



7.3.7 AranLIFE Project: Results to date and afterLIFE actions

Subject: Report on AranLIFE Workshop

Date and Time: 1st December 2016

Workshop theme: AranLIFE Project: Results to date and afterLIFE actions

Venue: Furbo, Co Galway

This summary report is based on the proceedings of a workshop held on Thursday December 1st, 2016 at the DAHRRGA offices in Na Forbacha, Co. Galway. The purpose of the workshop was to outline the AranLIFE project with a range expertise and discuss the actions of the programme and what were the best mechanisms to develop an AranLIFE afterlife. Present at the meeting were the project team Dr Patrick McGurn (Project Manager), Dr Amanda Browne (Scientific Officer), Gráinne Ní Chonghaile (Finance Officer), Louise Duignan (PhD researcher), Seán Mac Eoin (DARRHG) Dr James Moran (Institute of Technology, Sligo), Dr Brendan Dunford (Burren farming for Conservation), Dr Sharon Parr (Burren Farming for Conservation), Ivan Kelly (Teagasc), Dr Andy Bleasdale (NPWS) and Dr Enda Mooney (NPWS).

Over the first three years of the project, the AranLIFE has amassed a significant amount of data. This workshop was an opportunity to share this information with a group of experts in the agri-ecology field and to discuss the development of the project within the project timeframe and mechanisms required for the future after AranLIFE

Addressing the meeting were Dr Patrick McGurn and Dr Amanda Browne of the AranLIFE project. Dr McGurn presented an overview of the work of the AranLIFE project and some of the results developing. This included phosphorous deficiencies in grazing livestock; unsuitability of using the recommended national soil analysis methodology (Morgans) for high pH soils on the islands; the unsuitability of existing agri-environment programmes for high quality grassland habitats: a suitable habitat scoring assessment for any future results based agri-environment programme; determining favourable condition for calcareous grassland scrub and appropriate pathways to develop an afterlife programme.

Dr Browne outlined the present monitoring programme undertaken by the project; results of the ongoing work regarding the application of seaweed, issue of rabbit damage on some machair sites; the implementation of optimal grazing plans and associated monitoring and the control of scrub post cutting and future monitoring work proposed within the project.

Copies of both presentations are available [here](#).

Following the presentations, a question and answer session and a general discussion took place. The main themes the existing monitoring programme, the scoring system for a result based agri-environment programme, discussions on improving overall access to grazing land whilst minimising landscape changes and developing a pathway for any future programme within the present and future Rural Development Plans.

Discussions

The low phosphorus levels recorded in the forage samples also occurred in the Burren but rarely resulted in problems. However on the islands phosphorous deficiency is observed particularly in older animals in harder winters, general view of the group was to continue working with the local veterinary surgeon using phosphorous based mineral licks to rectify the problem and monitor accordingly.

The existing monitor programme was viewed to be scientifically robust to supply information and with detailed analysis would supply information on the effect of management on the habitats and help to determine methodologies in condition assessments, best practice guides for land managers and aid in the design and implementation of future agri-environment policy.



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,
Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta
Department of Arts, Heritage,
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



The workshop discussed some of the issues arising from public concerns regarding future recommendations. The use of herbicide can be an effective way to control the growth of scrub when used correctly but in karst limestone landscape there are concerns regarding residues entering local water supplies. The project is trying a range of methods, recutting, increased grazing, targeted grazing using goats and selective herbicide use to determine the most suitable method. Another public concern is improving access, the narrow boreens (pathways) and bearnaí (stone gaps) are a specific feature of the Aran Islands landscape. Improving access by widening boreens, replacing bearnaí with gates can alter the image of the landscape. The project is working to minimise these effects with the farmers and local authorities.

Developing an afterlife programme for the Aran Islands was also discussed. Dr Brendan Dunford and Dr Sharon Parr from the former BurrenLIFE programme were able to tell the group how the BurrenLIFE programme developed from 20 farmers to 150 farmers in the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme and how they were hoping to go to 600 farmers in the new Burren Programme funded under Article 28 of the Rural Development Plan. They found a results based programme with an action element was working well. Each land parcel was scored based on set criteria and payments were based on the score. To improve the score there was also a suite of works that were also funded under the programme. These included scrub control and supply of water. General feeling was that such a programme could work on the islands though different methods were required to reflect the differences in the farming system. The AranLIFE team felt they had the information to develop a simple scoring system that would reflect the differences in grassland quality and with adequate funding would incentivise the farmers to maximise the score for each land parcel.

The group then discussed ways of implementing such a programme. The first was through existing agri-environment programmes. However at present the national programme GLAS takes a broad and shallow approach and the habitats of the Aran Islands are at a higher quality than the base set under GLAS, so the programme would need re-appraisal before being suitable. The second approach to consider is the proposed Locally Led Agri-Environment Option to be announced by the Department of agriculture Food and Marine which are to be announced before the end of the year by DAFM. AranLIFE could in co-operation with the different shareholders develop a new approach based outcome based programme that meets the needs of the islands and fits into existing agri-environment measures.

The project team proposed that as part of the project, they would put together an application for the Locally Led measure when details from DAFM became available. This application would be specific for the Aran Islands and build on the work gathered by the AranLIFE project.

This was a very useful meeting for the AranLIFE project team to present their results to date to an expert group and obtain feedback and advice for the next steps.