Farming on Irish Machair
- an example -
Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo

‘The Irish team’

Natura & RDP Seminar, Uists, Scotland. June 2006
The Mullet Peninsula

Location of Natura sites (SPA & SAC)
In Ireland, Fixed Dune & Machair are Annex I habitats under the EU Habitats Directive (1992)

Criteria to define Irish machair:

• A coastal sandy plain with a more or less level surface
• A significant proportion of shell fragments producing a lime-rich soil
• Grassland vegetation with a low frequency of sand-binding species
• A history of human interference, principally through grazing
• A moist, cool, oceanic climate

It is unique in that it is considered a natural landscape that is the product of cultural activities
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Annex I Birds
Other significant birds
As part of Ireland’s monitoring obligations under the EU Habitats Directive, NPWS are surveying every dune/machair site in Ireland.

The main aims of the survey are:
- To assess the current conservation status
- To establish the area of the total national resource of each habitat
- To develop a monitoring programme for Irish sand dune habitats (including machair)
- Establish a database for monitoring purposes

This survey is currently being carried out on the Mullet Peninsula.
Traditional farming systems on Irish Machair

- Open Commonage
- Extensive grazing with cattle/sheep
- No artificial nutrients applied
- Agreed grazing regime (numbers and period)
Evolution of farming on Irish Machair

- Sub-division of the Machair commonage
- CAP Livestock Headage and Premiums
- Intensification of grazing
- Nutrient improvement
- Sub-optimal management
Threats to the Machair
Threats to the Fixed Dune
Other threats

- Non-participation in agri-environmental schemes
- Lack of knowledge/bad advice
- Poor infrastructure
- Inappropriate Development
- Enforcement
Conservation Policy Measures

- Habitats and Birds Directive Legislation
- Single Payment Cross Compliance
- REPS and NPWS agri-environment plans
- EU Termoncarragh Life Project
- Corncrake grant scheme
- Direct Ownership
Threats to the Rural Communities

Recent demographic and economic trends
Population Decline

![Population Decline Chart]

- Ireland
- Connacht
- Mayo
- Mullet

Census Year:
- 1991
- 1996
- 2002

% Change:
- Ireland: 2002
- Connacht: 1996
- Mayo: 1991
- Mullet: 2002

-15 to 15% change
Occupations

- Others Gainfully Occupied (522) 14%
- Employers and Managers (327) 9%
- Higher Professionals (79) 2%
- Lower Professionals (296) 8%
- Non Manual (450) 12%
- Manual skilled (316) 9%
- Semi-skilled (296) 8%
- Unskilled (294) 8%
- Own account Workers (236) 6%
- Agricultural Workers (87) 2%
- Farmers (789) 22%
Size of Holdings

Area in Hectares

- <10: 180
- 10-<20: 180
- 20-<30: 60
- 30-<50: 40
- >=50: 0

No. of Farms (479)
Decline in Livestock Numbers

Number of Suckler Cows

Year

Number of Cows

2000: 3039
2001: 2913
2002: 2638
2003: 2574
2004: 2563
Uptake of REPS

Uptake of REPS

Mayo Connaught Western Area Ireland

% area in REPS % Farms in REPS

Mayo

Connaught

Western Area

Ireland
Direct Payments on the Mullet Peninsula

- Average SFP/Farm €2,623
- Area Based /Farm €1,905
- REPS payments /Farm €4,000
Income Viability

Direct Payments vis-a-vis Family Farm Income

Figure 3: FFI, Direct Payments/Subsidies by Region - 2004
Summary

- Annex I Habitat
- Important wildlife diversity – declining/fragile
- Threats to the habitat - inappropriate management
- Changes to the rural community
What future?