



# Uplands Symposium 2023



# Setting the Scene - from the Cuilcaghs to the Comeraghs

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**1973: Ireland joined the EEC - 250,000 farms and agriculture accounted for over one-quarter of the total workforce.**

**1975: Headage payments introduced for livestock to support farm income in disadvantaged areas**

**❖ Total sheep numbers December (cso.ie)**

**➤ 1975: 2,653,000**

**➤ 1992: 6,109,000**

**1974 - 1985: Farm Modernisation Scheme – Land improvement including fencing and liming upland areas to make more productive**



## 1992: Reform of the CAP - MacSharry Reforms – Cheque in the post

- ❖ **Ewe Premium and direct payments to cattle and cereals – switch to beef**
  - **1992: Sheep numbers peaked - 5.3 m ewes claimed for ewe premium**
  - **1999: 4.7 million ewes were claimed for premium**
- ❖ **Extensification – maps of farms outlined and submitted by advisors**

## 1994: REPS introduced

- ❖ **REPS 1,2,3 and 4 – paid individual farmers for their share of commonage**
- ❖ **REPS 1 – precluded forestry – was subsequently allowed**



1998: Interim National Plan

- ❖ 30% destocking in 6 western counties: Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway and Kerry



## 2000's: Burren

- ❖ **Teagasc Clare and Burren IFA identified problems for the Burren in REPS**
- ❖ **Walsh PhD Fellowship with UCD**
  - **Burren LIFE**
  - **Burren Programme**
  - **Burren and Aran ACRES CP**



## **.Agenda 2000**

- ❖ **Extension of MacSharry reforms - decouple growth from negative environmental impacts**

## **Mid-Term Review of Agenda 2000 - Fischler Reforms**

- ❖ **Broke the link between direct payments and production – decoupling**
- ❖ **Single Farm Payment per hectare**

**After 2005: No specific requirement to keep Livestock to qualify for the decoupled payments**













- **Reduction in sheep numbers**



# 1999 - 2006: Commonage Framework Planning

❖ 440,000 ha of commonage surveyed by 50 teams of trained planners

➤ 4,400 Commonage Framework Plans.

Upland grass land			Dry heath		
					
Mat-grass	Sweet vernal-grass	Common bent	Calluna ling heather	Bell heather	Billberry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Dominated by low-growing grasses</li> <li>❖ <b>If undergrazed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bracken</li> <li>➤ Gorse / whins / furze</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Peat depth &lt; 15cm</li> <li>❖ Species poor</li> <li>❖ Ling and bell heather dominate</li> <li>❖ <b>If overgrazed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Heather disappears</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<b>Blanket Peatland Habitats</b>					
Wet heath			Blanket bog		
					
Purple moor-grass	Deergrass	Cross-leaved heath	Bog asphodel	Sphagnum mosses	Sundew mosses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Peat depth: 15 - 80cm</li> <li>❖ <b>If overgrazed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Slow to recover</li> <li>➤ Erosion of peat</li> <li>➤ Mat-grass / purple moor-grass</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Peat depth &gt; 80cm</li> <li>❖ <b>If overgrazed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Peat layer eroded</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		



# Commonage Framework Plans

## ❖ Destocking

Vegetation condition types		Areas where:	Destocking Bands
<b>Undamaged</b>	<b>U</b>	grazing damage is not detectable	<b>No reduction</b>
<b>Moderate damage</b>	<b>MU</b>	grazing damage is clearly detectable	<b>20% - 40% (30% norm)</b>
	<b>MM</b>	grazing damage is evident but nowhere very heavy	<b>40% - 60% (50% norm)</b>
	<b>MS</b>	there are many signs of grazing damage but where the S/S* threshold is not reached	<b>60% - 70 % (65% norm)</b>
<b>Severe</b>	<b>S</b>	bare peat (> 5%) and heather condition	<b>70% - 100% (85% norm)</b>



## 2009 – 2013: NPWS Farm Plans

### ❖ 186 farmers

- **Owenduff / Nephin Complex SPA in Co Mayo**
- **Twelve Bens/Garraun and the Maumturk Mountain Complex SACs in Co Galway**



