

Submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to the Public Consultation Process on the Proposed Interventions of the Draft CAP Strategy 2023-2027.

September 2021

Introduction to an Fóram Uisce

An Fóram Uisce | The Water Forum was established in June 2018 in accordance with the provisions of Part 5 of the Water Services Act 2017. An Fóram Uisce is the statutory body representative of all stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's water bodies. An Fóram Uisce consists of 26 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality and public water consumers. Approximately 50 different organisations were involved in the nomination of members.

The role of an Fóram is that of a strong independent stakeholder body contributing to water policy, which supports public and stakeholder engagement on all matters relevant to water. One of the strategic themes of an Fóram is reviewing and advising on the implementation of Ireland's River Basin Management Plan, which sets out Ireland's requirements and objectives to meet the EU Water Framework Directive.

Background to Submission

Due to the timing of the short consultation period of the CAP Proposed Interventions, the Water Forum was not able to meet to discuss this consultation as members and staff were on leave at various times in August. The Water Forum would once again like to highlight that the timing and length of this consultation period does not allow for adequate stakeholder and public engagement. While this submission is based on research which was commissioned by the Water Forum, **it is not representative of all views of the Water Forum**. While the Forum recognises there will be a consultation on the CAP Strategic Plan in October/November 2021, the Forum strongly recommends that the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine allow for a longer public consultation period with a commitment for public engagement around the CAP Strategic Plan to allow for adequate stakeholder engagement in the process. Public engagement is critical for the successful policy development and implementation. In 2019, The Water Forum commissioned a research paper on

Public Engagement in Water Governance¹, it recommends that a new and evolved form of inclusive and equitable engagement is essential in the preparing, reviewing, and implementing policy.

Key Recommendations

The Water Forum welcomes the ‘Green Architecture’ outlined in the new CAP, which proposes to address the climate, biodiversity and environmental crises through the enhanced conditionality, the Eco Scheme Intervention of Pillar 1 and the range of climate/environment interventions of Pillar 2. The Forum is very supportive of the proposal that both CAP Pillars ‘will work together in a complementary way’.

The Forum would like to address the following items for consideration for this public consultation.

1. Pillar 1 Eco Schemes

The Water Forum commissioned research in 2020 on ‘Optimising Water Quality Returns from the Reform of CAP’², which was carried out by Dr. Charles Larkin, University of Bath. A key recommendation from this research was that both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 must complement each other and include coherent measures to address the climate, environment and biodiversity crises. Please find attached a Discussion Paper³ prepared by Dr. Alec Rolston which summarises this research. Pillar 1 payments allocated for Eco Schemes are to be reduced, there is the potential for the two Pillars to contradict one another, potentially limiting the chances of reaching the essential national and EU climate and environmental targets.

A key question outlined for this public consultation;

“Should Ireland go beyond the 25% of direct payments to be allocated to eco-schemes? Or should Ireland use the flexibility in the regulation to reduce the percentage allocated to eco-schemes?”

The CAP research commissioned by the Water Forum in 2020¹ is supportive that at least 25% of direct payments under Pillar 1 should be allocated for Eco Schemes and the flexibility in the regulations should not be used to reduce this percentage.

The Water Forum recommends that the Irish Government should subsidise Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 to ensure farmers are supported to transition to more sustainable farming practices. The principle of ‘public money for public goods’ as recommended by the CAP research², should be applied, where public money can be used to support farmers to transition to more environmentally sustainable agriculture, having the potential to benefit farmers economically while protecting and enhancing public goods such as air, water, soil and biodiversity.

