



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 focus on improving the condition of the natural and cultural heritage of the Burren. The Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) are the main funding authority for the BP, with additional support from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

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, awarded in March 2016 by DAFM. 12 approved BP Farm Advisors liaise directly with the BP farmers and the BP team in the development of BP plans. This report outlines the work and impact of the BP between April 2018 and March 2019 – BP 'Year 3'.

328 Burren farmers currently participate in the BP, 191 (Tranche 1) since 2016 and 80 (Tranche 2) since 2017, with an additional 57 farmers joining in 2018 (Tranche 3 & 4). No further recruitment is planned. The total BP area is now 23,191ha, 13,748ha (59%) of which is 'BPS-eligible' and 11,385ha of which is 'I-1 assessable'. This equates to 70.7ha of SAC plus Additional Annex 1 habitat per farm with the BP now encompassing 71% of the designated land in the three main SACs in the Burren.

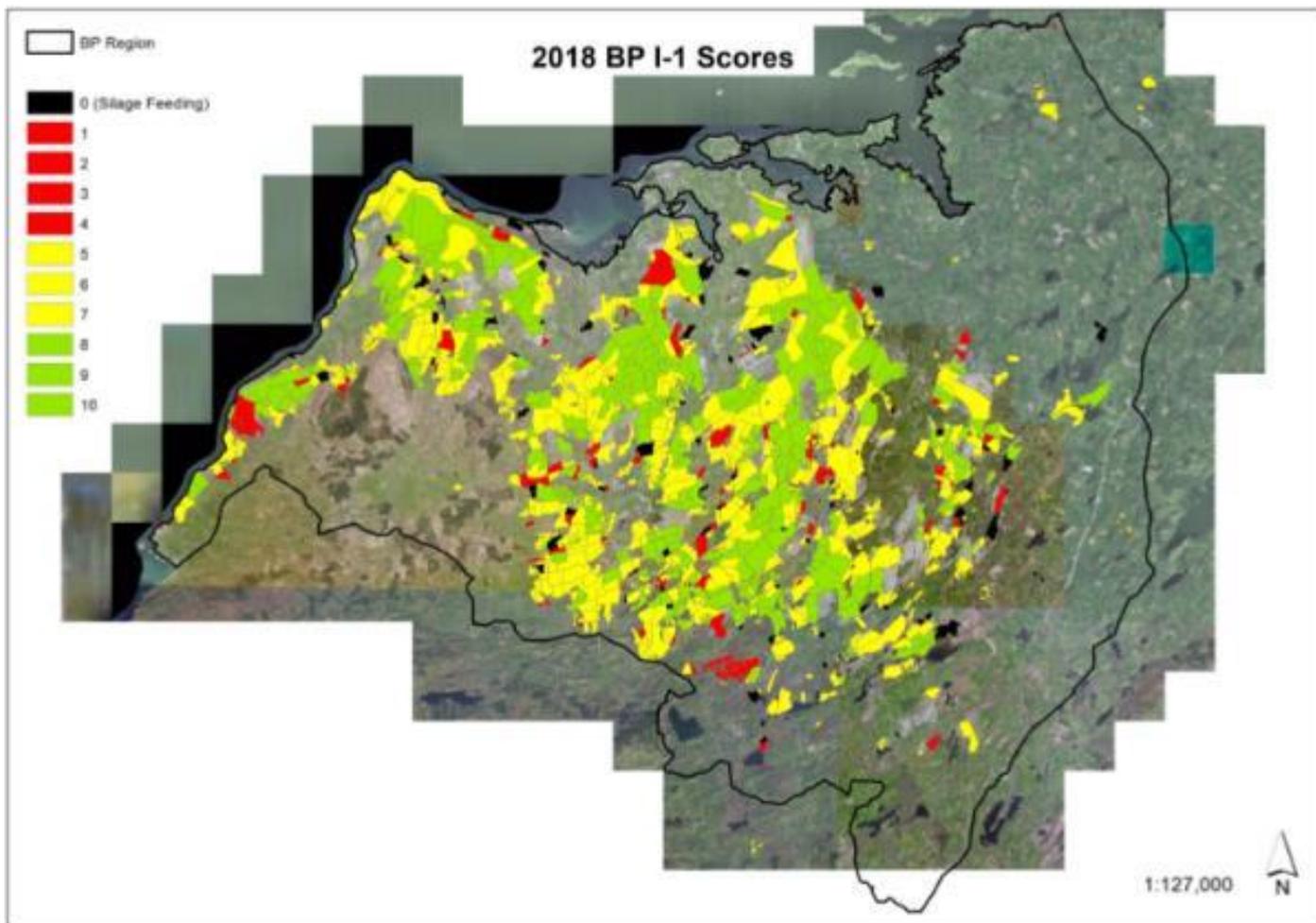
There are three farm plan 'structures' within the BP: the 5 Year Farm Plan, Intervention 1 (I-1) Score Sheets and Intervention 2 (I-2) Work Programmes. 5 Year Farm Plans act as the farmer's 'contract' with DAFM and have been signed by all 328 farmers. These plans can be amended once annually.

I-1 score sheets were submitted for all 328 farmers in Year 3, though 8 of these farmers received no I-1 payment. The total I-1 'results-based' payment approved by the BP team in Year 3 was €858,262, an average of €2,617 per farmer (range €36 - €9,347) or €75 per I-1 assessable ha. The average I-1 score across the entire BP area in Year 3 was 7.07. Analysis of I-1 data per 'Tranche' recruited shows that I-1 scores have increased annually by a very small amount (e.g for Tranche 1 farms the I-1 score has changed from 7.26-7.31-7.34 in Years 1-2-3). Longer term analyses (2010-19) confirm improvements in I-1 scores but at a slower rate under BP than previously under BFCP. Poor winter weather conditions of late combined with delays in commencing I-2 works have contributed to this.

