

**BirdWatch Ireland Response to European Commission Observation letter to Ireland on draft CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (May 11th 2022)**

Obs Points Number	CION Obs points	Actions Required	Detail and Evidence
3	The Commission requests Ireland to revise the proposed target values, by improving their accuracy and taking into account all the relevant interventions, and by defining an adequate ambition level in line with the identified needs.	Target values must be revised but critically the weightings and conversion factors in GAEC 8 must be revised to reflect their real size and ecological value.	The weightings in GAEC 8 inflate the biodiversity value of the habitats and therefore the target values. This needs to be addressed. We suggest that to improve the overall environmental ambition of the CSP, that Ireland revise all of the weightings and not just stone walls. See BirdWatch Ireland spreadsheet on weightings. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf</a>
8	The Commission has doubts about the effective contribution of the CAP strategic plan to this general objective and it considers that further improvements and more ambition are required for the Commission to approve the CAP strategic plan.	Significant further action is required by Ireland to attain value for money and meet EU Green Deal as well as national targets and laws.	We agree with the Commission's doubts. It is our view that this CSP funds mostly business as usual and we have expressed this to DAFM and in different articles. When we analysed the funding for the different interventions, it is clear that only between 5-7% could generously be considered targeted towards effective environmental action. See linked analysis of the budget against environmental traffic light system. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/Ireland-draft-CAP-funding-2023-2027.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/Ireland-draft-CAP-funding-2023-2027.pdf</a> And the links here to articles on our concerns with the CSP. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-cap-strategic-plan-should-not-be-approved-by-government-as-is/">https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-cap-strategic-plan-should-not-be-approved-by-government-as-is/</a> and <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/transformation-of-agriculture-remains-elusive-in-irelands-cap-strategic-plan/">https://birdwatchireland.ie/transformation-of-agriculture-remains-elusive-in-irelands-cap-strategic-plan/</a>
9	Ireland is nevertheless requested to better demonstrate the increased ambition of the planned green architecture as regards environmental and climate related objectives, using qualitative and quantitative elements such as financial allocation and indicators.	The CSP budget is €9.8bn. A significant reorientation of the CSP is needed to support horticulture including small hort producers and tillage. Significant additional and targeted funding is needed to address biodiversity, water and climate problems associated with farmland and driven by past CAP interventions.	1. Additional funding must be taken from other funds or additional funding come from central government to increase the funding for the breeding wader EIP to €30m as per our past submissions, and to increase the CP areas to bring in more resources to support more farmers. 2. The Space for Nature ecoscheme must receive a higher payment in order to fund farmer's efforts to improve the quality of habitats with the the support of ecological advice. We have raised the issue with the lack of focus on quality of habitats on several occasions. However, the quality of habitats is predominantly poor on those farms studied. Hedgerows in particular are poor quality. This would increase the ecological value added to this ecoscheme agri practice. Better to have an ecoscheme that is will result in concrete benefits than ones that have more limited benefits (GPS spreaders). See submission sent to DAFM on the need for a robust breeding wader scheme. See attached analysis on habitats on farms. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/Space-for-Nature-in-GAEC-8-and-ecoscheme.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/Space-for-Nature-in-GAEC-8-and-ecoscheme.pdf</a> Teagasc research shows many surveys in the wider countryside show farm habitat areas of 10-14% (from samples in farm surveys in Sheridan et al. 2013, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2011; Rotchés-Ribalta et al., 2020), though with a lot of variation. Dr Julie Larkin in a study undertaken as part of her PhD on habitats on intensive farmland found that 90% of hedgerows in her study area were classed as low quality with only 1% classed as high quality. Excessive cutting, herbicide and fertiliser use were the main issues as well as neglect and a lack of rejuvenation. The Monaghan study also found that 88% of the hedges were in "unfavourable" condition, with 55% of this due to "gappiness" and 40% due to nutrient enrichment. Approximately 75% of them are affected by poaching and not being fenced properly. That study also found that in 2010, 37% of Monaghan hedges were considered to be species rich but this had declined to 23% in 2021.

