



*An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta*

*Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*

Burren Farming for Conservation Programme Programme

Report No. 5

(Jan 1st 2014 – Dec 31st 2014)

Executive Summary

The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) is a pioneering agri-environmental programme which aims to conserve and support the heritage, environment and communities of the Burren. It is based on the findings of the BurrenLIFE Project (2005-2010) and is jointly funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (of the Dept. of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG)) and the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The BFCP is managed, under contract with NPWS, by High Nature Value Services Ltd, with a core team based in Carron in the central Burren.

The BFCP began in May 2010. This report summarises the progress of the BFCP in 2014 (Year 5). The report also presents summary data from the first five years of the BFCP which attest to the strong growth and positive environmental and socio-economic impact of the programme thus far in the Burren.

Areas under management: The total area currently covered by the BFCP is 14,734.39ha, which equates to 48.4% of the three main N2000 sites in the Burren (Table 1) and includes 1,291ha of Public land. The average area of SAC & Annex I habitat per farm was 93.3ha, but only 61.85% of this area is deemed 'eligible for payment' under SPS rules (and thus for payment under BFCP).

The number of farmers participating in the BFCP in Year 5 was 158, one less than in the previous year.

	BFCP Area (ha)	SAC size (ha)	% SAC in BFCP
BFCP total	14,734.39*	30,462	48.4
Black Head – Pousallagh SAC	2,623.04	5,572	47.08
Moneen Mountain SAC	4,126.64	6,070	67.98
East Burren Complex SAC	7,504.46	18,820	39.87

Table 1. Areas (ha) of the three main Natura 2000 (SAC) sites within the BFCP

(* this overall area includes 405ha of non-SAC Annex I land and 75.5ha of other SAC land)

Funding: The total amount scheduled to be paid (in Feb 2015) to BFCP farmers through their 2014 plans is €1,045,711.96. This equates to an average payment per farm of €6,618.4 (range €1,626.48 to €15,000), or a payment per (gross) hectare of €71. While previous BFCP payments were subject to 'modulation' of up to 10%, this won't apply to 2014 payments. **An estimated €4.935m has been paid to Burren farmers over the 5 years of the BFCP** (not allowing for 'modulation' or other DAFM deductions).

BFCP Payments continue to be issued under three measures - Measure 1 (M1): Management of species rich grassland; Measure 2 (M2): Site enhancement works and Measure 3 (M3): Protection of designated land and other areas of Annex I habitat. Most (91%) of the budget is allocated to M1 and M2 as many farmers already receive M3 ('SAC') payments through REPS or AEOS (Table 2).

	Year 5 Payment	Year 4 Payment	Year 3 Payment	Year 2 Payment	Year 1 Payment
Total	€1,045,711.96	€1,059,304.16	€1,147,007.24	€958,371.34	€639,384.74
Measure 1	€494,686 (47.3%)	€481,097 (45.4%)	€485,872 (42.4%)	€ 420,402 (43.9%)	€295,657 (46.2%)
Measure 2	€456,752 (43.7%)	€511,386 (48.3%)	€545,048 (47.5%)	€ 482,688 (50.4%)	€303,330 (47.4%)
Measure 3	€92,784 (8.9%)	€66,821 (6.3%)	€116,371 (10.1%)	€ 55,181 (5.8%)	€40,398 (6.3%)

Table 2. Payments made in Years 1-5 of the BFCP under the three Programme Measures.

Measure 1 (M1) The M1 payment for the ‘management of species rich grassland’ is based on an annual site assessment of habitat condition (based on 9 criteria) by the farm advisor (with additional checks by the BFCP team). Each SAC/Annex I field is given a score from 0-10. In Year 5 of BFCP, 1,035 fields (7,592ha) were ‘scored’ by farm advisors and/or BFCP staff under M1. On the basis of these annual M1 assessments, some €494,686 was paid to farmers, an average allocation of €3,131 per farm.

Data analysis of M1 scores shows a gradual but significant improvement in M1 scores between Years 1 and 5 (Fig. 1). This bar chart shows that the percentage area of land with ‘high’ scores (8, 9, 10) is, in general, increasing at the expense of areas with ‘low’ and ‘medium’ scores (3-7) indicating an overall improvement in site condition – and, under this ‘pay for performance’ measure - farm income.

