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'The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas'.

The Burren Programme (BP) Report No. 4

Executive Summary

The Burren Programme (BP) is a locally-led Agri-Environment Climate (AEC) measure under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. It is a 'Hybrid' programme, funding both results-based habitat management and complementary non-productive capital investments. It aims to improve 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 local team based in the central Burren through a 5-year contract with the DAFM. 12 approved BP Farm Advisors liaise directly with the participating BP farmers and the BP team in the development of BP plans. This report outlines the work and impact of the BP between April 2019 and March 2020 (inclusive)– BP 'Year 4'.

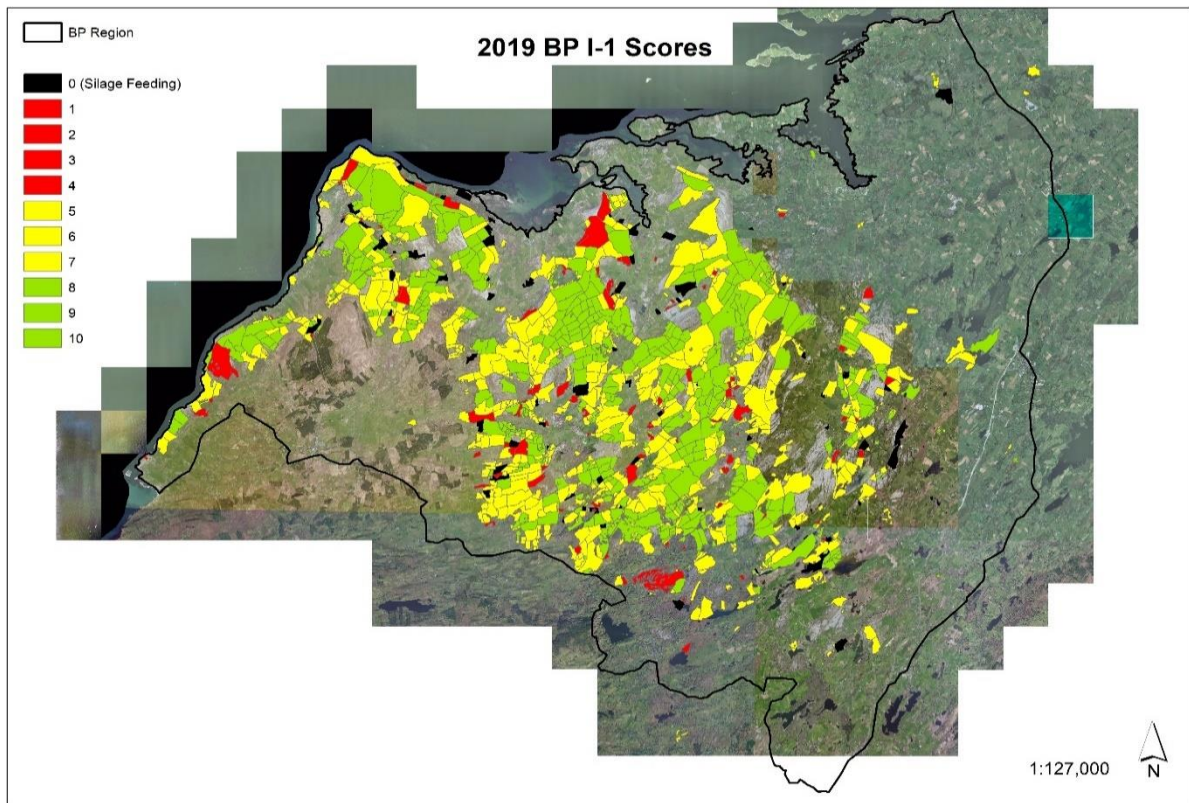
There are three farm plan 'structures' within the BP: the 5 Year Farm Plan, Intervention 1 (I-1) Score Sheets and Intervention 2 (I-2) Work Programmes. 5 Year Farm Plans act as the farmer's 'contract' with DAFM and have been signed by all 328 farmers. These simple, 'overview' plans can be amended once annually. Of the current 328 participant farmers, 191 (Tranche 1) joined in 2016, 80 (Tranche 2) in 2017, and 57 in 2018 (Tranches 3 & 4). No further recruitment is planned. The total BP area is now 23,207ha which equates to 70.75ha of SAC plus Additional Annex 1 habitat per farm. Of this, some 13,673ha (59%) is 'eligible' under BPS rules and 11,396ha is assessable under the BP I-1 scoring system. BP now encompasses 71% of the designated land in the three main SACs in the Burren.