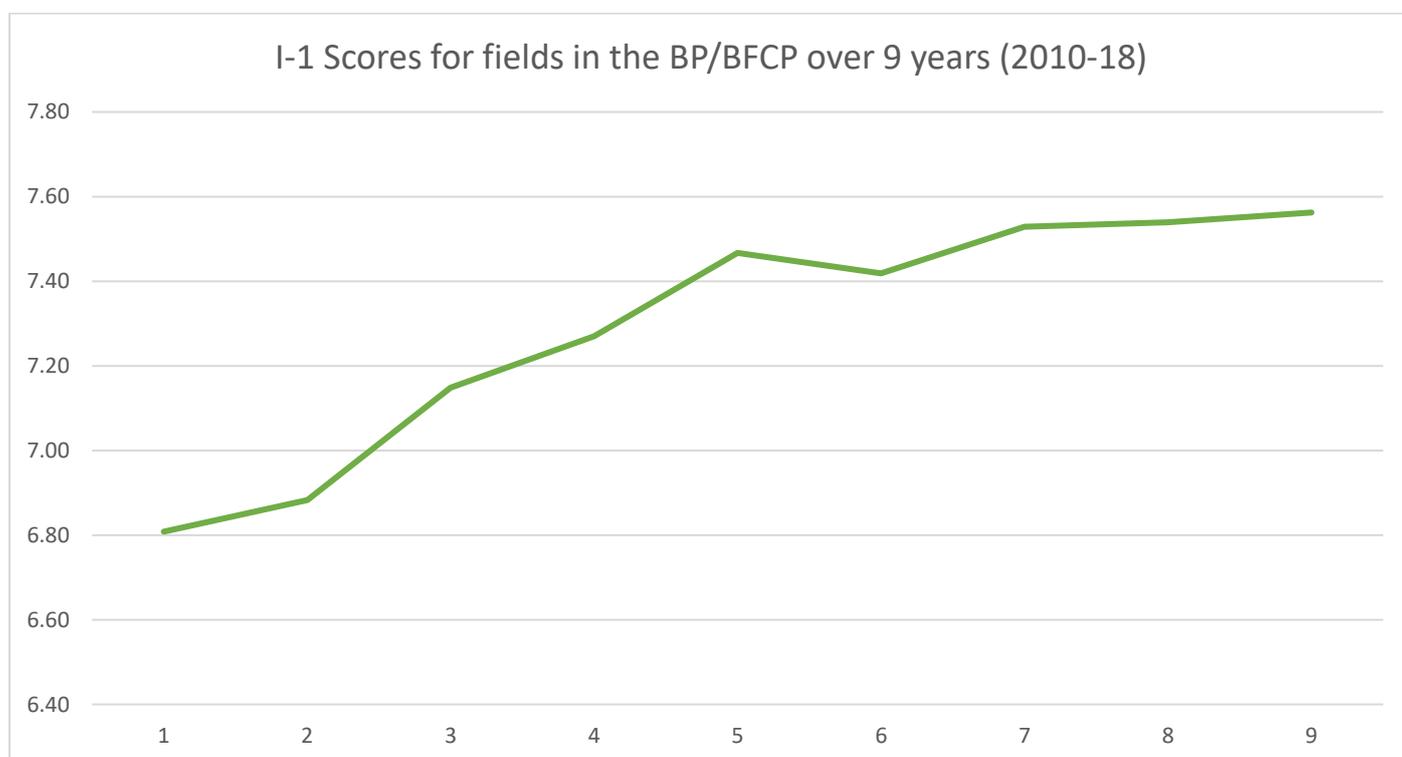
200 I-2 work plans worth €738,351 or €3,692 per plan have now been approved for payment by the BP team (€267,801 of this has been paid by DAFM, thus far, for I-2 work). An analysis of those I-2 plans where work has been completed (and payment claimed by the farmer) shows that scrub work accounts for most (64%) of the I-2 payments claimed, followed by water installation (7.9%), Stone wall repair (7.5%) and Access provision (7.3%). This is very consistent with BPCP (2010-15) data.

The total funding paid to date to Burren farmers since the inception (2016) of the BP is estimated as €2.48m. The anticipated overall spend for the BP is estimated at under €10m, though this figure will depend on a range of factors including I-2 spend and possible extension of contracts.

Year 3 has been a positive one for the BP with the recruitment of its full complement of farmers, the commencement of I-2 farm works and the successful ongoing implementation of the I-1 scoring system. The BP team have carried out a high level of oversight of I-1 scores (57% of farms checked in Year 3) and I-2 works (almost 100% of I-2 payment claims checked). The 12 approved BP Farm Advisors are doing a good job and, along with support from the BP team - for example in securing permission for works - farmers are very well supported to deliver positive outcomes for the Burren. All stakeholders remain supportive and the BP retains a very positive reputation for its stewardship of the Burren.



BP I-1 Scores for Year 3 fields presented as colour-coded bands on an Ortho of the Burren



Change in the average I-1 (M1) score between 2010-2018 for all fields which were continuously in BFCP-BP since 2010 ('1' above), calculated on the basis of overall area per I-1 score (574 fields, 4,567ha).