10	<p>The Commission has doubts whether what is proposed goes far enough. In this context, it particularly has in mind the substantial growth in the size of the Irish dairy herd in recent years – a growth which has had very substantial implications for agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, for quality of air, water and soil, and for biodiversity.</p> <p>Given the current and future implications of this issue, the Commission would like to see <b>more evidence that these aspects were fully taken into account in drawing up the CAP strategic plan.</b></p>	<p>Scientific and evidence based rationale should be provided to support DAFM interventions especially those that aim to support farmland birds, water quality and greenhouse gas emissions reductions especially of the dairy herd.</p>	<p>There are no measures within the CSP to address dairy greenhouse gas emissions in absolute terms. If this is not going to be addressed in the CSP, it could be outlined concretely what measures will result in absolute cuts in emissions. Our submission highlighted the lack of targeting of the nitrogen agri-cultural practice in the scoscheme. This is not in line with the Right Measure in the Right place. In addition, Phosphorus use has not been targeted and should be. Ireland's CSP should be redirected to fund more horticulture and tillage, ie plant based foods. There is no rationale or scientific evidence to support the inflated weightings of habitats under GAEC 8.</p>
11	<p>The CAP strategic plan could make a stronger overall contribution to addressing the needs which Ireland itself has identified or which arise naturally from the country's situation.</p>	<p>Right measure in the right place needs to be supported by targeting. There is not enough targeting.</p>	<p>From our perspective the lack of concrete measures for farmland birds is a key issue with the CSP. The general AECM states that it will support a range of species but some of the measures conflict with others for different speciesv and they are generally not targeted enough to support the range of threatened farmland bird species. See attached review of the AECM by BirdWatch ireland Review of the AECM by BirdWatch ireland <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-AECM-and-EcoScheme-Review.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-AECM-and-EcoScheme-Review.pdf</a></p>
12	<p>The Commission has concerns about aspects of the proposed scheme – including a risk that some of the options involved might add only very modest environmental value in comparison to basic good practice in Ireland, with the result that the scheme as a whole brings about too little change.</p>	<p>The Space for Nature ecoscheme must receive a higher payment in order to fund farmer's efforts to improve the quality of habitats with the support of ecological advice. We have raised the issue with the lack of focus on quality of habitats on several occasions. However, the quality of habitats is predominantly poor on those farms studied. Hedgerows in particular are poor quality. This would increase the ecological value added to this ecoscheme agri practice. Better to have an ecoscheme that is will result in concrete benefits than ones that have more limited benefits (GPS spreaders). Greater ambition is needed on stocking rate. Stocking rates for speciifc habitat types should be introduced.</p>	<p>There is a very high risk that Ireland's CSP will not address the biodiversity, water quality or air pollution issues on Irish farmland unless significant changes are made.</p>
20.2	<p>It requests that Ireland set such national values for the expected reduction in the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides.</p>	<p>Ambitious national targets should be included for pesticides.</p>	<p>This is really important and should be ambitious.</p>
20.4	<p>It invites Ireland to consider whether it could aim for a still greater increase as a means of delivering additional environmental benefits while also securing a higher share of added value for farmers in the food supply chain.</p>	<p>BirdWatch Ireland would welcome any initiative to shorten supply chains and add value to farmers for the food they produce</p>	
20.5	<p>The Commission welcomes Ireland's stated national value of 10% of farmed area to be "prioritised for biodiversity". It strongly recommends that Ireland explain in greater detail what this means in practice, and to clarify and/or improve relevant elements of the CAP strategic plan</p>	<p>Ireland must not inflate the weightings of non-productive areas in GAEC 8. This must be addressed. Otherwise the share of UAA for key biodiversity indicators will be fake news and a waste of taxpayers money. It is imprtant to note that many High Nature Value farming enterprises support a much higher percentage of biodiversity on farmland and they should be rewarded for this.</p>	<p>BirdWatch Ireland is concerned that the proposed Space for Nature ecoscheme will be further weakened by the inflated values of GAEC 8 habitats. We urge a complete revision of the weightings, adding additional habitas to the non-productive areas and for a focus on improving the quality of habitats in Space for Nature ecoscheme. See BirdWatch Ireland spreadsheet on weightings. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf</a></p>

33.2	<p>The Commission notes apparent gaps between the stated overall requirements of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector on the one hand, and the expected contribution to these reductions from the CAP strategic plan. Ireland should explain how other instruments will fill those gaps, or else consider how its CAP strategic plan could make a greater contribution to emission reductions.</p>	<p>These gaps must be explained. Ireland's CSP is doing very little to address greenhouse gas emissions.</p>	<p>We would also welcome this detail and actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. There is scant detail on actual emissions reductions in the beef herd from the Beef Genomics scheme. In fact the EPA has reported that methane emissions continue to increase nationally with cattle emissions plateauing at at 1990 levels, see charts at the end of this spreadsheet. A key point is that total livestock CH4 emissions are now the highest they have ever been in the EPA data from 1990 to present. Sustaining beef production while ramping up dairy output since 2011 is the main reason, driven by no limit on production output (milk quota) or reactive nitrogen input (via fertiliser and feed), all further enabled by the nitrates derogation. We are lacking in confidence that the State's Suckler carbon scheme is achieving emissions reductions since a similar scheme has been in operation since 2015 and emissions from cattle have increased. In terms of carbon budgeting, a substantial cut in agri CH4 (in addition to net zero CO2+N2O), starting now, is essential to meet a long-term 2050 goal aligned with the Paris Agreement Article 2 goal. Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council Technical Report (See link in next column) shows this in Figure 4-3: the min-max °C difference for their scenarios is 5 times greater for CH4 than for CO2. Right now agri CH4 and resultant pollution are going in the opposite direction to mitigation (= aggravation?!), so far more difficult to turn around, with ever greater impacts on farmers to do so if delayed. As we know agri strategy and policy have been contrary to staying within pollution and climate limits, carbon budgeting makes this even more obvious. Climate Change Advisory Council Technical Report <a href="https://www.climatecouncil.ie/carbonbudgets/technicalreport/">https://www.climatecouncil.ie/carbonbudgets/technicalreport/</a></p>
33.4	<p>The Commission welcomes Ireland's observation that protecting peatlands is an important aspect of combating climate change. With this in mind, it notes Ireland's intention to implement GAEC standard 2 from 2024 onwards –which is in line with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 – but would be grateful for provisional indications of the requirements which Ireland is considering applying under the GAEC standard, given the high presence of peatland in the country.</p>	<p>Require ban on drainage and ban on burning of GAEC 2 peatlands and wetlands.</p>	<p>We also would appreciate details on this topic. A ban on drainage, ban of burning peatland would be welcome details. Upland burning in particular must cease.</p>

