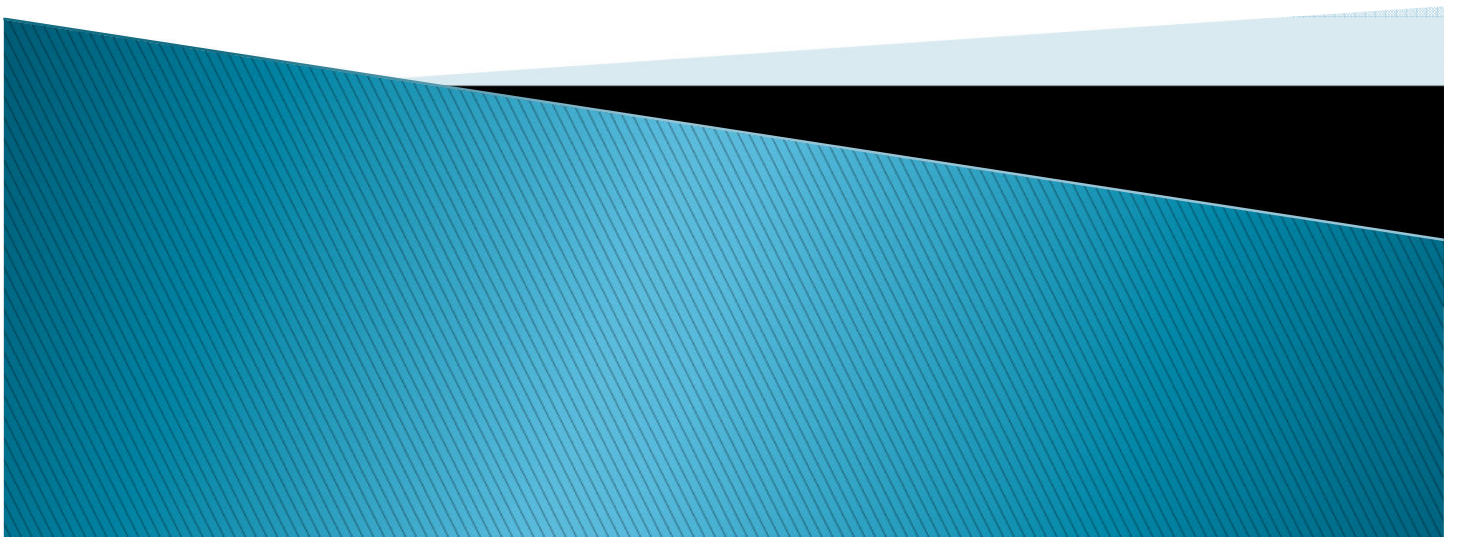


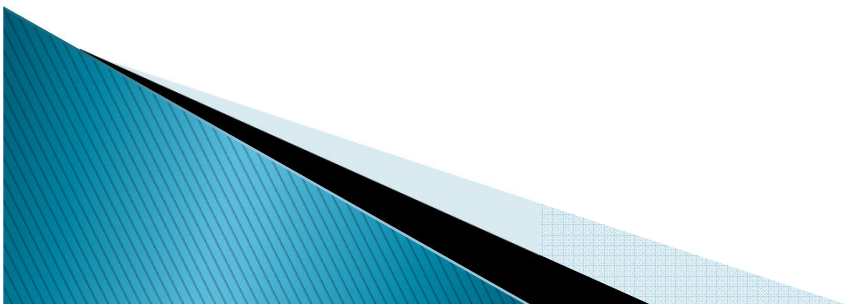
Irelands Commonages.

Where now from here ?



What is a Commonage?

- ▶ At its simplest, a commonage is land owned by 2 or more people.
- ▶ Includes land where 2 or more people have grazing rights on land owned by a third party.