*Owenduff/Nephin Complex cSAC and SPA. Photo C. Clotworthy (2001).*

## 2010 - 2020: AEOS 1, 2 & 3

- ❖ Sustainable stocking rate based on Commonage Framework Plans and farmers' share of commonage



<b>Habitat Type (Undamaged)</b>	<b>Stocking Rate: Ewe Equivalents / ha</b>
<b>Upland Grassland</b>	<b>1.5 - 5</b>
<b>Dry Heath</b>	<b>1 – 1.5</b>
<b>Wet Heath</b>	<b>0.75 - 1</b>
<b>Blanket Bog</b>	<b>0 – 0.75</b>

## 2015 – 2021: GLAS 1, 2 and 3

- ❖ 9,000 out of 15,000 farmers with commonage in GLAS
- ❖ 4,200 out of 4,500 commonages in GLAS
- One GLAS Advisor prepared a CMP for each commonage
- Minimum number of ewe equivalents
- All farmers signed to agree
- Sustainable Stocking Rate for each commonage





B O'Donoghue

# Hen Harrier EIP

(€25m)

Slieve Aughty

Stacks to Mullaghareirk  
west Limerick hills  
Mount Eagle

Mullaghanish to  
Musheramore

Slieve Beagh

Slieve Bloom  
Mountains

Slieve Felim to  
Silvermines

..  
**Results  
Based  
EIPs on  
uplands**

# Pearl Mussel EIP (€10m)



K O'Neill



K O'Neill



# Upland EIP's (€100,000 - €2m)

Inishowen

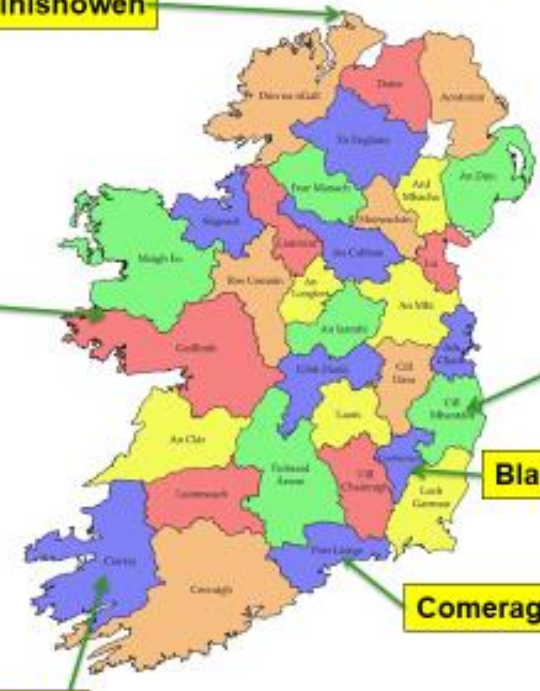
Connemara

SUAS

Blackstairs Farming Futures

Comeragh Upland Communities

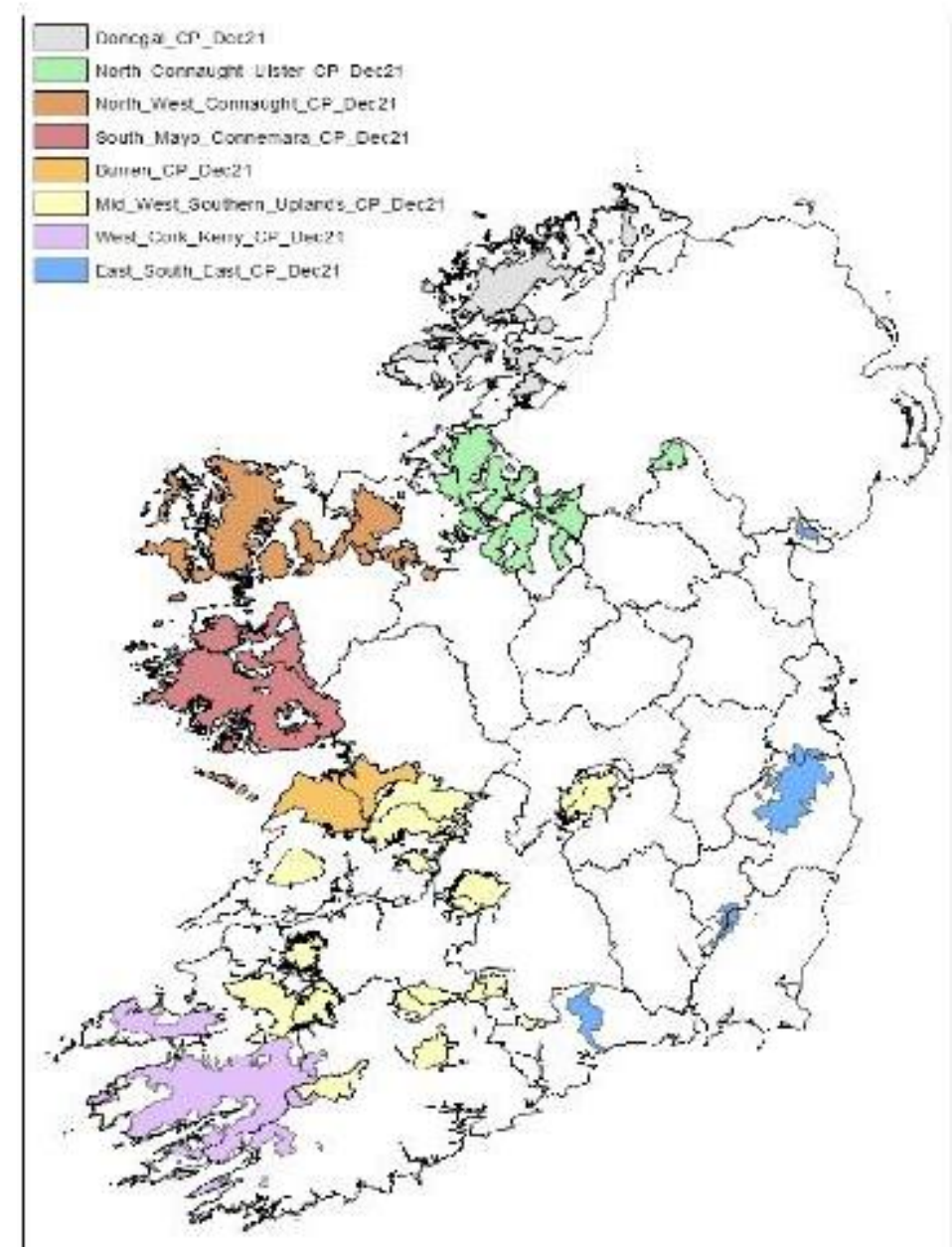
MacGillycuddy Reeks



# 2023: 268,518 ha of commonage assessed by ACRES CP teams

- **10,220 herd owners with commonage in ACRES Tranche 1**
- **Min. stocking rate: number on approval letter by 31/12/2023**
- **Agreement not to hinder or block works**

CP Area	Approx. Herd numbers
Donegal	4,366
North Connaught Ulster	4,586