¹ Bresnihan and Hesse, 2019. ‘Desk Study on Public Engagement in Water Governance Prepared for An Fóram Uisce’ [Water-Forum Public-Participation Bresnihan-and-Hesse 2019.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

² Larkin, C. “Optimising Water Quality Returns from the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): A Rapid Assessment Report,” An Foram Uisce, 2020. [CAP-Reform-Report-to-An-Foram-Uisce_FINAL-3.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

³ Rolston, A., 2020. Discussion Note: CAP Reform and Ireland’s Water Environment. [An-Foram-Uisce-Discussion-Note CAP-REFORM.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

2. GAEC 2; Protection of wetland and peatland

The Forum welcomes the proposal that “a dedicated and attractive action for farmers under the Eco Scheme intervention for land re-wetting”, under GAEC 2. The importance of addressing peatlands for climate mitigation and the protection of water, soil and biodiversity was clearly illustrated in the research commissioned by the Water Forum, carried out by Pschenyckyj et al., 2021^{4,5}, ‘Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-Benefits for Climate and Biodiversity’. Some key recommendations from this research in relation to agriculture, are that incentives should be provided for farmers to rewet agricultural peat soils and that rewetting of nutrient-rich organic soils that act as hotspots for CO₂ and N₂O should be prioritised. Emissions from grassland on peat soils is very high, 8 million tonnes per year out of a total of 30 million³. Under GAEC 2, the proposed protection target for wetlands and peatlands is 2025, the Forum recommends more urgent action is taken to protect wetlands and re-wet peatlands for water quality, climate and biodiversity outcomes.

When concern was raised by the agricultural sector that rewetting peatlands could cause flooding on neighbouring farms, Dr. Florence Wilson who lead this Peatlands Research⁴ responded that *“it is difficult to identify the fields that need these measures; to block drains you need to know where they are and rewet successfully rather than flood. Rewetting seeks to make moist they should not be flooded.”* (taken from discussion between lead researchers and Forum members) A report published by the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht, called “Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland”⁶, also indicates that blocking drains can slow the flow of water off the bog thereby potentially reducing the frequency and magnitude of flood events by restoring the hydrological function of the bog. Furthermore, buffer zones can further protect neighbouring farms from any risk of floods. The Forum recommends that when developing plans for rewetting peatlands, that support is sought from those with expertise in successfully rewetted peatlands in Ireland.

‘Working with farmers is key to delivering better ecosystem services from peatlands through rewarding good practice but also incentivising actions for improvements where ecosystem services are poor’, as stated by Derek McLoughlin, at the Forum’s webinar on Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-Benefits for Climate and Biodiversity’ 21/5/21. Derek has 20 years’ experience working with farmers on results-based-projects and currently of the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE project.

Furthermore, the Water Forum recommend that a landscape-based (rather than a farm-based approach) is adopted by the DAFM when developing GAEC 2, which will address farmers concerns about potential impacts of measures being adopted in neighbouring farms. A landscape-scale approach was also recommended by Professor Alan Matthews, an expert on agricultural economics, at the Forum webinar on Optimising water quality returns from the Reform of CAP (4/12/20) who stated that *‘Widespread implementation of successful pilot results-based projects could be highly relevant to future agri-environment schemes. One approach to the next CAP might be to put greater emphasis or premium on collective actions by farmers. Instead of focusing on individual farms, there*

⁴ Pschenyckyj, C. et al. 2021. Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-Benefits for Climate and Biodiversity. [Peatlands_Full_Report_Final_March2021b.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](https://thewaterforum.ie/Peatlands_Full_Report_Final_March2021b.pdf)

⁵ Pschenyckyj, C. et al. 2021. A Synthesis Report; Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-Benefits for Climate and Biodiversity. [Peatlands_Synthesis-Report_Final_April2021.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](https://thewaterforum.ie/Peatlands_Synthesis-Report_Final_April2021.pdf)

⁶ Mackin, F. et al., (2017). Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 99. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Ireland. [Best Practice in Raised Bog Restoration \(bordnamona.ie\)](https://bordnamona.ie/Best_Practice_in_Raised_Bog_Restoration)

are greater environmental benefits with landscape scale changes not just on a farm scale. Farmers can support each other and learn from each other. That way pilot schemes could be brought towards mainstreaming’.