Hill Farm in Connemara. »



Uplands »

Brockagh Mountain, Co. Wicklow



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Turloughs »

From Tir lough or dry lake in Irish

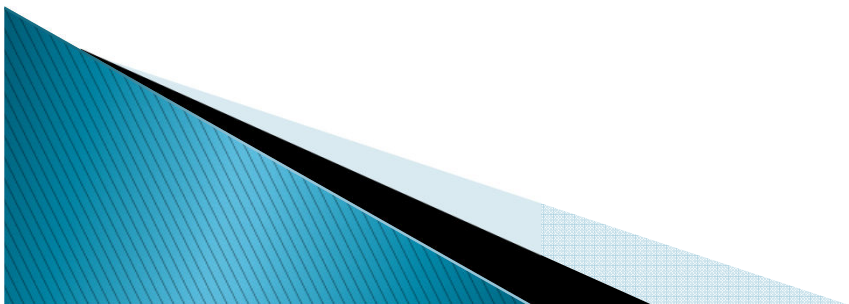


Coastal »

Machairs, coastal habitat unique to the west of Ireland and Scotland.

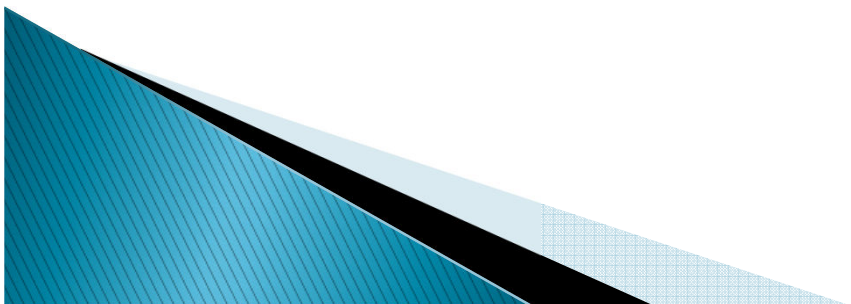
Basic Facts.

- ▶ Number of Commonages– approx. 4,500 commonages > 10Ha.
- ▶ Total Area of Commonages.
 - 435,978ha gross area (2011)
 - 410,187ha reference area (94%)
- ▶ Dormancy an issue (only 63.3% claimed*)
- ▶ Distribution of Commonages.
- ▶ Usage.
 - 6,793 LPIS plots, in varying condition.
 - Approx. 14,600 herd numbers.



Recent History; 1970's-1990's. Production related payments.

- ▶ No link with carrying capacity.
- ▶ Encouraged/ rewarded overgrazing.
- ▶ Breakdown of governance systems.
- ▶ Shift to single enterprise farming units.



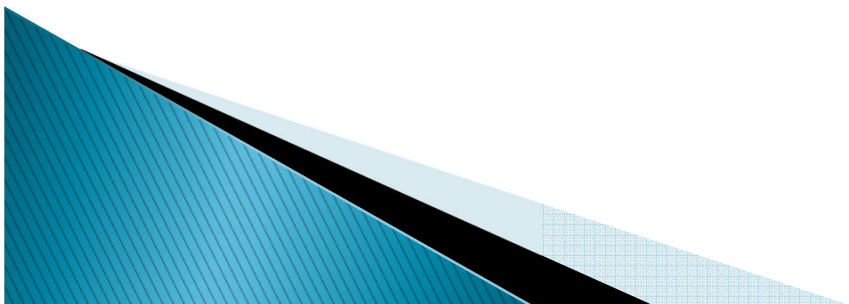


Overgrazing »

Inagh Valley, CO. Galway

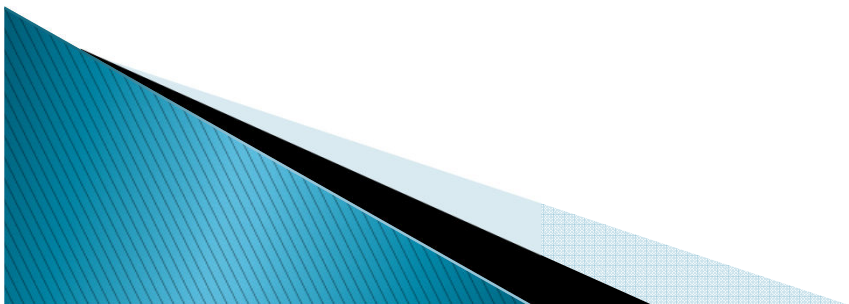
Recent History; 1998- 2013 Commonage Framework Plans.

