to seek a statement of support locally which then has some weight in the process.

Maybe these are non-issues, but if governance is important (and it should be when millions of Euros are being handled by bodies with tiny reserves and through a myriad of small contracts, often administered by part-time staff), then should there not be clear guidance? These problems are not unsurmountable given that groups with a range of different structures are currently up and running but clear guidance and government support on range of approaches that can be adopted should be available. Again this is a learning experience for all; the lessons learned from this cycle of implementation of the EIP operational group measure in the RDP will be invaluable in the next programming period.

Issues to discuss: Is this the distinction between the contractor and OG is some projects a problem?

Recommendation 20: DAFM to provide clear guidance on the expected relationship between OG and contracting body and DAFM, and conversely with other bodies with no legal responsibility, e.g. steering groups (see recommendation re 'competency framework'.)

5 EIP in wider policy development and delivery

5.1 What does the RDP say?

In the case of the Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel projects, the RDP says: 'The approach ...seeks to determine whether the locally-led approaches ...can be scaled-up significantly to address environmental challenges common to a number of distinct areas and habitats and involving disparate groups of farmers... The approach will be piloted on a subset of the geographical ranges of both species, with a view to informing the design of new schemes under the next Rural Development Programme.'

The two projects are therefore clearly intended as a stepping stone for mainstreaming an agri-environment measure in those Natura sites (following the path taken by the Burren), a measure which it is also intended would be rolled out to the other relevant Natura sites designated for those species at very least.

A similar wording is employed for the locally-led projects: 'The outputs will be monitored and disseminated with a view to informing the design of new schemes under the next Rural Development Programme.' But in this case there is no context which suggests what this might mean in practice. In this section, we explore some of the possibilities in the light of comments made by our interviewees.

5.2 What happens to current EIPs?

5.2.1 Roll-over?

EIP-Agri “works to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry that 'achieves more and better from less'”, according to the European Commission’s website. The inference is that the mechanism acts only to pump-prime the development of techniques or technology which can then be taken up by ‘competitive’ farmers to the financial benefit of their business. Under this vision, EIP-Agri is a time-limited intervention in which State financial innovation support wheels the cogs of science and the process of uptake.

We only came across one EIP group where the design of innovations which can be taken up without public support once the project had ended was *the* major focus. For the other projects, many or most of the innovations related to the delivery of public goods and by definition would require ongoing public financial support, for example in the form of agri-environment payments.

In Ireland, many of the currently funded groups are however testing innovative mechanisms and approaches to delivery of a range of public goods on farmland related to environment and climate action. Some of these actions may reduce input costs on farm while maintaining production and would thus be possible to roll out without public supports. But many will also have associated costs that may require continued public money for delivery of public goods.

Most of Ireland’s EIPs thus fall into a different logic. They certainly work towards ever more sustainable farming, one which achieves more and better, including in terms of economic viability. But they are also realistic. Public goods are public goods because there is currently no market for those services; the State has to provide one. And any notion of viability or competitiveness is within the context of continuing or even expanded State support – something which ironically seems equally to apply to the allegedly commercial farm products.

A common characteristic of all of the environmental EIPs in Ireland is that they are to seek local tailored solutions to identified problems linked to overall RDP objectives that cannot be addressed through national agri-environment measures. In almost all cases then, the logic of EIP in Ireland is that it leads to something else requiring State funding. In the RDP it specifically states that these EIPs amongst other things will enable the development of results based measures as opposed to generic prescription based approach for specific challenges. The RDP also states that “the outputs will be monitored and disseminated with a view to informing the design of new schemes under the new Rural Development Programme”.

But the fact that the original project is funded under the EIP surely sets a limit on the prospects of local ‘roll-over’, as some groups seem to assume will happen. Even if the work should be continued locally (management of SACs, maintenance of high water quality etc. will remain high priorities for the State), a new mechanism would need to be found using some other CAP instrument which doesn’t have ‘innovation’ as its key criterion. The one exception where an OG survives into the next period – one where it develops and tests new innovations – is of course not really an exception; the difficulty is how to carry forward *existing* innovation actions that prove successful in the context tested.

Issue for discussion: How should EIPs explore and describe their concepts for progress beyond the EIP Project itself?

Recommendation 21: EIPs should produce an exploratory short ‘roadmap to the future’ as part of their dissemination and communication activities. Thus expressing a preferred way forward.

5.2.2 A call for new EIPs in next policy cycle?

Although the implementation of EIP-Agri in Ireland has not been without its problems, and could be tweaked to improve the experience for applicants and successful OGs, the overall impression is overwhelmingly positive. Ireland and the Commission have both themselves been innovative in their use of the Regulation and the risk appears so far to have been well worth it.

A decision not to allow for new EIPs in the same vein in the next RDP (assuming this will be possible under the Regulation) would then be disappointing to many. Such a call would, it seems clear, meet with an enthusiastic response, whether from existing OGs keen to try new innovations, from unsuccessful applicants from past rounds (it is inconceivable that they not be allowed to apply again), or from completely new groups.

The apparent success of the hen harrier and freshwater pearl mussel projects, although not the main focus of this report, also carries lessons. The development of subtle and apparently effective measures within a very short period of time took place within a framework which defined ‘locally-led’ as a marrying of bottom up and top down. It facilitated local adaptation and involved high levels of engagement and leads to a sense of ownership on the ground. What then determines the balance between roll-out from existing projects and the encouragement of new ones?