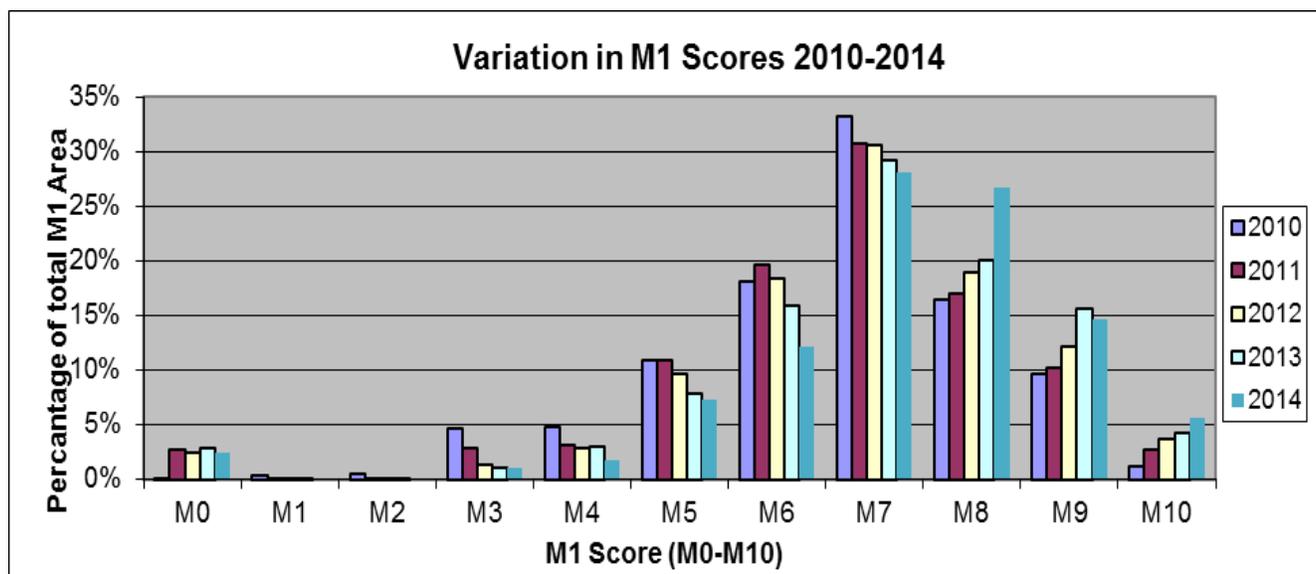


Figure 1. Comparison of M1 scores (by % of total M1 area per score) between 2010 and 2014.

Over the past 5 years of the BFCP, a total of €2,177,714 has been spent on Measure 1, c.44.9% of the total payments made under the Programme. The amount paid under M1 has increased from 63% of the maximum available in 2010 to 70.3% of maximum available in 2014, which attests to farmers success in gradually improving site management and thus site condition and M1 payment.

Measure 2 (M2): M2 works are nominated by the farmer. These works help the farmer address the agri-environmental needs of his/her land and potentially increase the M1 score on the land. This farmer-led approach to farm planning is central to the success of the BFCP as it results in bespoke plans for every farm, as well as a higher standard of work being done by the farmer (who co-funds all M2 work). The quality of work does vary but the BFCP team work closely with farmers and their advisors to ensure that all work is completed to an acceptable standard or else payment is recouped.

Within M2, a total of 1,319 separate jobs were planned in Year 5 - an average 8.3 jobs per plan at an overall cost of €456,752. A breakdown of the M2 budget based on general work type is shown in Table 3 below. Scrub removal remains the main M2 task planned – over 59% of the M2 budget was allocated to scrub removal work (42.3ha, including 38.7km of paths). However, this is down significantly from previous years (70.3% of budget in Year 4). In contrast, other tasks such as stone wall repair (22km), gate installation (108 gates), access provision (15km) and water provision showed a renewal in interest, increasing to absorb much of the scrub budget adjustment (totals shown in Column 3 of Table 5).

Farmers contributed 25%, 50% or 75% to the cost of each M2 task, amounting to an additional estimated input into the BFCP from the farming sector of €288,853 in Year 5. This equates to an effective Year 5 M2 spend of €745,604, some 38.7% of which is funded by participating farmers through co-funding of Measure 2 works, testimony to the excellent value for money provided by BFCP.

