

BURREN PROGRAMME 2016 - Executive Summary

The Burren Programme (BP) is a locally-led agri-environment climate (AEC) measure under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020, introduced under Article 28 of Regulation 1305/2013. It is a 'Hybrid' programme in the sense that it funds both results-based habitat management and complementary non-productive capital investments. Its objectives relate to improving the condition of the natural and cultural heritage of the Burren.

The Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are the main funding authority for the BP, with some support from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The BP is overseen by a Steering Group composed of representatives from the main stakeholders. The BP is managed by a 5-person local team based in Carron in the central Burren through a 5-year contract which was awarded in March 2016 by the DAFM. A team of 10 trained and approved Advisors liaise directly with the BP farmers and the BP team in the development of BP farm plans. An additional 5 Advisors were recruited and trained in 2016, and all advisors will receive refresher training on an annual basis.

Over 300 Burren farmers have been recruited into the BP thus far, in two Tranches. Tranche 1 farmers were recruited in late 2015 and 194 of these farmers accepted a place in the BP, receiving training and information during the year. An additional 124 farmers were recruited in late 2016, and received induction training. A further and final Tranche of farmers will be recruited in late 2017.

The three farm plan 'structures' within the BP are the 5 Year Farm Plan, the Intervention 1 (I-1) Score Sheet and the annual Intervention 2 (I-2) Work Programme. Due to delays in the development of a Mapping and Planning System for the BP, only I-1 Score Sheets could be developed in 2016. All 194 Tranche 1 farmers submitted I-1 Score Sheets in 2016 and on the basis of these scores will receive payment in the region of €620,263, an average of €3,197 per farmer and €73.84 per assessable ha.

The total area covered by Tranche 1 farmers is 17,284.53ha (an average of 89.1ha per farm) of SAC and additional Annex 1 habitat. Of this, 10,065 (58.2%) has been claimed for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme, while only 8,400ha was considered I-1 assessable. The BP area currently accounts for 56.7% of the total (digitised) area of the three main SACs in the Burren region.

The average I-1 score across the entire BP area assessed in 2016 was 7.21. An interesting difference was noted between the Average I-1 of 7.34 for the cohort of farms which had been a part of the Burren Farming For Conservation Programme, as compared with an average I-1 score of 6.58 for the 'new' entrants to the BP. The difference highlights the improvement in condition of the BFCP cohort following the past six years of investment through the BFCP. For the subset of BFCP farmers (149 of them) it is notable that the I-1 score in 2016 (7.34) was slightly lower than 2015 (7.37), the first year since the inception of the BFCP/BP that such a decline occurred. This was probably caused by a poor winter and by the absence of any funding to undertake capital works.

In summary, Year 1 of the BP has gotten off to a somewhat sluggish start, mainly due to the absence of a dedicated mapping and planning system. This has resulted in no 'capital' work being done by farmers, the build-up of a backlog of 5-year plans and annual work programmes and may even have contributed to a decline in site condition as suggested by the I-1 scores.

On a more positive note, good progress has been made in establishing a robust baseline for the BP and in issuing at least some payments to BP farmers. A lot of positive work has been done on training and education, and the reputation of the BP and its predecessors in the Burren has continued to grow. Thus, while significant challenges lie ahead, the BP remains in a strong position to deliver on its promise.

