



The Burren Programme (BP)

Report No. 2 Executive Summary

(1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018)

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 additional 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 6-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 14 trained and approved Advisors liaise directly with the BP farmers and the BP team in the development of BP farm plans.

272 Burren farmers are currently participating in the BP, 192 since 2016 and an additional 80 since 2017. A further 119 places were offered to farmers in early 2018 and a proportion of these will submit farm plans in summer 2018. The final number of BP participants is expected to be 350 maximum.

There are three farm plan 'structures' within the BP: the 5 Year Farm Plan, the Intervention 1 (I-1) Score Sheet and the Intervention 2 (I-2) Work Programme. 5 Year Farm Plans have been signed by all farmers, with 50 of the Year 1 plans amended to accommodate area changes in Year 2. I-1 score sheets were submitted by all 272 farmers also, though 7 of these farmers received no I-1 payment. Due to delays in the development of a Mapping System for the BP, only 19 I-2 sheets were signed (for payment) by farmers in Year 2 (avg. payment of €3,665, mainly scrub work).

The amount of results-based (I-1) payments allocated in Year 2 (2017) was €770,948, an average of €2,834 per farmer (€74.8 per assessable ha). The total funding paid to Burren farmers since the inception (2016) of the BP is €1.359m. The total anticipated spend for the project (2016-2022) is in excess of €10m.

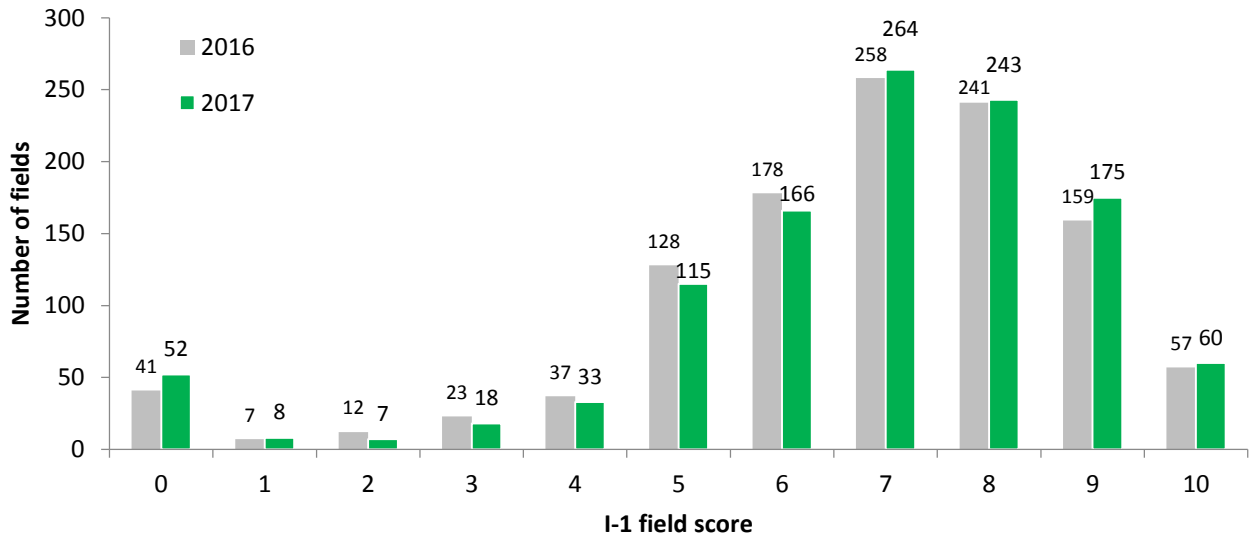
The total area of SAC and additional Annex 1 habitat which was assessed for I-1 payment was 20,998ha (an average of 77.2ha per farm), distributed across 1,517 separate fields. Of this, 12,357ha (58.8%) has been claimed for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme, while 10,308ha of this was considered I-1 assessable. The BP area currently accounts for 66% 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 2017 was 7.1 (7.21 in 2016). This perceived fall masks the fact that new farms tend to score much lower (average 6.5) thus dragging down the overall score. A direct comparison of average score between farms who have completed 2 years in the BP (192 farms) shows a small (0.8%) score increase from 7.215 (2016) to 7.274 (2017). The slight increase must be considered in light of the absence of I-2 works budget, as farm level actions really drive score changes. Proof of this is that the average I-1 score for the cohort of farms which had previously participated in the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme was 7.38 (compared with 6.5 for 'new' farms), highlighting the impact of six years of investment through the BFCP.