5.2.3 Roll-out?

A word that was used by more than one group to describe their work was ‘pilot’. This implies that they are assuming that their work will be built upon not just by ‘roll-over’, but in a way which involves a considerable increase in scale. This is expected given the intervention logic described in the RDP. There are a number of potential options for roll out at this stage

- 1. Local roll out within a defined geographic area of successful innovations enabling further testing and refinement*

This could in the first instance involve more local farmers being able to avail themselves of funding. This would be rather like the way the Burren programme developed from the embryo of Burren Life through the adolescent Article 68 scheme to the current agri-environment measure which is available to any interested farmer in scheme area.

Such a limited roll-out would maintain the local delivery and local adaptation aspects of the original EIP schemes. But it raises wider political questions, ones which impinge even on some of the stakeholders in the current OGs. What would this imply for the rest of Ireland? There would be a risk that very gradual expansion of the EIP programme to include more and more areas through new schemes, with existing ones becoming entrenched through roll-over into some other measure, would leave areas of the country excluded and abandoned. And not necessarily because they are

unimportant or don't offer opportunities for 'delivering more, more effectively', but because they don't have the local capacity to write a successful application, for whatever reason.

2. *Wider Regional/National Roll out of successful innovations from a particular EIP or group of EIPs with similar characteristics*

This approach would see innovations from EIPs with particular characteristics roll out to similar areas regionally or nationally. However, this approach also poses challenges. What if techniques or measures developed in locally-led EIP projects were to be rolled out nationally, in terms of structures at any rate? A national roll-out would still involve targeting criteria which limit entry to certain areas etc. e.g. Natura 2000 land and land of similar character outside Natura 2000 with particular land characteristics. In that case, the locally-led element would be lost, as would, in principle, the locally-adapted aspect. However, there is a particular opportunity here to learn lesson from the larger scale EIPs in Ireland (Hen Harrier and Pearl Mussel EIPs) on how a national framework could be used while maintaining a certain amount of local adaptation. The Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel projects offer one model of the way forward: both have a national, albeit targeted, aspect but show that locally adaptation can be done at a considerable geographical scale if well-designed. Both also are intended, according to the RDP, to be foci for future wider roll-out.

5.2.4 Further reflections after the Winterage School workshop

Below is a list of reflections arising from the relevant Burren Winterage workshop (Workshop 1); a more comprehensive list of discussion points are include in Appendix 3.

- EIPs must not migrate into a GLAS-like national scheme. There was unanimous agreement, firmly expressed, that whatever scheme(s) take over the work of the EIP projects, they must retain the element of being appropriate to the place and be centred on a meaningful adaptive interaction between advisor, farmer and scheme.
- There was also however a surprising degree of agreement that this does not have to imply the continuation of discrete locally-based measures – rather, local relevance and flexibility mediated through locally-based teams was the red line.
- There was a great deal of awareness that different EIP measures in terms of actions on the ground or support payments structure are evolving in a similar direction across the operational group network. There was a great deal of open-ness to the idea that more could be done to explore synergies across operational groups and that this was a possible way forward. Though there was a feeling from some groups that this would need quite a bit of work to get right.
- The messages from a small number of groups were not quite as clear, focussing largely on education and awareness that was less easy to describe narrowly as 'actions on the ground or support payments'. The actual on-the-ground practice was often seen as essentially social and the farmer group as central to this. The groups stressed the importance of changing mindsets, including in the knowledge transfer community – how this might be achieved was something for further discussion within those groups and between those groups and other stakeholders, not least DAFM. It was not clear in all cases whether this was 'all' that would be necessary to produce wider benefits and to transfer best practice from the EIP area.

Possible ways forward

- DAFM should map out possible delivery mechanisms and work out what steps would need to be taken to get there from the current situation, setting out a clear timetable compatible with the drawing up of the documentation of the future Irish CAP implementation
- Groups of similar EIPs should come together to start discussions on future mechanisms for roll out of successful innovations.
- Even more established programmes like The Burren Programme offer opportunities to look at expansion and consolidation. There seems to be a willingness in Caomhnú Árann to envisage a joint future, while recognising the challenge of working with farms and parcels of very different scale and constraints. But the Burren farms also contain habitats other than limestone pavement and species-rich meadows, which if incorporated would potentially convert the Programme into a whole-landscape measure of the type most EIP groups want to see.
- It would be useful to consider how many ‘Programmes’ are needed. Do the Hen Harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel need to remain separate, when the difference is more in terms of emphasis? Would simplification to a general approach suitable for bog/heath; semi-natural grassland, improved grassland and arable land, each with a range of (sometimes species- or target-specific) complementary actions/works and a small number of adjusted results based payment scorecards for specific targets be a possibility?
- Could the ‘whole farm’ element of the FPM project be generalised down into a general eco-scheme?
- The key issue seems to be not finding and incorporating the synergies, but ensuring that the local essence of the new approach is maintained, even as scale increases. There are some fears that capacity is limited, but the two species EIPs show how quickly scaling-up can happen when well managed.

Recommendation 22: DAFM to map out possible delivery mechanisms and work out next steps for locally led environment and climate measures, setting out a clear timetable compatible with the drawing up of the documentation of the future Irish CAP implementation.

Recommendation 23: Similar EIP operational groups should be encouraged to work together to look at synergies, opportunities for consolidation and roll out of successful innovations.