33.6	<p>The Commission welcomes efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions from the suckler herd through the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Scheme. However, it invites Ireland to find ways of ensuring that any such support actually leads to the necessary net emission reduction. (No evidence provided that efficiency gains won't be lost through increased production)</p>	<p>There are no measures to address dairy herd emissions and this also must be included.</p>	<p>There is scant detail on actual emissions reductions in the beef herd from the Beef Genomics scheme. In fact the EPA has reported that methane emissions continue to increase nationally with cattle emissions plateauing at at 1990 levels. A key point is that total livestock CH4 emissions are now the highest they have ever been in the EPA data from 1990 to present. Sustaining beef production while ramping up dairy output since 2011 is the main reason, driven by no limit on production output (milk quota) or reactive nitrogen input (via fertiliser and feed), all further enabled by the nitrates derogation. We are lacking in confidence that the State's Suckler carbon scheme is achieving emissions reductions since a similar scheme has been in operation since 2015 and emissions from cattle have increased. In terms of carbon budgeting, a substantial cut in agri CH4 (in addition to net zero CO2+N2O), starting now, is essential to meet a long-term 2050 goal aligned with the Paris Agreement Article 2 goal. Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council Technical Report (See link in next column) shows this in Figure 4-3: the min-max °C difference for their scenarios is 5 times greater for CH4 than for CO2. Right now agri CH4 and resultant pollution are going in the opposite direction to mitigation (= aggravation?!), so far more difficult to turn around, with ever greater impacts on farmers to do so if delayed. As we know agri strategy and policy have been contrary to staying within pollution and climate limits, carbon budgeting makes this even more obvious.</p>
33.7	<p>The target set for result indicator R.14 (carbon storage in soils) is 8.88% in the table and 9.32% in the text, this should be clarified. In either case, given that Ireland has the highest percentage of permanent grassland in the EU and peatlands cover a substantial proportion of the national land area, this target seems low.</p>	<p>Additional measures, actions, targeting needed to support sensitive grasslands and peatlands</p>	
34.2	<p>its Nitrates Action Programme will play a major role in achieving some of the CAP's objectives – and that this revision may involve adjustments to “the organic nitrogen output of the dairy cow, reducing stocking rates for a cohort of farmers”. If this is the case, the Commission invites Ireland to make this fundamental point clearer in all relevant sections of the CAP strategic plan. <b>The Commission also requests further information from Ireland on the consistency of the CAP strategic plan with needs and targets arising from the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC)</b> – including how many of the country's water bodies Ireland wishes to exempt from the requirement of reaching “good status” under that Directive because of agricultural pressures.</p>	<p>There should be NO waterbodies exempted from reaching good ecological status.</p>	<p>The Commission point about Ireland potentially seeking to exempt certain water bodies from reaching Good Status is alarming and we ask DAFM to clarify this as soon as possible. We would reject any such proposal. Ireland must meet its obligations to the WFD and to restore water quality in Ireland.</p>