- ▶ Top down Plans, drawn up and imposed without consultation with farmers.
- ▶ Compulsory destocking.
 - Original quota remained the base figure.
- ▶ Impact on viability of hill flocks.
- ▶ 5 year plans
 - In force for 15 years.
 - No reviews.



Recent History; Single Payment Scheme

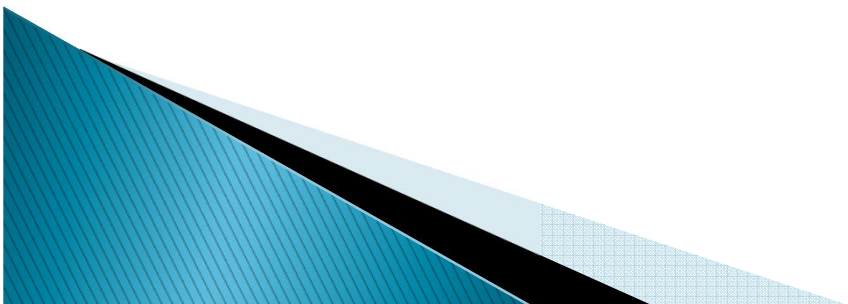
- Payments link to production broken.
 - Facilitated/ encouraged a further reduction in stock numbers.
 - Rewarded past activity. Discouraged current activity.
 - Penalised new entrants and young farmers wanting to develop an enterprise.
- Reduction in activity,
 - Other factors included.
 - Age profile of hill farmers.
 - Off farm employment during the Celtic Tiger years.
 - Non viable flocks.
 - Inflexibility of agri–environment schemes.



Recent History; Agri-Environment Schemes.

- ▶ 2000–2009.
 - Continued link to historic ewe quota.
 - No facility to increase sheep numbers.
 - In ability to increase flocks, even where under grazing was apparent.
 - Based on Obsolete Commonage Plans.

- ▶ 2010–2014.
 - Stock limits based on desk top assessment without ground truth.
 - Took no account of dormancy.
 - Did not consider the enclosed land that supports the hill flock



Recent History; 2013-present.

- Introduction of 2014–2020 RDP.
- Collective Agreements.
 - Strong opposition from Commonage Farmers.
 - Concerns about collective responsibility/ punishment.
 - Concerns about access to AE schemes being dependent on other farmers choices.
 - Significant modifications made to original proposals.
 - Roll out of Commonage Plans,
 - a work in progress.
- Land Eligibility.
 - Key Issue,
 - Until this year no definition of what is eligible/ ineligible.
 - Lack clarity on assessment process.
 - Often in conflict with agricultural and conservation interests

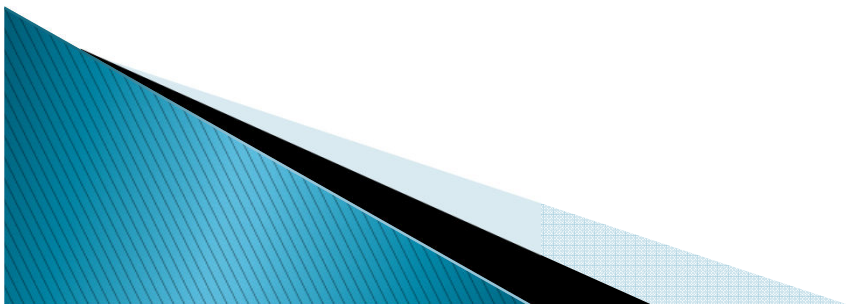


Structural Issues.