5.3 EIP as part of a wider policy map?

What emerges clearly from the discussion is that the EIPs are crying out to be fitted into a wider policy framework. While many aspects of the details of implementation of the current measure can be improved upon, DAFM needs explicitly to set EIP-Agri into a wider policy context where successful innovations have a potential pathway for wider roll out. This wider policy environment is not limited to CAP but includes environment, climate, biodiversity, rural development and social policy. This reflects the broad mix of innovations currently being tried and tested within the current set of operational groups. This needs to combine the innovative and the non-innovative, the local

and the national, the measure itself and the vital surrounding infrastructure of complementary measures which provide the environment in which local initiatives can be germinated and incubated.

5.3.1 Post-EIP steps?

There is a need for clear thinking on what happens post-EIP. It would be surprising if one size were to fit all: some projects are locally distinct (much as the Burren was in some of its key detail). Some others could potentially be rolled out with very little amendment (the RBAPS³ pilot's Leitrim scorecards for species-rich grassland and marsh fritillary are a non-EIP example; the approaches taken to rough grazings by the hen harrier and freshwater pearl mussel EIPs seem similarly relevant to areas outwith their respective SACs). Some could stand alone, Burren-style, or be integrated as a measure within the next agri-environment measure, for example; yet others might be complementary actions in other parts of the RDP – non-productive investments, local infrastructure, training and so on.

It is too early to list definitively what actions are successful and replicable (not necessarily the same thing); what is needed at present is some thinking about what the possibilities are and the process by which decisions will be made in 2020 or 2021. In particular, the initial findings from the EIPs and indeed other pilot initiatives such as RBAPS can help inform the design of Ireland CAP Strategic plan (CSP) post 2020. It is clear, even at this early stage, that there needs to be scope for local adaption, cooperation, results based and actions based payments, specialist advisory and support services within the framework of the CSP. An additional challenge is that actions like these which are tightly complementary within the EIP project would, on mainstreaming, fall under different Articles of EAFRD or even potentially into different Pillars of the CAP. Ensuring similar coherence between measures in national programmes is quite a challenge, as the mixed messages over land eligibility illustrates.

From a cursory look at the CAP post 2020 legislative proposals it is clear that there is flexibility and potential mechanisms to mainstream successful aspects of the EIPs (

³ Results based agri-environment pilot projects in Ireland and Navarra (Spain). See full details at <https://rbaps.eu/>

Table). There will need to be clear objectives and targeting for any roll out in the CSP that encompasses a range of CAP measures in an integrated manner.

The overall impression was that there needs to be overhaul of advisory and education system in terms of delivery and knowledge base to address environment challenges. There seems to be a need for the continuation of EIP type measures but there are also some measures that can be rolled out immediately in the CAP strategic plan post 2020, in particular in relation to agri-environment.

Most of challenges to this are seen around how to scale up from pilots, economies of scale and reducing administration costs. Flexibility and the ability to adapt to local variation needs to be maintained, and Government needs to ensure that a national GLAS type measure would be compatible with roll out rather than conflict with it. The need for a more integrated design of policy support across agri-environment, education, knowledge sharing, cooperation and innovation is clear. How can a scheme deliver multiple objectives in a coherent fashion e.g. climate action, water quality, biodiversity, while minimising trade-offs as much as possible?

It was striking that there was very little consideration of role of new eco-scheme and in particular a lack of awareness of the potential scale of money involved. This will be a very political discussion reflecting the current distribution of Pillar 1 direct payments. Nature-friendly and socio-economically marginal farmers need to avoid the trap of focussing only on the relatively small elements of the CAP budget.

Whatever post-EIP framework DAFM designs will have to cope with a non-innovative phase in the development of the particular projects concerned; why not consider at the same time how a process for encouraging local cooperation and targeted action, perhaps bid for in a similarly-competitive way, might be designed in a way which omits the stress on innovation?

It is also possible to take action in parallel to and complementary to existing EIP activity, for example using LEADER; awareness of such opportunities is often currently very dependent on individuals.

Issue for discussion: What criteria should be used to determine the pattern of roll-over/roll-out (or not) post-EIP? What models are possible? What makes certain EIP actions suitable for one model over another? ('Roadmaps' – see earlier. Not as constraining but as opening a forward looking local dialogue.)

Issue for discussion: Is being locally-led an end in itself? Can measures be locally-adapted without being locally-led? What are the implications for roll-out, not least for areas without the capacity for action through EIP?

Issue for discussion: What is the timetable for decision-making on these and similar issues with regard to the next CAP? What is possible by the final deadline? Does the mismatch in timeframes for developing the CAP strategic plan and the current implementation phase of various EIP operational groups threaten continuity of action on the ground? How can this be avoided or gaps filled?

Recommendation 24: Needs to be overhaul of the agriculture knowledge and education system in terms of delivery and knowledge base to address environment and climate challenges.

Recommendation 25: Needs to be clear objectives and targeting for any roll out of measures coming from EIPs in relation to locally adapted climate and environment actions. There needs to be a more integrated approach to design of policy support across agri-environment, education, knowledge sharing, cooperation and innovation in the CAP strategic plan post 2020.

Recommendation 26: Needs to be proactive engagement by DAFM with EIP operational groups as part of the CAP Strategic Plan drafting process. This needs to allow sufficient time to discuss issues of compatibility, collaboration, further roll out, fit within proposed agri-environment and AKIS related measures, etc.