35.2	The Commission requests Ireland to reflect more clearly, in its CAP strategic plan, the CAP-relevant needs (and responses to needs) identified in the PAF.	<p>The linkages between CSP interventions and PAF should be reflected in tabular format and also NOT exaggerated. In particular adequate funding for breeding waders, more measures for farmland birds and the integration of the conservation measures required to address the pressures and threats to farmland birds and habitats should be integrated at all levels into the CSP. These are:</p> <p>CODE CONSERVATION MEASURE NAME</p> <p>CA01 Prevent conversion of natural and semi-natural habitats, and habitats of species into agricultural land</p> <p>CA02 Restore small landscape features on agricultural land</p> <p>CA03 Maintain existing extensive agricultural practices and agricultural landscape features</p> <p>CA04 Reinstate appropriate agricultural practices to address abandonment, including mowing, grazing, burning or equivalent measures</p> <p>CA05 Adapt mowing, grazing and other equivalent agricultural activities</p> <p>CA06 Stop mowing, grazing and other equivalent agricultural activities</p> <p>CA07 Recreate Annex I agricultural habitats</p> <p>CA09 Manage the use of natural fertilisers and chemicals in agricultural (plant and animal) production</p> <p>CA10 Reduce/eliminate point pollution to surface or ground waters from agricultural activities</p> <p>CA11 Reduce diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters from agricultural activities</p> <p>CA12 Reduce/eliminate air pollution from agricultural activities</p> <p>CA15 Manage drainage and irrigation operations and infrastructures in agriculture</p>	<p>The CAP SP does not do enough to deliver the priority needs in the PAF relating to maintenance and restoration measures for species and habitats, with particular reference to priority habitats such as Heathlands and shrubs, Bogs, mires, fens and other wetlands, Grasslands, Other agroecosystems (incl. croplands), Woodlands and forests, Freshwater habitats (rivers and lakes).</p> <p>The PAF highlights notable breeding bird species relevant to this MAES group that have undergone severe long-term breeding range declines including mainly breeding waders. While some of the upland species will benefit from the ongoing funding afforded to the Hen Harrier project there are a number of species on the list and in particular the breeding waders which are not afforded enough targeted conservation measures within the CAP SP. The PAF also outlines a list of 'Measures needed to maintain or restore favourable conservation status'. The list contains conservation measures required to address the threats and pressures to each habitat and species, as reported by the Article 17 process. The points relating to agricultural activities are poorly addressed in the CAP SP.</p>
35.2	It also invites Ireland to consider a more ambitious goal with regard to improving the status of agricultural habitats. Ireland is invited to consider further action on freshwater habitats, heathlands, mires and bogs, particularly those outside Natura 2000 areas.	Include Annex 1 habitats and Habitats of Natura 2000 sites in land eligibility criteria. Include freshwater habitats, fens, marshes that are not grazed in GAEC 8 non-productive areas. Ensure that they are also referenced in Space for Nature ecoscheme.	<p>The submission from the Department of Housing, Community and Local Government (DCHLG) comment to the SEA specifically presses for greater ambition in this area which was disregarded. This should be revisited. DCHLG comment "it is proposed to allow up to 30% of a parcel consisting of features that may be beneficial to water protection, climate or biodiversity to be considered eligible: The DCHLG recommends that Natura 2000 Annex 1 habitats and habitats of Natura 2000 species are prioritised to be included within the 30%. This will require upskilling of farmers and advisors to identify such habitats. Annex 1 habitats should be recorded on LPIS and these maps should be available for Article 17 reporting.</p>
35.2	while welcoming the statement that by 2030 "10% of Ireland's farmed area will be prioritised for biodiversity", the Commission requests clarification of what that would mean in practice	Allocate higher payment for Space for Nature ecoscheme to a level that supports provision of ecological advice to farmers and to reward and support farmers for landscape features that supports better quality habitats. E.G. appropriate cutting regimes for hedgerows etc.	<p>The EU Biodiversity Strategy calls for High Diversity Landscape features to be featured. Studies show that only 1/3 of hedgerows in Ireland are of good quality. These are not high diversity landscape features. Support for encouraging their appropriate management to support biodiversity is needed.</p>
35.3	The Commission notes that Ireland's CAP strategic plan will not address the identified need of maximising the contribution of forestry to biodiversity, as other instruments will do this. Given the importance of this need, the Commission seeks reasoned assurances from Ireland that the instruments concerned will be improved as required to meet the need.	Ensure that all tree planting schemes in CSP are screened to avoid peat soils, semi-natural grasslands and important habitats for ground nesting birds. Ensure tree planting supports existing woodlands/hedgerows. Ensure that only scrub, native woodlands that are 'nonproductive' are included in GAEC 8.	<p>In order to maximise the contribution of forestry to biodiversity more native provenance trees need to be planted and in the right places avoiding important areas for groundnesting birds, semi-natural grasslands. Forestry sensitivity mapping is needed.</p>