In summary, Year 2 of the BP has seen the programme pick up some pace after a slow start in Year 1. A strong set of validated (88% check in Year 2) I-1 baseline data has been generated for the 272 participants, the final recruitment phase has been completed, a mapping system (GLAMS) is now live, all planning templates are being successfully applied, and I-2 works have recommenced after a three year absence.

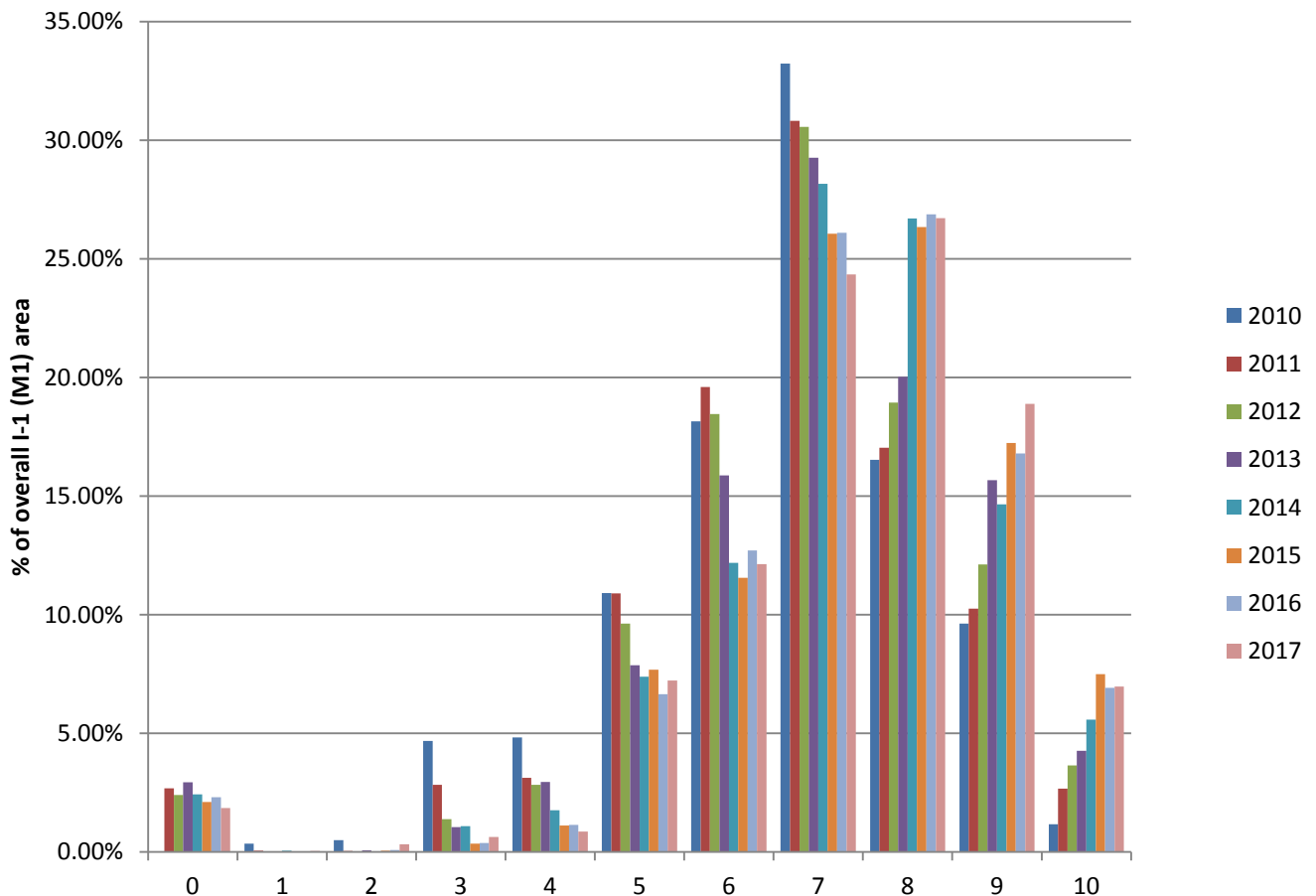
Year 3 should see a strong increase in I-2 works across all farms, which should help support the I-1 scores on these farms in spite of a very poor winter 2017/8 in the region. A strong local team, an excellent group of advisors and a very engaged cohort of farmers are now very keen to ensure the BP lives up to its potential and reputation.

Change in I-1 score from the BP Year 1 to Year 2



The number of Tranche 1 fields (n=1,146) in each score class compared between 2016 and 2017 (Only fields that were scored in both years are included).

Percentage of I-1 (M1) area per Score, 2010 -2017



The Percentage of I-1 (M1) area per I-1 (M1) Score, 2010 – 2017 (147 farms, c.7,000ha)