Table 3. EIP activities and possible roll-over mechanisms within the draft post-2020 CAP proposals

EIP activities	Article in proposed legislation
New Innovations and testing of innovations from other EIPS untried in specific geographic context	Article 114 European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability. "The envisaged innovation may be based on new but also on traditional practices in a new geographical or environmental context."
Further scale up, development and testing of successful innovations at local level, local cooperation, pilot projects	Article 71 Cooperation. Includes support for cooperation of collective environment and climate actions. Support may be for longer than seven years where duly justified.
Full implementation of agri-environment measures (results/action/hybrid)	Article 28 Schemes for the climate and the environment (eco-schemes). Includes lists of agricultural practices beneficial for the environment. Article 65 Environmental, climate and other management commitments. Payments for environmental, climate and other management commitments. May promote and support collective schemes and result-based payments schemes to encourage farmers to deliver a significant enhancement of the quality of the environment at a larger scale and in a measurable way.
Activities linked to WFD and Natura 2000	Article 67 Payments in Natura 2000 and agricultural areas included in river basin management plans under Water Framework Directive. Compensate beneficiaries for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone related to the area-specific disadvantages in the area concerned related to requirements of legislation.
Non-productive investments supporting achievement of objectives	Article 68 Investments. Non-productive investments linked to the specific environmental and climate-related objectives.
Training and capacity building	Article 72 knowledge exchange and information. Support for agricultural, forestry and rural business knowledge exchange and information. May cover costs of any relevant action to promote innovation, access to training and advice and exchange and dissemination of knowledge and information which contribute to achieving the specific objectives.
Advisory services	Article 13 Farm Advisory Services. The farm advisory services shall cover economic, environmental and social dimensions and deliver up to date technological and scientific information developed by research and innovation.
Technical assistance and improved administration	Article 112 Technical assistance at the initiative of the Member States. Covered under Article 60 advisory services and technical assistance, in particular regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation;
Set up of quality schemes, collective markets, networks and clusters, organic production etc.	Sectoral types of Interventions. Article 60 provides for a range of sectoral interventions related to advisory, training, technical assistance, marketing, quality schemes, traceability and certification

5.3.2 Pre-EIP steps in developing partnership within multi-actor projects?

In all the groups we interviewed, bar none, the development of the project came about through a few key individuals active at the local level, often for long periods of time. It was noted that the organisational longevity of individual partnership members in such circumstances often proved vital during gaps in the process, knock-backs etc.. The question of how to encourage the development of such collaborations and to nurture individuals is a key one for rural development.

State bodies in the broad sense have often had a crucial role – how can staff be encouraged to engage locally when there are cuts in personnel and other tasks are given higher priority? Some groups sensed some understandable reluctance or resentment from their local agency staff that they would have to carry out extra tasks because of the EIP but without any extra support from above. It was noticeable that more than one group had first to deal with a lack of basic understanding of the reasons for Natura designation, and of the role of farming in the management of Natura sites. But then when NPWS for example has engaged well locally and it seems clear that the EIP application is seen by them as being a positive move for the local sites, subsequent failure becomes even more confusing and resentment-inducing; local staff are put in a thankless position which must be discouraging for their colleagues elsewhere.

It was often the case that the local development company had played a positive role over many years, particularly where LEADER had objectives which had over the years chimed with the goals of EIP-Agri.

Meanwhile, more than one group asserted firmly that farmers needed to be in control, making that point in the context of unexpectedly strident comments about Teagasc in particular. This seemed to be not so much a reflection on individual advisors locally, many of whom were praised, but of a general feeling that Teagasc now has an agenda of its own (or of DAFM's, as some suspected) which concentrated on a limited number of messages focussed on intensive systems, and neglecting the real needs and opportunities of the mountain or disadvantaged area farmer.

The issue is very much one of chicken and egg – which comes first, the feeling that change is needed, or that change is possible, or specific ideas, or local networks for mutual assistance? Change often comes as a result of some crisis locally, but crisis also creates a rush to perhaps over-hasty decision-making; how can the process be encouraged in 'normal' times?

Knowledge exchanges for individuals and groups are often a catalyst for new thinking – study visits, discussion groups, micro-scale innovation testing and the like are all used in Ireland and elsewhere as part of the innovation agenda. Peer-to-peer, as opposed to institutional, exchanges are particularly valued. It would be a small and simple step to better integrate these at least into the EIP process, especially in the pre-EOI stage, and including knowledge transfer from and between EIP projects.

Not everything needs to go through FAS-registered advisors, as the success of the Heritage Council's study tour grant for mountain areas shows. It appears that the current narrow disciplinary focus of FAS limits its ability as a support infrastructure to support EIPs effectively. This is particularly the case with challenges that require multidisciplinary solutions. And such an infrastructure of

supportive and complementary measures is of course relevant and necessary throughout the whole process of developing and implementing locally-adapted and locally-led measures. The current narrow disciplinary focus of FAS would seem to be limiting its ability as a support infrastructure to deal effectively with challenges that require multidisciplinary solutions.

Transnational exchanges were sometimes mentioned as having been important; opportunities may arise through LEADER or Erasmus+ to organise and encourage such visits.