35.4	GAEC 2 peatlands: but would be grateful for provisional indications of the requirements which Ireland is considering applying under the GAEC standard, given the high presence of peatland in the country.	Require ban on drainage and ban on burning of GAEC 2 peatlands and wetlands.	A ban of drainage, ban of burning of peatland should be included as a minimum. Important to ensure that the detail links in with the Natura Impact Statement. The NIS states that As part of this GAEC infilling/inversion ploughing and the conversion of lands from permanent grassland to arable will be restricted in agricultural areas/eligible hectares that are identified as peatland and wetlands. It is likely that most eligible wetlands and peatlands identified under this GAEC are managed as permanent grassland and that these are located in close proximity to existing non-agricultural wetland and peatland habitats.
35.5	The comment in Part A of this letter about Ireland's proposed multi-option eco-scheme is relevant to specific objective 6. The Commission welcomes the practices proposed within the eco-scheme for improving on-farm biodiversity -particularly the options on "space for nature" (involving 7-10% of non-productive areas and features across all agricultural land, i.e. a requirement beyond the strengthened GAEC standard 8), and on the planting of hedgerows and trees. However, the Commission has a concern that the approach of setting a single compensation rate for all the various options of the eco-scheme could make these particular options less popular with farmers and limit their uptake. The Commission therefore considers it potentially important to ensure that these options would be adequately rewarded in comparison to others.	Allocate higher payment for Space for Nature ecoscheme to a level that supports provision of ecological advice to farmers and to reward and support farmers for landscape features that supports better quality habitats. E.G. appropriate cutting regimes for hedgerows etc.	Commission calls for more ambitious measures to be rewarded commensurately. And we agree. See points above in relation to Space for Nature ecoscheme payments.
35.6	The CAP strategic plan includes few direct actions on birds and habitats, particularly farmland birds (e.g. ground nesting species, breeding waders), although these issues seem to be covered throughout several interventions. Ireland is asked to make the contribution of the CAP strategic plan on these issues explicit to ensure that the challenges related to the worsening trend in biodiversity are adequately addressed.	Fund the Breeding Wader EIP to €30m as per BirdWatch Ireland proposal. Expand and fund CP areas to wider geographical area. Include additional farmland bird schemes in general AECM for Kestrel, Yellowhammer and Chough.	Ireland must make explicit the contribution of CAP SP to birds and habitats, particularly farmland birds (e.g. ground nesting species, breeding waders) to ensure that issues are adequately addressed. Additional schemes and targeting are required for farmland birds within the AECM. See the BirdWatch Ireland analysis of the AECM here <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-AECM-and-EcoScheme-Review.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-AECM-and-EcoScheme-Review.pdf</a> .
36	Ireland is requested to better demonstrate the increased ambition of the planned green architecture as regards environmental and climate-related objectives, using qualitative and quantitative elements such as financial allocation and indicators.	A significant revision is required on the weightings in GAEC 8 and to cease the inflation of the biodiversity benefit of these aswell as some of the conversion factors.	See BirdWatch Ireland submission on weightings. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf</a>
38	Ireland is invited to further develop the description of statutory management requirements 3 and 4, aimed at the protection and conservation of wild birds and habitats.	This is very important. Clear descriptions of what is allowed and not allowed to meet the requirements of the relevant Birds and Habitats Directives articles. Prevent conversion of natural and semi-natural habitats, and habitats of species into agricultural land to meet Birds Directive requirements.	See BirdWatch Ireland submission. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-Submission-on-SMRs-3-and-4.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-Submission-on-SMRs-3-and-4.pdf</a>
46	While the CAP strategic plan acknowledges the need to increase awareness of healthy diets, interventions proposed seem to be limited. The Commission therefore invites Ireland to better explain how the shift towards healthy, more plant-based and sustainable diets will be achieved.	Increase the level of aid for tillage for human consumption. Remove the turnover threshold for horticulture Producer Organisations so that smaller horticulture farmers can access funding.	See Talamh Beo submission. <a href="https://talamhbeo.ie/projects/cap-submission/">https://talamhbeo.ie/projects/cap-submission/</a>

68	In section 4.1.1.2, the definition of maintenance of agricultural area (for arable land, permanent crops and permanent grassland) includes reference to controlled burning. Clarity is needed on how this complies with GAECs 1, 2 and 9, and with the National Emission reduction Commitments Directive (Directive (EU) 2016/2284) targets on air quality.	Burning of farm habitats in Ireland is not adequately controlled. Until it is completely regulated and applied in specific conditions it should be discouraged. Currently burning of habitats to provide palatable vegetation for livestock can cause significant damage to habitats and wildlife. Illegal burning during the breeding period (March 1-August 31) should be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators penalised. Any burning occurring in the legal period should be checked for consent received from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure that it complies with the Activities Requiring Consent if in Natura 2000 network and national legislation.	BirdWatch Ireland has submitted a complaint to the European Commission due to the scale of the destruction from burning of habitats in Natura 2000 and commonage. Hundreds of thousands of hectares have been burnt on peat soils and Annex 1 habitats in particular compromising their ability to function and devastating habitats for a range of wildlife including threatened farmland and upland bird species.
70	information should be provided as regards the definition of agroforestry, such as tree density, size, distribution in relation to pedo-climatic conditions or management practices (whether or not differentiated per type of agricultural area).	Agro-forestry should be supported in appropriate areas and avoid important areas for sensitive groundnesting birds	
96	Ireland is requested to confirm that wetlands will be afforded the same protection as peatlands.	This confirmation is important but must also be clearly communicated to farmers.	
100	GAEC 6: Ireland is requested to define the sensitive period(s) and the appropriate minimum requirements to avoid bare soils.	Winter stubble should be allowed to support wintering farmland birds. Several species that depend on arable land are severely threatened and would benefit from winter stubble habitat.	
101	However, in the Commission's views, the option of fulfilling an annual rotation with a winter cover crop could be feasible for all farmers. The duration of the cover crop should be specified to ensure a significant break period between the main types of tillage crops. It is possible to differentiate the rules on cover crops according to farm size if a justification is provided.	Winter stubble for seed eating birds should be allowed.	
102	The Commission considers that the intention to extend the requirement for a minimum share of landscape features and non-productive areas to all agricultural areas needs to be further discussed in the light of the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115	The extension of the requirement to all agricultural land is welcome and should be encouraged. Please do not remove this.	
103	The Commission notes that Ireland proposes to allow farmers to remove tree lines and hedgerows, as long as double the length is planted first and within a 10 km radius. However, Ireland is requested to clearly provide in GAEC 8 that farmers can only perform hedgerow removal on the basis of a prior administrative authorisation and that removals should be strictly limited to the need of land consolidation	Ireland and the European Commission must cease facilitating this exemption which allows Irish farmers to remove landscape features such as hedgerows. It has no legal basis and must end. Until DAFM puts in place a robust assessment system to allow any deviation from the requirement to retain landscape features, there should absolutely be no allowance for removal of landscape features. There should be no removal for land consolidation.	

