

Submitted on behalf of Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann to the Public Consultation on the Environmental Assessment of the draft CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Background:

The offshore islands of Ireland have supported communities for thousands of years and throughout history farming was, and still is, an integral part of island life. Although farming on the islands is difficult, islanders are absolute in their conviction to meet the challenges and to continue to safeguard their farms and environment. Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, as the representative body for the offshore islands, are submitting this document as part of the current CAP consultation process. Our offshore island farms are some of the best examples of sustaining and protecting our environment and biodiversity while also crucial to maintaining the landscapes of the islands.

The continuation of farming on the islands increases sustainability of the island populations which is vital to every island's future and is in keeping with government policy which states: "A central objective of the Government is to ensure that sustainable vibrant communities continue to live on the islands". (Department of Rural and Community Development). Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann have outlined the following support measures to ensure that island farming can continue and grow in a sustainable manner for future generations.

Recognition of the Islands in the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027:

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann proposes that where cooperation projects are developed that 'Offshore Islands' are specified in relation to any proposed mainland hinterland projects. Co-management and partnership is an important theme for islands with other stakeholders.

With this in mind Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann is proposing that islands deserve a specific mention under the following sections in the CAP Strategic Plan which will ensure that the special circumstances of offshore islands are recognised and that the future sustainability of island farming, the environment and biodiversity is to the forefront to meet the challenges ahead.

- Co-operation Measure-Article 77, p394: 'Offshore Islands' should be a priority objective in this section.
- Page 405: where the document says ".....available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas...." Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann would request that "including the offshore islands" would be added to the sentence. (full text: "*..available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas including offshore islands*").
- Page 442: Competitive Calls-Stream B where it states; "Innovative approaches to farming in Coastal areas" Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann would request that "and offshore islands." would be added to the sentence. (full text: "*Innovative approaches to farming in Coastal areas and Offshore Islands*").

Essential Financial Supports for Island Farming:

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann made the request for additional funding in the past and thankfully were successful with the island increase under the ANC/ASC and TAMS categories. This led to the Island Farming Scheme with the new designation of Areas of Specific Constraints (Island Farming). This was a very welcome development for the islands and the extra financial support that is currently available must be maintained and strengthened. Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann are requesting additional financial support through the establishment of an offshore island category across all available agriculture funding schemes under the next CAP Strategic Plan, as listed under the table of indicative allocation per intervention, to ensure the viability of our offshore farms.

Rural Development Programmes:

Given the enormous potential for the revitalisation of island and rural communities Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann proposes that measures to promote and support remote employment be embedded in all aspects of the Rural Development Programme.

LEADER:

The islands are unique under LEADER in that they are spread out geographically along the western seaboard encompassing four counties and two languages. The bottom-up approach and the experience built up over the years, in terms of human resources and expertise of island based staff, is essential for successful animation

of projects in island communities under the LEADER programme. In the next call for submissions for Local Development Strategies it is vital for a separate distinct call for a national islands strategy. This strategy must have a dedicated ring fenced budget recognising the additional difficulties with islands and acknowledge this through funding that addresses the diverse nature of the additional costs associated with rural island life.

Conclusions:

Island farming communities are dependent on the available agricultural schemes and programmes, therefore the need to increase the funding for islands is paramount to the continued activity across the offshore islands. The farming community ensures the preservation of the landscapes and ecosystems along with being a major contributor to the economic activity of island populations. Maintaining and growing the agricultural sector on the offshore islands is difficult when working under the constraints of isolation, high infrastructure and transport costs, land quality and income issues. Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann is requesting that this document is recognised in the urgent context of securing the future of offshore islands through the relevant government and European funding mechanisms committing to increasing island farm payments and island based programmes.

Furthermore, Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann are very willing to set up an agricultural sub committee, or have one set up directly by the Department of Agriculture, which would involve the relevant stakeholders. The work of this committee would involve 'island proofing' of future policies and measures to ensure that island based farming and programmes are not negatively impacted. What may work on the mainland might not be transferable in full/part to the islands. Also, the work of the committee could examine other areas where islands can be at the centre. As two examples, the committee would oversee the collection of baseline island agricultural data which would help the work of the committee in making appropriate decisions on policy issues. The committee could also examine pilot projects which can be trialled on the islands with a view to producing case studies and best practice. For example: Biodiversity and Biosecurity, Local Food Production, Next Generation Farmers, Succession, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.