North West Connaught	4,682
South Mayo Connemara	4,208
Burren	2,188
Mid West Southern Uplands	8,270
West Cork Kerry	5,117
East South East	1,319
Total	34,796



# Biodiversity is in crisis



**Habitats in Ireland, the overall status of blanket bogs is 'Bad' (NPWS, 2019)**

# What do we want?

## Undergrazing:

- Strong heather
- Scrub



High score for biodiversity

**Sustainable  
Grazing**

## Overgrazing:

- Peat erosion
- Loss of species



## Uplands are important for:

- farming
- carbon sequestration
- recreation
- tourism
- flood attenuation
- biodiversity



- cultural heritage
- landscape



## The Future – Challenges

- ❖ EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy
- ❖ Ireland declared a biodiversity and climate emergency (2019)
- ❖ Concern over decline in high status water quality in the uplands
- ❖ Farm viability challenges across all drystock sectors - most notably on uplands
- ❖ Challenge of keeping farmers farming the uplands



# Engaging farmers on environment

- ❖ Farmers sourced environmental information from their traditional sources of agricultural information
- ❖ Other farmers, family and friends were key influencers in the decision-making process



# The Future

- ❖ Lots of good work in progress on Biodiversity, Carbon and Water in the uplands – need to integrate with each other and with upland farming system advice.
- ❖ Key role of the agricultural advisor
- ❖ Importance of education – to include in Knowledge Transfer Programme?
  - KE WAN
  - CUC EIP





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