Measure 2 Work Category	Paid in 2014 (Year 5)	% of M2 Year 5	% of M2 Year 4	% of M2 Year 3	% of M2 Year 2	% of M2 Year 1	Funding Rate
Scrub Removal	€269,980	59.1	70.3	70.6	61.1	44.3	75%
Wall repair (incl. fencing)	€76,412	16.7	12.1	12.1	14.8	19.7	50-75%
Water Provision	€34,165	7.5	6.7	6.6	11.1	15.2	50%
Vehicle Access Tracks	€36,013	7.9	4.4	3.6	5.7	5.8	25%
Gate installation	€18,437	4.0	2.5	4.3	4.1	7.3	50-63%
Habitat Restoration	€13,495	3.0	1.4	0.8	2.0	4.8	75%
Feeding equipment	€8,250	1.8	2.6	2.0	1.3	2.9	25-50%
Total	€456,752						

Table 3. Year 5 Measure 2 Payments per category and M2 percentage breakdown Years 1-5

M2 Cumulative Impact

Since its inception in 2010, €2,299,204 has been spent on M2 works which amounts to c.47.4% of total BFCP budget. The main investment has been in tackling invasive hazel and blackthorn scrub - €1.44m, equating to c.63% of all M2 funding, was spent on the removal of 216ha of scrub from species rich grasslands and the reopening of 137km of new paths to facilitate livestock movement (Table 4).

Measure 2 Work Category	Total budget, Year 1- 5 (€)	% of Total M2 spend, Year 1-5
Scrub Removal	1,443,581	62.8%
Wall repair & fencing	335,138	14.6%
Water Provision	203,644	8.9%
Vehicle Access Tracks	123,445	5.4%
Gate installation	96,714	4.2%
Habitat Restoration	49,377	2.1%
Feed equipment	47,305	2.1%
Total	2,299,204	

Table 4. Budget spend per M2 Work Category over the entire programme period

There has also been a huge investment of over €850,000 in farm infrastructure which will have a lasting impact beyond the life of the BFCP. Works include (Table 5 below): 89km of stone wall repaired, 22.5km of additional wire fencing erected, 595 new gates hung, 383 water troughs and 65 water storage tanks installed, 173 feed troughs and 118 feed bins purchased, 19km of new vehicle access tracks constructed, 267km of track repaired, as well as over 100 habitat restoration jobs completed.

Measure 2 Works	Total	Year 5	Year 4	Year 3	Year 2	Year 1
Area of Scrub removed – not incl. paths (ha)	213.89	32.7	51.99	61.43	44.16	23.59
Scrub pathways (m)	137,254	38,674	37,384	32,365	21,600	7,231
Area of scrub stump-treated (ha)	153.2	30.1	45.5	38.2	24	15.3
Stone wall repair (m)	89,105	21,875	14,992	16,867	18,833	16,538
Wire fencing (m)	22,585	4,239	5,844	5,111	5,991	1,400
Gate installation (no.)	595	108	88	135	122	142
Water Troughs (no.)	383	65	53	61	93	111
Water storage tanks (no.)	65	12	8	13	15	17
Feed Troughs (no.)	173	28	16	29	34	66
Feed Bins (no.)	118	19	22	17	24	36
New Access Tracks (m)	19,433	5,731	3,049	3,339	5,714	1,600
Upgrade Access Tracks (m)	25,844	9,577	4,915	2,604	3,764	4,984
Habitat Restoration Jobs (n)	103	21	24	19	19	20

Table 5. Works done per M2 Work Category per year and over the entire programme period

Adding the estimated M2 co-funding by farmers of €1.33m to the €2.3m paid out means that c.€3.63m worth of M2 work has now been completed under the BFCP. The average drawdown (of max available M2 budget) has declined from c.63% in 2011 and 2012 to 53% in 2014. This is as a result of less work being planned by farmers, the reasons for which vary from case to case.

Measure 3 (M3) €92,784 was allocated under M3 in Year 5, a large (39%) increase from Year 4. This increase was as a result of REPS 4 contracts ending for a lot of farmers, hence the N2000 payment was no longer available to them under this scheme and was paid instead by BFCP under M3.

Over the past 5 years of the BFCP, a total budget of €371,555 has been spent on Measure 3, c.7.7% of the total payments made under the Programme.

Farm plans were prepared for each farmer in Year 5 by one of 11 trained advisors (same cohort of advisors as in 2013). Four advisors alone drafted almost 75% of all plans. BFCP farm advisors undertake annual refresher training courses to update their planning skills. They use a BFCP workbook and assessment sheets to compile plans: these digital resources were further 'tweaked' in Year 5.

The main work of the BFCP team in Year 5 has been assisting in the compilation of the 158 Farm plans, ensuring that all planned works deliver positive environmental impact and value for money, that they have the required permissions and are completed to a high standard. The team – composed of 6 F/T or P/T staff (4 FTEs) - are based in Carron, Co. Clare. The team organised Training events for farmers and advisors, as well as hosting numerous study groups, the feedback from which was extremely positive.

In summary, Year 5 of the BFCP saw the programme consolidate and grow in impact, profile and maturity. All stakeholders in the BFCP – farmers, advisors, funders and others – continue to work in a very positive, inclusive and professional way and it is this level of co-operation that has made the BFCP so effective and has resulted in a further extension of the programme until the end of 2015.