This question was the main focus of Group 3 in the Winterage School workshops (see also Annex 3). It concluded that external actions/supports should:

1. **Enable and demand (create a pull effect for) common purpose (that displays shared values) in projects.** Common purpose is core to a strong project concept & its delivery and can easily be weakened or put at risk. The actions of external parties must not disable issues of trust and empathy.
2. **Allow 'space' (this more complex than just time alone) for people to be creative.** This is where innovation with matching delivery ideas comes from. In some situations funding (say for workshops) will be essential but in others space is more 'time away from the day job' etc.
3. **Allow 'space' (this more complex than just time alone) for people to build trust.** The necessity for trust-building mustn't be risked by overly compressed timelines etc. Trust is also a two-way process between project teams and authorities/administrators.
4. **Enable excellent communications** most importantly a) internally in the project development team and b) to their key stakeholders (others in the community/ies). External parties can provide skills, resources, good practice, and guiding principles such as 'transparency'.
5. **Focus on their own methods & procedures to ensure an 'agile' programme.** This orientation allows project development to speed up and produces higher quality outcomes. Waiting for information and guidance can seriously disable a project team and stifle the search for better impacts.

Whatever post-EIP framework DAFM designs will have to cope with a non-innovative phase in the development of the particular projects concerned; why not consider at the same time how a process for encouraging local cooperation and targeted action, perhaps bid for in a similarly-competitive way, might be designed in a way which omits the stress on innovation?

It is also possible to take action in parallel to and complementary to existing EIP activity, for example using LEADER; awareness of such opportunities is often currently very dependent on individuals.

Issue for discussion: How do we nurture groups or networks or key individuals pre-EIP – what actions by the State help?

Issue for discussion: What criteria should be used to determine the pattern of roll-over/roll-out (or not) post-EIP? What models are possible? What makes certain EIP actions suitable for one model over another? ('Roadmaps' – see earlier. Not as constraining but as opening a forward looking local dialogue.)

Issue for discussion: Is locally-ledness an end in itself? Can measures be locally-adapted without being locally-led? What are the implications for roll-out, not least for areas without the capacity for action through EIP? (Q? Is the language key here? Maybe 'place' as a core criterion in roll out would encompass all options from locally-ledness to adapted and any other version?).

Issue for discussion: How do we nurture groups or networks or key individuals pre-EIP – what actions by the State help?

Issue for discussion: What is the timetable for decision-making on these and similar issues with regard to the next CAP? What is possible by the final deadline? Does that leave any potential holes in provision? How could they be avoided or filled?



McGillicuddy's Reeks (Jim Barton, Creative Commons Licence)

Annex 1 – interview structure template

Learning from innovation and innovation processes in the EIP projects

Introduction

EFNCP is undertaking this project to generate insights useful to 1) the current set of EIP projects and their programme managers and 2) especially to communicate these to policy makers crafting the 2020+ programme.

The product will be a report that comments on the key issues, priorities and tasks that will make innovation in EIP like projects happen best.

The work will ensure confidentiality, no individuals will be quoted etc.

Name (in confidence):

Project:

Date of Interview:

Best descriptors (from list):

Location in project (1-10):

[Descriptors: 1 farmer, 2 forester, 3 fisherman/angler, 4 administrator, 5 trainer/advisor, 6 nature expert/enthusiast, 7 tourism operator, 8 accommodation provider, 9 active in the community, 10 other, 11 business person, 12 politician/leader, 13 health and wellbeing provider/expert, 14 environmentalist, 15 food producer, 16 educator].

Involvement in project: 1 to 10 (1= on outer fringes, 5= quite involved, 10= up to my neck...)

The interview questions:

A) Background and inspiration

(1) What stage is your project at (can be more than one)?

- identifying the opportunities and challenges, generating ideas and solutions,
- developing and testing these ideas, delivering these at a practical level,
- developing more activity and impact, capturing insights from what's working/not working
- using these to make the project better (& possibly generating a next funding bid)?

(2) What was the need the EIP was (really....) intended to fill (practical outcomes on the ground)?

(3) How was the need identified?

(4) Who took the initiative to bring the project together, make the bid and set up the practical work and activity?

(5) Who identified the potential innovations (solutions emerge)? And when?

(6) How did the Partnership come about and who is (really....) part of it? Are partners involved at different level e.g. key partners in day to day implementation, supporting partners etc.

(B) Developing the project

- (7) Who led? (and who didn't lead)
- (8) Who developed the potential actions? How, when?
- (9) What were the perceived imperatives (gaps to be filled..)? Did these change? (Why?)
- (10)What were the perceived constraints? (Did others emerge?)
- (11)What were the technical difficulties? (Were there knowledge gaps [of any kind]?).
- (12)How did people around the project get on? How were problems/conflicts overcome?
- (13)Which elements do you consider to be truly (or potentially) innovative?

[Innovation is the introduction of a product (good or service), process, organization form or marketing, which is new or significantly improved. Innovation is multidimensional and consequently often difficult to identify and measure. It may be an obvious innovation, or a hidden innovation, what often takes place concerning process or organizational innovations..... "HNV innovation" is a change in the institutional, regulatory, market or farming approach that is better able to conserve HNV farming characteristics. This notion of "HNV innovation" distinguishes it from "general" innovations that aim at economic and/or social and/or environmental goals, but that are not consistent with the conservation of a significant proportion of semi-natural vegetation (SNV) within the farming system." Four broad innovation themes: a. Social and Institutional (often the organising frame of HNV innovation) b. Regulations and Policy c. Products and Markets d. Farm Techniques and Management].

- (14)Has your proposal gone beyond a similar mechanism in the current RDP and if so, how?
- (15)What support did you get from outwith the partnership, incl. from Govt. departments and state agencies? Was there a need for more input? From whom and in what context?
- (16) Where would you place the projects work into these categories?