3. Buffer Zones (GAEC 4)

The Forum welcomes the proposal to incorporate buffer strips into GAEC 4 and GAEC 9 of Pillar 1 Eco Schemes. Buffer zones are one of the most common and important measures used to mitigate impacts of farming on water quality from a large range of pollutants and significant issues such as phosphate, total phosphorus, sediment, nitrate, ammonium, pesticides and microbial pathogens⁷. Uniform buffer zones alongside watercourses are already included in regulations such as the GAP Regulations, and are a welcome consideration for the new CAP Strategy as a means of improving biodiversity and protecting water quality.

It is important however, to consider that effectiveness of buffer strips for mitigating impacts on water quality will be dependent on the permeability of the soil, subsoil and bedrock, and on the topography. Therefore, the Forum recommends less emphasis on uniform width buffer zones and that greater consideration be given to requiring spatially targeted extended buffer zones in poorly draining areas where runoff of pollutants is posing a threat to watercourses.

In freely draining areas, a high proportion of rainfall infiltrates vertically underground to the water table, thereby flowing underground and bypassing much of the nearby buffer zones. Buffer zones in freely draining areas therefore provide less protection for water quality from nutrient pollution, although they still have many environmental benefits for biodiversity and hydromorphological integrity. In contrast, in poorly draining soils, a high proportion of effective rainfall must ‘run off’ either as overland flow or shallow subsurface flow. Buffer zones in poorly draining soils enable interception of runoff and are therefore more effective at protecting local watercourses relative to freely draining soils.

Buffer zones are one of the most common and important measures used to mitigate impacts of farming on water quality from a large range of pollutants, along with having multiple benefits for the local environment and biodiversity; benefits include• Enhanced aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.

- A more cost-effective policy tool to achieving national biodiversity and water quality targets.
- As collaboration with farmers would be essential, it enables improved engagement and awareness among farmers of water quality issues and biodiversity in their local area.

Spatially targeted and extended buffer zones in focussed delivery paths for pollutants in poorly draining areas have the potential to have major environmental benefits, including;

- Interception and reduction in phosphate, sediment and pathogen loss to waters from critical source areas in a catchment, achieved by use of extended buffer zones in focused flow delivery zones and zone outlets.

Utilisation of spatially targeted extended buffers need not increase the area of buffer zones as some of the area allocated to uniform width buffers (their width could be decreased) could be repositioned to the water and pollutant flow delivery paths and zones, and could be designed and shaped to suit the local topography, thereby getting optimum benefits from the area allocated to buffer zones.

⁷ NFGWS Handbook of Source Protection and Mitigation Actions for Farming at this link: <https://nfgws.ie/nfgws-source-protection-publications/>

Utilisation of the new EPA Pollution Impact Potential (PIP-P)⁸ maps would aid location of the flow delivery paths and points.

The Forum supports GAEC 4 and the establishment of buffer strips along water courses. Due to the major environmental benefits buffer zones could have in critical areas, the Water Forum recommend that the Irish Government should supplement CAP payments to ensure that these are developed and targeted in areas for maximum results, particularly areas identified as critical source areas. This approach would optimise the benefits of buffer zones for dealing with pollutants such as phosphate, total phosphorus, sediment, ammonium, pesticides and microbial pathogens. It could be useful for Pillar 2 Interventions, and ‘the right measure, in the right place’ proposed for the Agri-Environmental Climate Measure.

4. Pillar 2 Agri-Environment Climate Measure

The Water Forum recommends that **all farmers** can avail of the Pillar 2 Agri-Environment Climate Measure, instead of the current proposed limit of 50,000 farmers. DAFM’s recent Results-Based Environment Agri Pilot Project (REAP) received applications from five times the limit of participants, illustrating the willingness of the farming communities to transition to sustainable farming.