103	it should be ensured that the areas sown with a specific crop mix to provide feed for wild birds and grassland space for nature are not used for production or grazing. The conversion factor of 3 and a weighting factor of 2 for stonewalls seem difficult to justify.	Wild bird cover is non productive for livestock. This should be allowed in GAEC 8. Require removal in GAEC 8 non-productive areas of ASSAP areas which are productive. Overhaul all weightings (not just stonewalls) as they are mostly inflating the biodiversity benefit which is a disgrace.	See BirdWatch Ireland spreadsheet on weightings. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/05/BirdWatch-Ireland-suggested-weightings.pdf</a>
104	Moreover, forests (afforested area), commonages and Natura 2000 areas are not eligible for the calculation of the share, as they cannot be considered non-productive agricultural areas. However, woody features / groups of trees of a limited extent at the edge of agricultural areas or located in the parcels can be considered landscape features.	Noted. Please add non-productive aquatic habitats that are in Natura and other freshwater habitats, marshes, fens etc to this group of non-productive areas to replace commonage, semi-natural grasslands. Use Fossit guide to habitats for list of wetland habitats.	
105	Ireland is invited to consider a large definition of these areas, taking into account the current grassland status and trends in the recent report[1] on the conservation of protected grassland habitats, and the objective to achieve a good conservation status of these valuable grasslands	Utilise the GIS mapped grasslands from the NPWS 2007-2012 semi-natural grasslands survey (1000+ grassland sites) as well as known ESPG in Natura sites. This is the minimum. Where known peat grasslands outside of Natura are mapped include them also. Ensure that farmers with ESPG are given priority eligibility for Low Input Permanent Grassland AECM scheme.	See BirdWatch Ireland submission on ESPG. <a href="https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/04/BirdWatch-Ireland-Submission-ESPG-GAEC-9.pdf">https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2022/04/BirdWatch-Ireland-Submission-ESPG-GAEC-9.pdf</a> Ireland is losing important semi-natural grasslands to intensification, conversion to forestry and land abandonment as outlined in the 2007-2012 grasslands survey (O'Neill et al 2013) and the resurvey of 3 Annex 1 grasslands (Martin et al 2018) as well as several other national and local surveys. Semi-natural grasslands, supported by low input and low-intensity grazing, are very important for a range of bird species, invertebrates, plant species including those protected under Flora Protection Orders. Bird species known to be supported by semi-natural grasslands include the following Red and Amber listed Birds of Conservation Concern2, Barn Owl, Curlew, Lapwing, Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Kestrel, Snipe, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Short-eared owl. There's been a 45% increase in the number of farmland birds added to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland between 1998-2020 due to loss of and degradation of habitat mainly. The Irish government must do everything in its power to halt these losses and safeguard habitats through every possible measure.
111	This can discourage the farmers' uptake of the most demanding practices such as planting trees/hedgerows or maintenance of landscape features/non-productive areas. The Commission considers that keeping a reasonable link between the unit amounts and the calculation of costs incurred and income foregone could avoid that the more demanding practices are side-lined by the less demanding ones. Ireland is requested to explain how it is intended to ensure an adequate uptake for the practices with a higher environmental effect, in line with Article 31(8) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, stipulating that Member States shall use a rating or scoring system or any other appropriate methodology to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of eco-schemes to deliver on the targets set.	Allocate higher payment for Space for Nature ecoscheme to a level that supports provision of ecological advice to farmers and to reward and support farmers for landscape features that supports better quality habitats. E.G. appropriate cutting regimes for hedgerows etc.	