Average I-1 (M1) Score 2010-2016

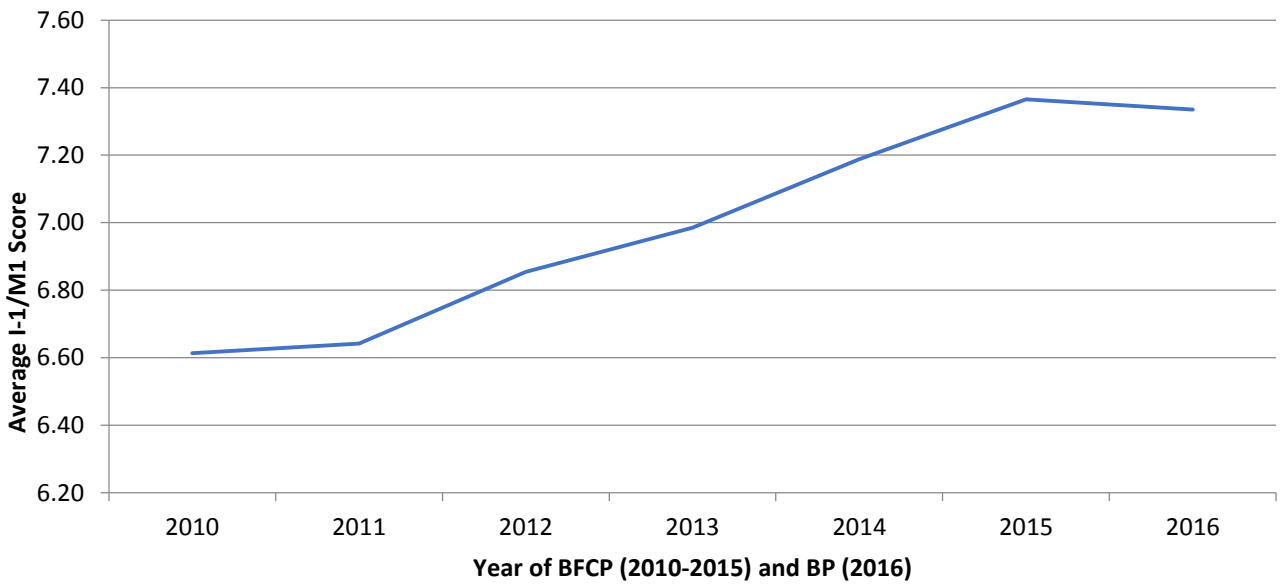


Figure: Average I-1 (M1) scores from 149 BFCP-BP farmers, 2010 - 2016

Percentage of I-1 (M1) area per Score, 2010 -2016

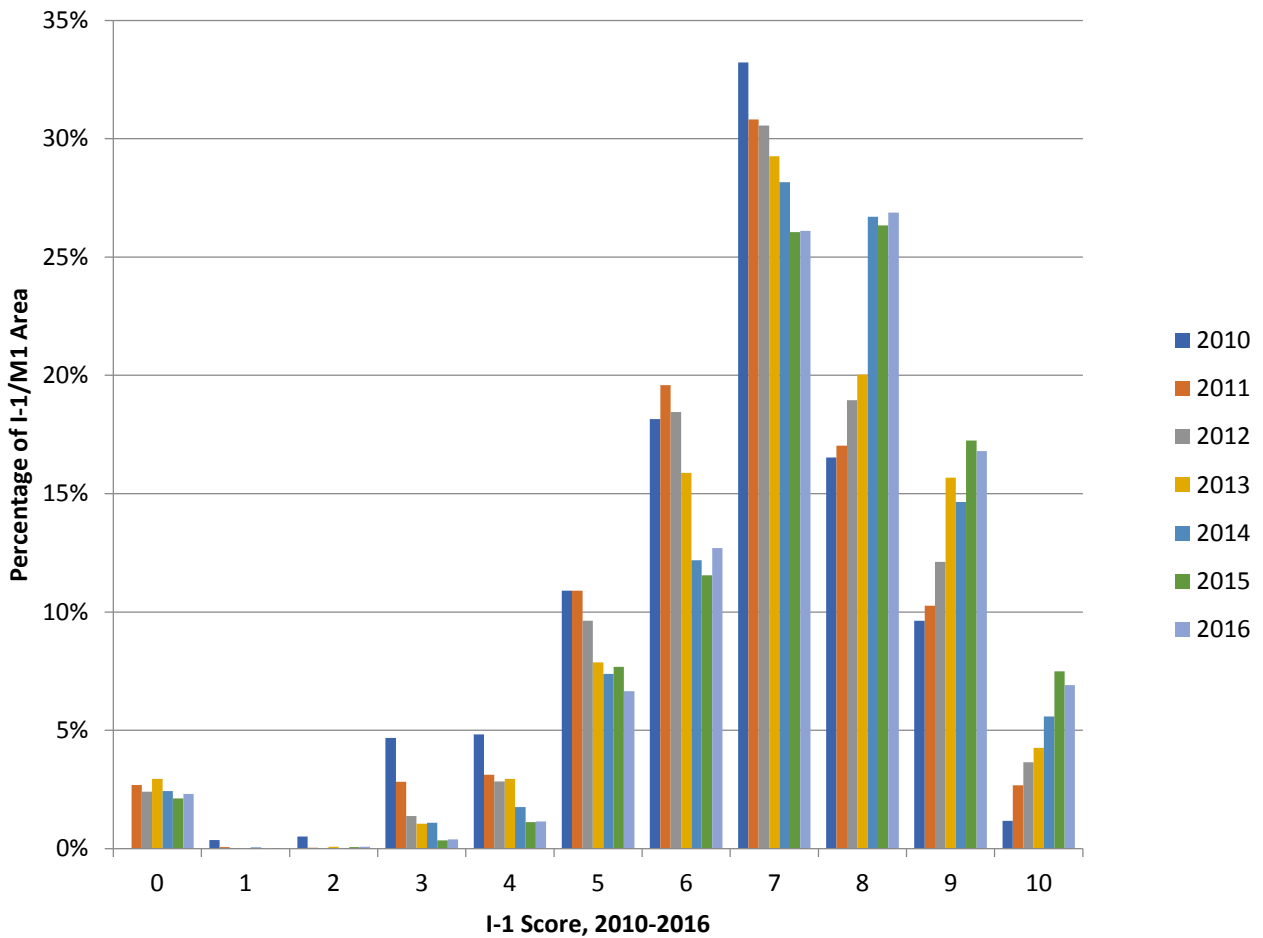


Figure: Percentage of I-1 (M1) area per I-1 (M1) Score, 2010 – 2016