The Water Forum recommends that the Irish Government should subsidise Pillar 2 payments to allow **all farmers** to avail of AEEM. As outlined above, the principle of ‘public money for public goods’ as recommended by the CAP research², should be applied, to protect farmers incomes while protecting and enhancing public goods such as air, water, soil and biodiversity.

The Forum welcomes that the underpinning principle for the AEEM scheme will be ‘the right action, in the right place’, in order to ensure effective targeting of measures to deliver biodiversity, water and climate action in an integrated manner on farms. This is in line with the Forum’s CAP research and associated webinar outputs which highlighted that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach was inadequately sensitive to local conditions, such as soils, geology, habitats, biodiversity and types of farming in order to get optimal environmental improvement and maintenance of water quality. In 2020, the Water Forum adopted the Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management (FILLM)⁹, as the overarching framework for not only catchment management, but also environmental management, (see additional document attached), or downloaded at this link: [Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management](#). The FILLM encourages multidisciplinary and multi-organisational approaches, as well as environmental policy coherence, policy integration and policy implementation.

The view of the Water Forum is that the national CAP Strategy would similarly benefit from the conceptual framework provided by FILLM, as a means of optimising efficiency and effectiveness in achieving environmental outcomes for climate, biodiversity, water quality and soil enhancement. The Forum believe that while designing actions/measures to be included in the new CAP Strategy, that emphasis is placed on those with a range of co-benefits for climate, water, soil and biodiversity to maximise capacity and resource efficiencies (see Table 1 below). The implementation of the new CAP will require cross-component planning where disciplines and organisations from multiple Government departments and agencies should work together in a co-ordinated manner to achieve climate and environmental targets.

⁸ EPA Pollution Impact Potential Maps; [EPA Maps](#)

⁹ The Water Forum, A Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management; [TWF-FILLM-Report-Feb21-v9WEB.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

5. Measures to protect water quality for consideration for Eco Schemes and Agri-Environment Climate Measures

The Water Forum support the measures currently under consideration for inclusion in Eco Schemes in the draft Proposed Interventions of the CAP Strategy outlined on Page 24:

1. Devoting more of their land to non-productive areas
2. High nature value actions such as extensive livestock production, where farmers maintain a low stocking rate
3. Hedgerow management to protect biodiversity
4. Reduced input of chemical nitrogen

The Forum also propose the following measures to be included in the Eco-schemes and Agri-Environment Climate Measures (as per FILLM, Page 20 and Discussion Paper by Alec Rolston), where measures will provide co-benefits for water, climate and biodiversity. See Table 1, which illustrates the range of co-benefits for some the measures below.

1. Incorporating spatially targeted buffer strips along water courses where appropriate, e.g. riparian zones, grass margins
 2. Re-wetting peatlands
 3. Planting of clover and multi-species grasses
 4. Planting hedges alongside water courses and across slopes
 5. Planting cover/catch crops
 6. Undertaking soil nutrient analysis to optimise nutrient application to land
 7. Liming of mineral soil to ensure optimum pH
 8. Agroforestry
 9. Protecting and re-establishing native woodlands
 10. Interception ponds and constructed wetlands
 11. Restricting livestock access to water courses
-
12. The Forum would also support rewarding farmers who take action to mitigate invasive species on their lands, e.g. alongside water courses and draining ditches, and who participate in local biosecurity programmes.

Table 1. Illustration of the range of environmental benefits provided by different farming and forestry practices within the Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management. Taken from Page 20, FILLM.

Management option to address pressures	Water quality	Biodiversity	Flood mitigation	Soil conservation	Landscape	Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
Creation of buffer strips, e.g. riparian zones, grass margins.							
Planting of clover and multi-species grasses			–		–		–
Planting hedges alongside watercourses & across slopes							
Liming of mineral soil to ensure optimum pH		–	–		–		
Agroforestry							
Planting with native woodlands				–			
Interception ponds and constructed wetlands							
Rewetting peatlands				–			



= Management option contributes directly to an environmental benefit



= Management option contributes indirectly to an environment benefit