Social and Institutional	Regulations and Policy
Products and Markets	Farming Techniques and management

(C) Delivering the project (for successful applicants)

- (17) What were the challenges of the start-up phase? Did you confront challenges which you had not considered during project development? What were they? What support was available? Was it enough?
- (18) After the start-up period, what have been the major challenges?
- (19) Have the realities of implementation affected the partnership (its enthusiasm etc).? How easy has it been to keep farmers on board and/or enthused?
- (20) What has succeeded and what has been tricky?

- (21) Have any third parties (apart from us!) been trying to learn lessons from your project?
- (22) What is your attitude in general to sharing information about the project? In detail? What are the perceived constraints/motivating factors in that regard?
- (23) At this stage can you suggest one key issue, priority or task that will make the innovation you want to see in your project happen best?
- (24) Lastly, any thoughts or key insights we haven't touched on...?

For unsuccessful applicants

- 25) How many times did you attempt to get an EIP project funded?
- 26) Did you understand the official reason why you didn't get funded? Did anyone (official) try to help you understand it? Does it make sense to you?
- 27) What does the group think the 'real' reason is? (if different)
- 28) What has rejection meant for the group (apart from the obvious initial disappointment)?
- 29) Did you get any aftercare from anyone? What (if anything) would have been helpful?
- 30) Do you think there is still life in the project idea? Are you pursuing other avenues to fund the same idea or other alternative ideas?
- 31) What advice would you give to another group in your situation X years ago (i.e. when you were just getting together to 'do something' about your target issue)?
- 32) What could Govt. do to change the EIP grant and the process for applying for it?
- 33) Anything else you'd like to say on the previous questions or anything you'd like to say on something we haven't covered?

Many thanks

Annex 2 – examples of comments gleaned from the interviews

- *Farmer driven. Perception is key!*
- *Many of the elements of the potential project had been ‘in the air’ for a while...*
- *Clear that for many farmers the purpose and practice of pro-nature N2k farming had never been explained or communicated to them. Outreach around this issue became an urgent activity.*
- *Structured outreach to find stakeholders and enablers. Some potential stakeholders engaged a bit but didn’t follow through.*
- *Outreach, information and dialogue became key elements of bid development. This demanded real energy and capacity but seen as critical to move the concept forward.*
- *Local knowledge seen as key in concept development. Knowledge in many forms not just the technical, so including a kind of psycho-geography (interviewers’ interpretation) where ‘who’ is as important as ‘what’. The lay of the land as much as stakeholders.*
- *Clear that a small group and very largely one or two keen energetic individuals drove much of the work regards the content of the bid.*
- *Established (c.f. trusted) individuals in area really helps...*
- *The PM role – being a central part of the project – brings risks – e.g. the wrong choice would floor a time limited project.*
- *Employing an experienced and locally knowledgeable Project Manager has been key and v helpful.*
- *The choice and outcome of using an external contractor to develop the bid was problematic. [This step and the risk of bringing in an unknown force is very risky! Alternatives of enabling people from within the key community or networks may reduce risks].*
- *Mixed sense of engagement from Dept Ag and Teagasc.*
- *As ideas were developed Dept of AG were interested and helpful (up to a limit)*
- *Individuals from Teagasc were helpful.*
- *Informal advice from individuals from Teagasc very helpful (but not joined up – Teagasc has completing/conflicting interests).*
- *First Eol bid to EIP fund failed but (informal?) feedback helped tighten a then successful 2nd bid.*
- *Speed of response re N2k consents has emerged as real constraint.*
- *Time scales and the stop- start or lagging nature of decision making – real time gaps are hard to bridge in small and stretched groups*
- *Transparency underpinned by rich and deep dialogue seems to have avoided conflicts.*
- *An existing Forum provided for both formal and informal dialogue.*
- *Energetic individual/s drove much of the dialogue around need and emerging solutions.*
- *Informal networks seen as important*
- *Enthusiasm is both key and a key test!*
- *Big effort has been made to build ‘profile’ for the project. Profile - a mix of good communications plus networking with key individuals and organisations.*
- *‘Door opening’ was important – thoughtful, sensitive, engaging.*
- *‘Drive’ & ‘leadership’ key. Soft tools like building trust and good dialogue (including more formal via newsletters, articles, etc.)*
- *Stakeholders (via an informal analysis) approached. Proactivity important.*

- *Challenge of innovation in this kind of situation (emergent farmer groups etc.) is to make the actions 'do-able'.*
- *Practical actions became a key filter for idea generation.*
- *Used an early farm walk to share and develop concept and emerging content.*
- *The interviewee brought the experience of partnership creation and could add in some practical support (e.g. re: banking and admin).*
- *Cited local knowledge and pre-existing trust and networks as key*
- *Via a series of well-planned consultation meetings. Good ideas were generated*
- *Farmer-group centred, step-wise learning based on farmer action, adaptive, accepts unknowns (don't have all the answers)*
- *Project very open to learning and adaptation. Challenge was welcomed.*
- *A kind of interactive developmental process through the life of the project.*
- *Imperatives would evolve during the life of the EIP. Adaptive change is seen as a good thing.*
- *Worries about flexibility – could the EIP change and adapt based on learning (yes it seems)?*
- *Ready support from other EIP and EIP like groups helped a lot.*

Annex 3 – Outputs from the EIP Workshop at the Burren Winterage 2019, ‘Lessons Learned Through Shared Experiences’

Question 1: What happens beyond the EIP?

Notes from the discussion

Group 1

Q: What do you see beyond the EIP?

