Recommendations from the EIP Farming and Nature Group for inclusion in the development of the CAP Strategic Plan under the Agri-Environment Climate Measure (AECM)

Summary

- Locally led EIP type projects deliver environmental gains over different farming systems for habitat and species and their structure can be incorporated into the next RDP.
- The use of the Co-operation article (Article 71) will allow the local led, project team structure to continue and expand.
- The operational group managing any Co-operation Project will need a range of actions available to the farmers to achieve the overall objectives of a project. Based on present EIP experience details of necessary actions are outlined. These have been standardised by the EIP farming and Nature Group.
- The suggested proposal of a Stream A and Stream B approach in the next RDP is a suitable structure for continuing the work of EIP projects, however, there are concerns that the overall expenditure ceiling may be the same for each Stream and transfer from one Stream to the other isn't possible.
- EIPs are presently working successfully with farmers involved in existing agri-environment programmes (GLAS). Allowing all farmers access to Stream A in the future with Stream B also available for a farmer in delineated areas should be considered.
- For Stream B to be meaningful, it must have a significant and ambitious budget covering the costs of the proposed actions required by the Co-operation Team to deliver. These actions could be funded under Article 65, 68 and 71 as detailed in the action list.

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Scheme funds projects that allow farmers, scientists and other experts to collaborate together to develop new practices that are environmentally friendly and economically sustainable. In Ireland agri-environment related EIP projects are presently operating in 12 different counties involving up to 3,000 farms across a across a broad spectrum of land types and farming systems, both intensive and extensive. These projects have delivered improvements in species numbers and habitat quality. They have also shown that, if provided with a suitable incentive, farmers will respond.

With the right structure in place within the CAP Strategic Plan these measures can be scaled up and applicable to a much higher number of farmers than the 3000 farmers presently participating in EIP projects. A core requirement in all the EIP work is the preparation of a farm plan that details the baseline condition of the farm and in association with the farmer identifies the actions required to improve conditions for habitat/species within commonage and non-commonage areas. For this to deliver, a local project team is essential that is working with the farmer's needs and the associated biodiversity of the farming system and a landscape level. This requires assessment and planning at landscape level initially, with management priorities and actions developed for delivery at individual farm/LPIS plot level. Starting with this landscape level approach ensures coordinated delivery of the required management over the target area, rather than just hoping individual farmer all choose the correct options.

Therefore in future agri-environment measures, a two tiered approach with a Stream A and a Stream B should be considered, with a Stream A meeting the general agri-environment requirements of the farm with a range of measures but Stream B, like the existing EIP approach, dealing with farmers with a higher level of environmental output and associated with a results based approach. Two major concerns the EIP groups have in terms of the DAFM proposed structure are (1) the proposed financial ceilings and (2) the either/or approach to Stream A and Stream B with no moving between Streams. Based on our experience farmers will make business decisions and if it is financially more favourable and easier to deliver, they will opt for the perceived easier menu-based approach offered in Stream A and it will be difficult to establish the Stream B approach. This is especially important for commonages, where some shareholders may have a small share but could get large payments on their lowland areas through a Stream A scheme.

An alternative would be to allow all farmers to apply for Stream A with Stream B also available in delineated areas. For dispersed or priority species and habitats that do not fall within co-operative areas, a stream B approach should be taken, overlapping where relevant with existing co-operatives, and extending outside these areas where necessary. For priority species i.e. farmland birds, an overarching national approach to their management, both in stream A and B areas, should be co-ordinated and implement by a dedicated co-operative. This allows early implementation of the agri-environment measure (Stream A) and allows time for the establishment of local teams to develop Stream B in targeted areas. Under the Stream B payment ceilings must be high enough to reward improvement and include degressive payments to improve the situation from the results based payments approach. A range of Non Productive Investments (NPIs), targeted at habitat management, would only be available under Stream B. A summarised list of agreed management tools coming from the EIP projects are detailed in Table 1. Some of these actions are applicable to Stream A and Stream B, however in Stream B the project team would determine the work required based on the habitat/ species/landscape requirements. For defined areas, such as commonage, uplands and high quality grassland areas Stream B would be the priority option for habitat management, however habitat options under Stream A could pick up small fragmented areas of natural and semi-natural vegetation in a similar approach as in REAP.