I-1 score sheets were submitted for all 328 farmers in Year 4, though 10 of these farmers received no I-1 payment. The total I-1 'results-based' payment approved by the BP team in Year 4 was €845,110, an average of €2,576.55 per farmer (range €41 - €9,417) or €74 per I-1 assessable ha. The average I-1 score across the entire BP area in Year 4 was 7.13, a 0.8% increase from 7.07 in Year 3. 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 7.23-7.26-7.3-7.35 in Years 1-2-3-4). Longer term analyses (2010-19) confirm improvements in I-1 scores, but at a slower rate under BP than previously under BFCP. This may relate to several factors including weather conditions, the improving off-farm economy and the below-predicted amount of I-2 work being undertaken.

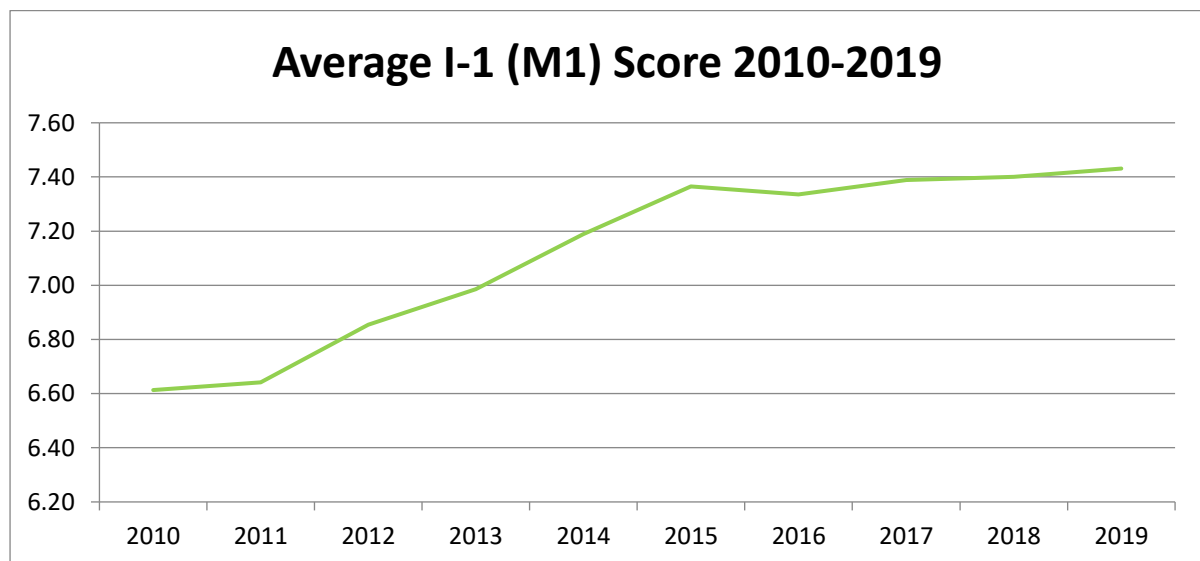
354 I-2 work plans, consisting of 3,679 individual tasks worth €1.28m (average of €3,627 per plan), have been approved for payment by the BP team (157, or 44%, in Year 4). €667,185 has been paid by DAFM for I-2 work completed on 211 farms. An analysis of I-2 work completed shows that Scrub control accounts for most (65.8%) I-2 work, followed by Stone wall repair (8%), Water installation (7.26%) and Access provision (5.77%). Farmers co-fund all I-2 works, contributing an estimated €455k (39%) to the total cost of I-2 works. Works completed include the removal of 87ha of encroaching scrub, the repair of 16km of stone wall, the installation/upgrade of 10k of access tracks and over 120 gates – all of which will help improve the management of key Burren habitats.

The total funding paid or allocated (yet to be paid) to date to Burren farmers since the inception (2016) of the BP is estimated as €4.26m (averaging €1.066m per annum). The anticipated overall spend for the BP is estimated at €8.85m, though this figure will depend on a range of factors.

Year 4 has been a largely positive one for the BP with a gradual increase in I-2 work and a related improvement in I-1 scores. The BP team have carried out a high level of oversight of I-1 scores (51% of farms checked in Year 4) and I-2 works (almost 100% of I-2 payment claims checked). The 328 participating farmers, 12 approved Farm Advisors, local and national stakeholders continue to engage positively with the BP and the local team, auguring well for the future of the programme.



BP I-1 Scores for Year 4 fields presented as colour-coded bands.



Average I-1 scores from 147 BFCP-BP farmers, 2010 - 2019