SUAS: Expect to continue beyond the pilot scheme and there is a perception that funding will continue into a more mainstream scheme, unfortunately with a downgrading of environmental supports. The ideal is that the scheme would be expanded from the 44 participants across 6-7 Commonages but continue with the same measure. There is scale for potential expansion in Wicklow, capacity is there but the programme is still in learning phase.

Q: Have you had any consultation with DAFM about future beyond EIP?

SUAS: No discussion with DAFM yet on the future

Q: Do you think you have the knowledge to expand 3yrs of the Programme?

SUAS: Still finding our feet and not yet worked through the payments.

MacGillycuddy Reeks: We have over 130 farmers and 4 Commonages, circa 20 hectares per participant. Willingness is there and the desire to expand and show results.

Q: In 2020 will you be confident of scaling up?

MacGillycuddy Reeks: It seems too short a timeframe to show proof of concept and it is a bit premature to be discussing the prospect of expansion with DAFM.

Q: Where do you see your future?

BRIDE: The template could be rolled out across intensive farming, although we recognise our approach is against the grain, BRIDE takes account of all habitats on the farm, so the feasibility of this approach is unknown and we are still to prepare and undertake spot checks...or a self assessment. There is an issue with permanence of results payments, for example paying for woodland but payment is only year by year, therefore unstable value and uncertain eligibility into the future. There are a lot of synergies within the Programmes [EIPs] and overlaps that could be incorporated into the other operational groups.

Q: Is this the case for other EIP Operational Groups?

MacGillycuddy Reeks: Yes, for us the habitat management aspects of the Programme is where we would welcome knowledge transfer.

BRIDE: Projects could be merged and there is huge potential to diversify and expand.

Q: Do you think that EIPs would lose anything if expanded? [ad lib...is it Locally Led ...or Locally Relevant?]

BRIDE: It is not individual led, but locally led is extremely important. Perspectives are different in these EIPs as there is no stigma of DAFM prescriptive approach...the engagement is roots based.

MacGillycuddy Reeks: Building trust is crucial and having a local champion and leader is important.

.....

Group 2:

Q: What do you see beyond the EIP?

Caomhnu Aran: In regard to beyond the EIP, the stability for the island and livelihoods is important especially the unique situation and an incentive to continue.

Curlew Conservation Programme: Our EIP is very specific so unsure whether the application of or relevance of the EIP will persist beyond this current period. Target areas and some actions align with other RBAPs/EIPs. The nest protections measures are an addition or a departure from farming, its incorporation into a expanded farming programme presents challenges. Also contrasting policies are/likely will undermine the EIP objectives, for instance forestry policy/farming.

DANU: Synergies with the EIPs objectives and but our EIP can't be competitive in a commodity market, albeit our approach should be able to merge with biodiversity objectives in other EIPs. In terms of ecosystem services, policy needs to shift.

Q: What are the outputs after 5 years?...is it best practice, or is the future in training in schemes?

DANU: There needs firstly to be a policy shift from intensity to profitability, so there needs to be a national change.

Q: But what is the output beyond the EIP?

DANU: To have the fundamental principles of what works to educate and empower farmers going forward, what should follow is farmer control and supports, ideally there would be guidelines to follow [less inputs > profitability], so a national shift in policy needs to be implemented and promoted locally.

Culra Creafoige: The main output in our EIP is to prove concept and what would be ideal is for this to continue the farming approach rediscovered and learned through the EIP in other relevant areas/locations.

Group 3.

Q: What do you see beyond the EIP?

Allow Project Blue Dot Catchments: Beyond the EIP we would like the measures we have still to develop to be continued and rolled out, however the challenge is the EIP relies heavily on factors outwith its control and may not work, as water quality within the catchment needs unity as one polluter can undermine entire EIP. Results may not be achieved in the 4 years but aim is to build on the Allow and expand into adjacent catchments.

Q: So in 4 years' time where will the EIP be?

Allow Project Blue Dot Catchments: We may or may know what works and may not actually have delivered widespread and measurable environmental or biodiversity benefits, but the EIP will have established areas that have worked and have identified what needs improvement to achieve future aims.

Q: So do you mean the approach you are taking could be a larger GLAS like scheme?

Allow Project Blue Dot Catchments: Not really, as it's more an individual farm versus catchment approach required.

Q: So what could complement the EIP?

Allow etc: Perhaps a combination of measures, some overlaps maybe with GLAS prescriptions but this would need Advisors.

Q: and beyond the EIP?

Allow: No communication with DAFM on future beyond pilot programme, and only dealing with small contracts.

Culra Creafoige: In our case we have a focus on soil renewal in a single parish, 12 acres of land each for 5 years. With such a specific approach, there are limitations on expansion and uncertainty beyond this EIP. Unsure what a deliverable could be, beyond the promotion of cultivation practices.

North Connemara: We have 380-400 herd numbers and from this 100 participants will be contracted. Historically there has been a lack of supports and so there is an aversion to prescriptive farming. In 5 years' time, we envisage there will be focus on sheep welfare scheme, retaining farming actions for sheep productivity. In regard to potential for being rolled out, there is a succession crisis, so unlikely, possibly, maybe but as a broad GLAS style scheme is unlikely to work.

Unattributed: Synergies with other EIPs, Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project for instance may provide collaboration on invasive species. However there has been no discussion with DAFM about these overlaps or future beyond the current EIP period.

Question 2: Where do you feel it will fit or what support will be needed from future Common Agriculture Policy?