Action no.	AECM actions	Options under this action	Stream A	Stream B	Funding Measure	Notes
1	Water Quality	Field margins (Riparian)	x	x	65	
		Lower impact machinery use	x	x	65	
		Integrated Pest Management	x	x	65	
		Integrated Nutrient Management	x	x	65	
2	Pollinators, Birds	Wild bird cover	x	x	65	Wild bird cover, Herbal Leys, Multispecies swards limited to improved grassland or arable land.
		Tillage Cover Crops	x	x	65	
		Multi Species sward/Clover Pasture	x	x	65	
		Herbal Lay	x	x	65	
		Buffer Strips	x	x	65	
		Field Margins	x	x	65	
3	Hedgerows/Boundaries Walls	Hedge planting and restoration	x	x	65	
		Stonewall building and restoration	x	x	65	
4	Woodland measures and associated trees	Tree planting	x	x	65	
		Natural Regeneration	x	x	65	
		Agro-forestry	x	x	65	
5	Archaeological and Heritage linked	Access provision and repair	x	x	65	Only permissible within Stream A in conjunction with an archaeological report carried out by suitably qualified personnel.
		Archaeological repair/conservation	x	x	65	
		Scrub removal on archaeological features	x	x	65	
		Post-visitor maintenance	x	x	65	
		Lower impact machinery use	x	x	65	
6	Arable options	Overwinter Cropping Incentive	x	x	65	
		Infiltration - Annual Cropping	x	x	65	
		Infiltration - Permanent Feature	x	x	65	
		Under cropping	x	x	65	
7	Soil management	Soil Carbon Retention	x	x	65	Limited to improved grassland and arable fields
		Soil Species Richness	x	x	65	
8	Habitats management of lanscape with	Grassland Scheme (Basic)	x	x	65	Results based programmes above the basic grassland with a higher associated quality within a Stream B
		Results Based grassland Scheme		x	71	
		Curlew bird options	x	x	65	
		Traditional Hay meadow	x	x	65	
		Upland habitat option (RBS)		x	71	
		Upland Habitat option (Basic)	x	x	65	
		Pond creation	x	x	65	
		Habitat retention	x	x	65	
9	Commonage	Commonage measure:Commonage group formation		x	71	
		Commonage group support		x	71	
		Commonage plans		x	71	
		Delivery of commonage plans		x	71	

Action no.	AECM actions	Options under this action	Stream A	Stream B	Funding Measure	Notes
10	Habitat Management Tools	Control of encroaching scrub Access improvements to aid habitat management Provision of water Control of unwanted animal species Fencing for habitat management Sediment traps Targeted grazing management for habitat enhancement Controlled Burning Specific actions required for habitat management Creation / reprofiling of drains Wader Scrape creation Peat/plastic dams Drain Management		 x x x x x x x x x x x x	 68 68 68 68 68 68 68 68 68 68 68 68	NPI actions specifically targeted within co-operation groups
11	Landscape scale actions	Farm management plans for baseline and habitat works		x	71	
12	Farming systems	No pesticide options Protein Crops/Red Clover Mixed Enterprise Smallholding Smallholding Farm Advisory Supplement Farmland Bee Colonies	x x x x x	x x x x x	65 65 ? ? 65	
13	Knowledge transfer	Habitat management Training Specialist pre entry advisory	x x	 x	 71	
14	Other	Small Machinery (Field) Supplement Abandoned Agricultural Land Restoration		x x	? ?	Within a Co-operation group structure based on needs