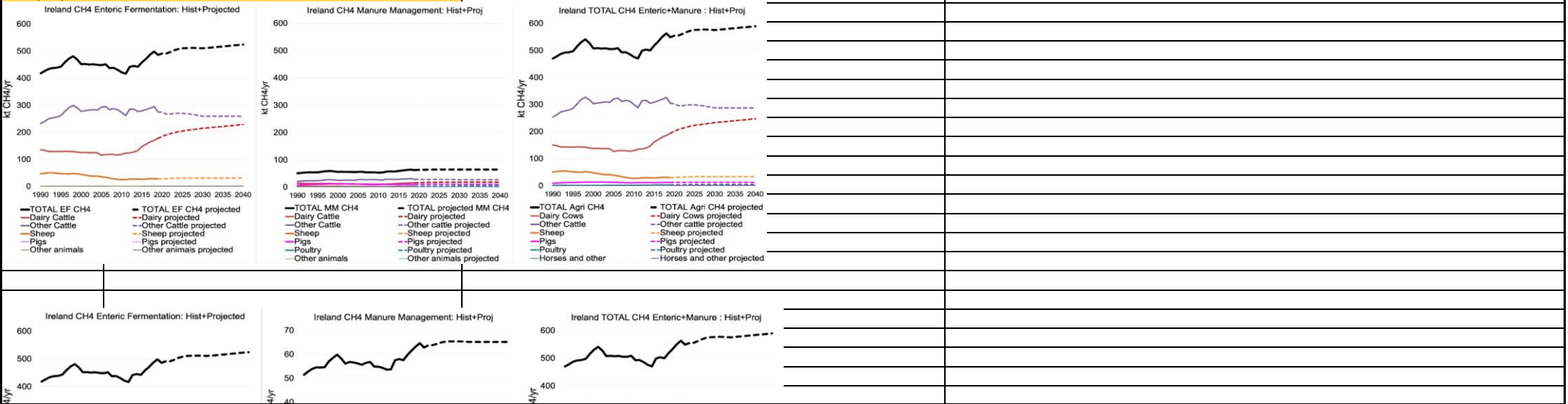


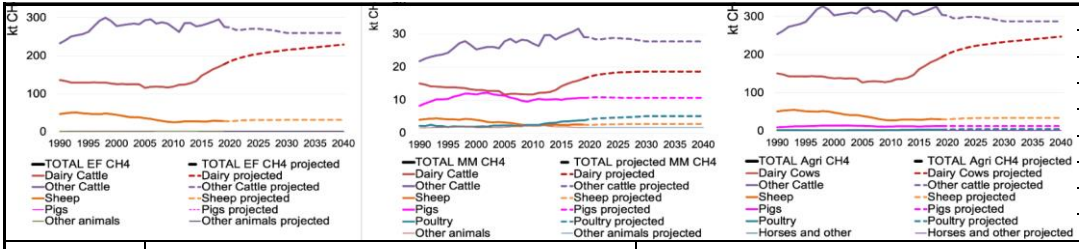
112	Moreover, the choice of practices is not framed and there is no incentive for farmers to subscribe to practices that can be more synergetic and lead to a higher environmental benefit (e.g. practices 3 and 5, practices 5 and 6, possibly practices 2 and 8).	Agreed. Lower stocking rates appropriate to habitat types is required. This requires scientific advice. Remove the tech spreader/sprayer ag practices.	
113	the level of payment shall nevertheless take into account the level of sustainability and ambition of each eco-scheme, based on objective and transparent criteria. The statement that the level of payment will depend on the uptake is not in line with the legal framework, as it implies that the level of support does not depend on the requirements.	Allocate higher payment for Space for Nature ecoscheme to a level that supports provision of ecological advice to farmers and to reward and support farmers for landscape features that supports better quality habitats. E.G. appropriate cutting regimes for hedgerows etc. And allocate higher payment for High Nature Value farmers with lower stocking rate.	
114	Considering the arguments above as well as the modest environmental value-added that some practices seem to have, it is uncertain that this eco-scheme would result in a substantial change of practices on the ground and ultimately in an improvement of the farming footprint on environment and climate. Ireland is invited to consider these arguments and to strive for an eco-scheme that ensures a balanced approach between simplicity and appropriate environmental/climate ambition.	Allocate higher payment for Space for Nature ecoscheme to a level that supports provision of ecological advice to farmers and to reward and support farmers for landscape features that supports better quality habitats. E.G. appropriate cutting regimes for hedgerows etc. And allocate higher payment for High Nature Value farmers with lower stocking rate.	
115	.The choice to select three result indicators for the overall eco-scheme does not seem an optimal approach to capture the contribution of the different practices to specific objectives. Only the practices that contribute directly and significantly to a result indicator should be attributed to this indicator. Consequently, only the hectares (outputs) planned for the practices linked to a specific result indicator should be taken into account when setting the milestone/target for that specific indicator. Ireland is invited to review table 11 and plan separate unit amounts for each practice (or group of practices) and set specific result indicators for the specific practices.	Revision required.	
118	This practice proposes a commitment of maximum 1.5 livestock units/hectare for 7 months. The stocking rate value may be environmentally beneficial in some more intensively managed regions, but it will be automatically achieved in other regions. Ireland is invited to provide an indication of expected benefits in terms of maintenance and change of practice, by clarifying how many farms already comply with the required threshold, since the practice targets all livestock farmers.	Farmers in High Nature Value farmland areas should receive higher payment for demonstrated lower stocking rate. Stocking rate should match soil types and habitats.	