Education/knowledge transfer

- Education, knowledge sharing/transfer some of outcomes from EIPS may be directly applied on farms without need for public support where they improve efficiency of production for example through improved soil health. Create knowledge sharing environment where farmers want to learn –good training they will come, rather than having to attend mandatory training. Farmers especially want to learn through peer to peer exchange
- The task for the CAP strategic plan must be to create an environment where there is flexibility within training and knowledge transfer measures for different forms of training.
- Currently have farm walks, workshops, visiting experts in some EIPS –seed funding could help flying squads which promote or help develop solutions to particular challenges
- General advisory support should not be minimal in practice in some peripheral parts of country e.g. Aran Islands
- Need to link design of advisory programme to the needs of the agri-env programme and wider agri-env needs
- Support to upskill/train advisors and/or supporting a specialist advisory service; CPD for advisors - funding may be there but currently no infrastructure to support this i.e. who trains the advisors?
- Importance of education of young people and youth outreach but within and outside farming community in area of agro-ecology
- Need multi-stakeholder engagement at landscape scale, implying education of public & media
- Need to look at structures for alternative enterprises for agri-industry; may be counterproductive for agri-industry to move to agro-ecological approaches with lower inputs unless there is alternative business opportunities - need for innovation there too. Should imply high degree of complementarity with LEADER, but is focus and interest of current network of LAGs up to this role in all LEADER areas?
- Need for specific advisory/knowledge sharing effort for designated areas to allow for more inclusion of landowners and farmers in managing of designated areas, one which prioritises needs of landowners and technical innovation
- Current policy does not provide for on-going investment in soft skills/ farmer engagement /partnership building, need to foster more inclusive cooperation to find solutions

Overall policy support

- Need clear information /direction from policy
- Multi actor approach to EIP-partnership, cooperation and local a real strength-how to take this forward on roll out
- Need to maintain flexibility
- Need to link current biodiversity measures to climate action-carbon counting
- Need for wider more flexible agri-environment schemes, new innovative support measures operating at larger scale
- Need to support whole catchment/landscape approach

- Needs to be better policy alignment and no conflicts
- Some local schemes worthwhile to include in next policy cycle but how do they combine with GLAS type measure. Need for whole farm approach as in Pearl mussel project, more environment aspects covered in one programme.
- Need for consistency in payments, can bespoke/local adaption be facilitated in a wider administrative framework
- Cooperation and engagement with young farmers to attract young people needs attention- will value of ecosystem services and important role of farmer in meeting societal demand be an attractive proposition. Need to tailored incentives for young farmers
- Role of social enterprise/entrepreneurs and need to contribute to economic viability of farms is central
- Overall more CAP money needs to be tied to environment protection role of eco-schemes
- Urgent need to focus on whether eco-schemes can be designed for Ireland which are effective, simple and involve minimal bureaucracy
- Need to be overall co-ordination between action based payments and results based payments; should select which approach is being used in a particular setting for x objective/challenge. Should not be competing with each other. In general, results-based seems more suited to the general, with detailed adjustment being achieve through action-based.
- Need bespoke policies for different land capacities e.g. intensive v extensive requires different approach
- Small farmers (<50 cows) being squeezed out- need for some sort of cooperative system to improve purchasing power for example and reduce costs
- Larger farmers do have interest in environment improvements as well and need incentives to incorporate spectrum of agricultural activity and land types.

Roll out ready

- Certain innovations are ready for wider roll out but more niche activities within current EIPs will require further testing. Need for continued EIP type measures in RDP
- EIP could also deal with wider enterprise diversification, tourism and wider rural development.

Question 3: What external actions/supports would promote local cooperation, partnership, development of ideas?

- External actions/supports must be much more than about funding alone and additionally focus on how things get done.
- Programme governance must include those who are driving bottom-up innovation, alongside academia and rural citizen groups. These will exert leadership through advice on funding allocation, project selection and evaluation and experimentation with new approaches.

- Programme management should create demand for and stimulate innovative solutions. It should allow 'space' (this is more complex than just time or funding alone) for people to be creative. It should excite innovation.
- Innovation requires new dynamic metrics and programme governance and should embrace new evaluation frameworks, tools and techniques that capture spill-over effects that can be directly attributed to project and programme implementation.
- Programme governance should focus on its own methods & procedures to ensure an 'agile' programme. Agile procedures should promote experimentation and risk-taking. This approach allows projects to speed up and produces higher quality outcomes. Waiting for information and guidance can seriously disable a project team and stifle the search for better innovation and impacts.
- Common purpose is core to a strong project concept & its delivery and can easily be weakened or put at risk. The actions of external parties must not disable issues of trust and empathy. Trust is also a two-way process between project teams and authorities/administrators.
- Enable excellent communications most importantly a) internally in the project development team and b) to their key stakeholders (others in the community/ies). External parties can provide skills, resources, good practice, and guiding principles such as 'transparency'.
- Policy support and finance should support innovation through the life of the mission and be tailored to each stage of the innovation process.

Key words from workshop

- Trust/Empathy
- Time/flexibility
- Courageous decision making/leading project development
- Networking
- Capacity for R&D re early stages of project bid.
- Focus on farmer need
- Connecting like-minded in community (of interest)
- Realism – strength and weakness...
- Identify and approach (thought) leaders in farming community
- Does having 'No rules' starting point help innovation?
- Community innovators
- Balance – variable levels of...
- Would Regional level 'match- makers'/coordinators help joined up learning etc.?
- Trust is a two-way thing (between funding bodies and farmers and vice-versa)