Policy and Administration.

EU level.

- ▶ Concept of Eligible area.
- ▶ Time to consider payment structure that incorporates recognition for public goods and services.
 - Carbon sequestration and hydrological functions of peatlands are not recognised. Their role in offsetting emissions from other agricultural sectors climate change or in building landscape level resilience to effects of climate change is not supported (at least in Ireland).
 - Land eligibility criteria could be expanded to incorporate land uses that facilitate agricultural production elsewhere, e.g. Sand dunes that protect grazing lands to the rear from erosion.
 - Agri- environment payments should not be primarily focussed on costs/ income forgone basis.
 - Peatlands are marginal agriculturally, payments on costs/ income forgone basis ties support for public goods to margins from low intensity agriculture.
 - Missed opportunity particularly with reference to climate change agenda.



Structural Issues

Policy and Administration.

Irish Government Level.

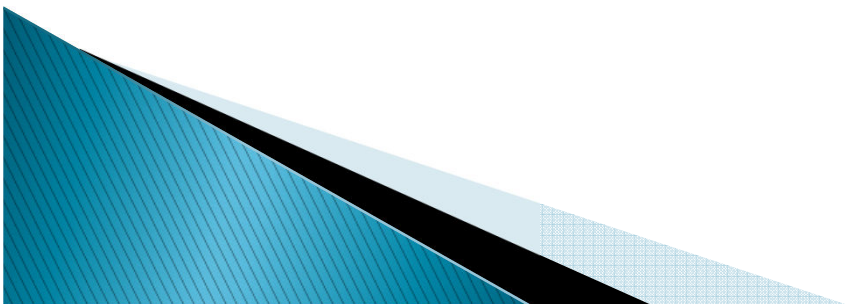
- ▶ National policy has far to often been reactionary.
 - Responses to threats of legal action or pressure from EU auditors.
 - Current Commonage policy aimed at achieving Pillar 1 objective, i.e. Keeping land eligible for payment.
- ▶ Past agricultural policies have to a large extent created the current difficulties.
- ▶ Poor co-operation between Dept of Agriculture, NPWS and Local Authorities.
- ▶ Scheme design; focus on administrative convenience at the expense of practicality and efficacy.



Structural Issues.

Markets.

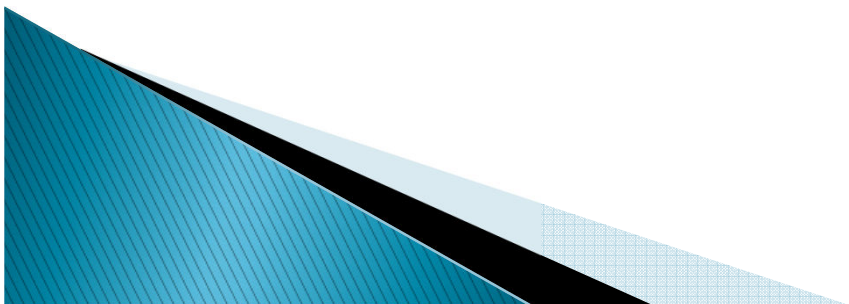
- ▶ The farmer is remote from the consumer.
- ▶ Meat industry dominated by a small number of meat processors and large retail chains.
- ▶ Organic farmers also affected by the lack of choice in distribution channels.
- ▶ Aid is available to promote shorter food supply chains. It must be accessed.



Structural Issues.

Competition between Farming Interests for Resources.

- Resistance to reform of Pillar 1 payment system by some agricultural interests.
- Advocacy of AE scheme roll out to facilitate farmers with no priority environmental assets.
- 30% of places in first tranche of current agri–environment scheme for farmers with no priority environmental assets.
 - Imbalances in resource allocation.
 - Scheme design and implementation contributed to this.
 - Resulted in a reduction in availability of key options for later applicants.



Scheme Roll Out and Service Provision.