119	This practice offers a good potential to de-intensify improved grassland areas and avoid further intensification, provided that the proposed compensation to dairy and beef farmers is sufficient to ensure uptake and an appropriate level of maximum livestock units/hectare is set. It could also be considered to encourage livestock farmers to take this practice in combination with practice 8 on multi-species sward.	Grazing (and the farming enterprise) should be at levels appropriate to the soil type and habitat type and proximity to water bodies.	
120	This practice involves a substitution of chemical fertilisers by organic ones, but not necessarily a reduction in the use of fertilisers. Moreover, the average use of mineral fertiliser was 82.9 kg N/ha UAA in 2018 (latest data available). Therefore, a significant number of farmers would qualify for this payment without any change of practice. Ireland is asked to provide an indication of the expected added value in terms of change of practice. Ireland should also justify the proposed threshold and the rationale for the maximum level of nitrogen usage, which seem high	This is an important point. Ireland must identify lower total fertiliser usage rates.	
146	Ireland is invited to consider programming Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive payments for mandatory requirements established under the relevant planning documents (including the third river basin management plan). This could complement voluntary approaches under other interventions for any area where obligations face an issue of acceptance. This is especially relevant for the new area to be designated for the 10% of strict protection according to the EU biodiversity strategy.	Unclear on what this means.	
149	Ireland is asked to describe how the proposed actions go beyond the standard practice and how they concretely lead to improved animal welfare.	The Sheep Improvement Scheme appears to have a clear link to production considering that the CSP mentions the economic value of it. This is a very questionable scheme. Farmers must ensure that animal dosing/dipping is in line with environmental requirements for bats, waterbodies.	Welcome DAFM measure to support lesser horseshoe bats who are threatened by antihelmics. However, it should be noted that these chemicals threaten all bat species.
151, 152, 153	Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme	Soecifics on effectiveness at national scale would be welcome.	The Natura Impact Statement for this scheme states "Whilst the objective of this measure relates to less time/shorter time required from birth to killing and accompanying reductions in food requirements, energy costs and GHG emissions it is unclear how effective at national scale this will be".
160	Large-scale drainage actions, which may cause emissions from organic soils, are mentioned. Ireland is asked to clarify under what circumstances support for drainage would be proposed.	Clarification would be welcome	

163	Suckler Carbon efficiency: Ireland is invited to better explain the overall emissions reduction the precursor schemes delivered, the data used for assessing this and the limiting conditions that will be put in place to ensure an overall net emission reduction from this intervention. In this regard, links with area-related conditions such as reduced stocking density could be explored, since this intervention is proposed as an agri-environment-climate management commitment under Article 70 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 to be paid per hectare. Ireland is invited to consider including low-protein diet and other feeding strategies to reduce methane and ammonia emissions into this intervention. Ireland is asked to explain how the productive effects of this intervention have been taken into account.	Strongly agree - Support the call for clarification on how the scheme will prevent efficiency gains being offset by increased production. Call for measures that will ensure an overall net emission reduction such as a cap on herd size for participants or an extensification requirement for reduced stocking density. Ireland should indicate the projected emissions reductions anticipated as the result of this measure.	Ireland's methane emissions from livestock continue to increase but fairness is also required as the fastest growth is associated with the dairy herd. Measures to tackle methane from dairy are required. See next table for EPA projections on methane emissions. Citation for these charts: With Existing Measures: EPA (2021) GHG Inventory – Detailed EPA Agriculture workbook for "With Existing Measures" (WEM) . With Additional Measures: EPA (2021) GHG Inventory – Detailed EPA Agriculture workbook for "With Additional Measures" (WAM)
166	It is unclear whether straw incorporation would lead to an overall increase in carbon sequestration when compared to the current standard practices. Ireland is asked to describe the logic of this intervention in reducing national net carbon emissions.	Description of GHG emissions reductions would be welcome	
173	The intervention is linked to R.31 (biodiversity), while the description of the intervention does not justify this link. This should be reviewed.	This link to R31 should be removed as there is NO LINK to biodiversity in the ANC scheme. This is just money for more production. We would support inclusion if defined specific biodiversity, climate or water quality benefits were supported.	

**EPA projections on methane emissions**





Citation for these charts: With Existing Measures: EPA (2021) GHG Inventory – Detailed EPA Agriculture workbook for "With Existing Measures" (WEM) . With Additional Measures: EPA (2021) GHG Inventory – Detailed EPA Agriculture workbook for "With Additional Measures" (WAM) available here <https://sites.google.com/a/dcu.ie/dcuern/files>

[3.A and 3.B CH4] you will see that the historic and the projected values are the same for WEM and WAM for EF and MM, hence the chart legends noting "WEM/WAM" for projected dashed lines.



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