- ▶ Pressure to get large numbers of farmers into schemes quickly.
- ▶ Encouraged Farm Advisors to prioritise simple cases, i.e. Farmers with no commonage or NATURA land.
- ▶ Requirement for large scale delivery of services compressed into very short periods.
- ▶ Reliance on newly qualified inexperienced graduates, employed on short term contracts to deliver very complex tasks and then being laid off.
 - Inadequate skills base.
 - Low morale.
 - Lack of continuity of advisor support.
 - Rushed applications.
 - Increased risk of advisor error.
 - Poor service delivery in many cases.
- ▶ Funding for CPD for Advisors is available but is not being accessed.
 - Development of advisor expertise is inhibited even discouraged.



Commonage Management Plans.

- Need for adequate time for preparation.
- Adaptive management.
- Commonage Implementation Committee made up of Dept of Agriculture and Wildlife Service representatives to adjudicate on exceptional cases.

NOTE

- No commonage farmer or farm advisor representation.
- Will the senior officials involved be able to commit the time that will be required.
- There maybe a lot more exceptional cases then they anticipate.



Current Issues.

- Land Eligibility remains the core issue.
- Medium term “**Protection**” for participants in a Commonage Management Plan from adverse eligibility findings is needed.
 - Current problems did not develop overnight,
 - They will not be solved in the short term.
 - Vegetation response does not always correspond with CAP planning cycle.
- Regulatory requirements, planning permission for fencing/ burning seasons etc.
- Market/ product development support needed for light mountain lamb (needed for good conservation grazing).
- Uncertainty about **Commonage Implementation Committee**.
- Will it live up to its billing?



The need for Strategic Thinking.

Planning for the next RDP needs to ensure that:

- Clear objectives are set.
- Barriers to progress are identified early in the process.
- Drivers/ contributory factors are identified assessed and addressed
- Conflicting objectives of pillar 1 and pillar 2 schemes are reconciled.
- Constraints to the planning and roll out of schemes are identified and considered at an early stage. These include;
 - Funding requirements.
 - Time demands of required preparatory actions.
 - Knowledge gaps.
 - Legal and regulatory issues.
 - Skill sets within the Dept of Agriculture and among farm advisors.
 - Confidence building steps.



How can this be achieved ?

- Planning for the next RDP must start now.
- An early and ongoing engagement between stakeholders is essential.
- Agriculture/ conservation measures cannot be considered in isolation.
 - From each other or from the farming community and the rural economy.
- Objectives cannot be achieved with AE schemes alone. Consideration must be given to the;
 - Role of Pillar 1 supports.
 - Market and product development.
 - Consideration of Socio-economic context.
 - Need to integrate supports with wider rural development measures.
- Recognise that the various stakeholders have a wide range of concerns, objectives and perceptions.

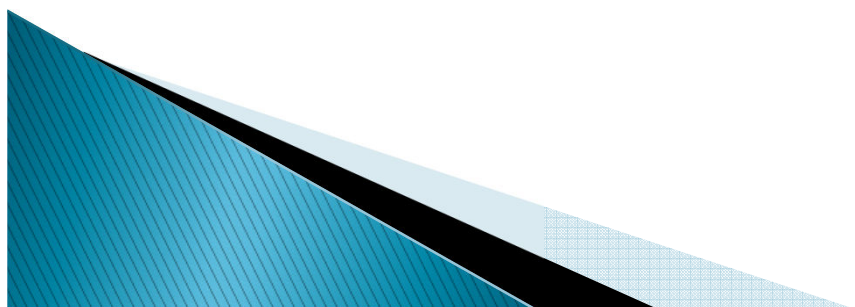


Hope for the Future.

- Many practical problems remain.

but

- Situation has improved in the last year.
- Stakeholders are engaging with each other.
- Commonage Plans are to be site focussed and evidence based.
- Locally Led Schemes offer potential as a template for more effective AE schemes in the next RDP.



2021–2028

Lets get started.

