



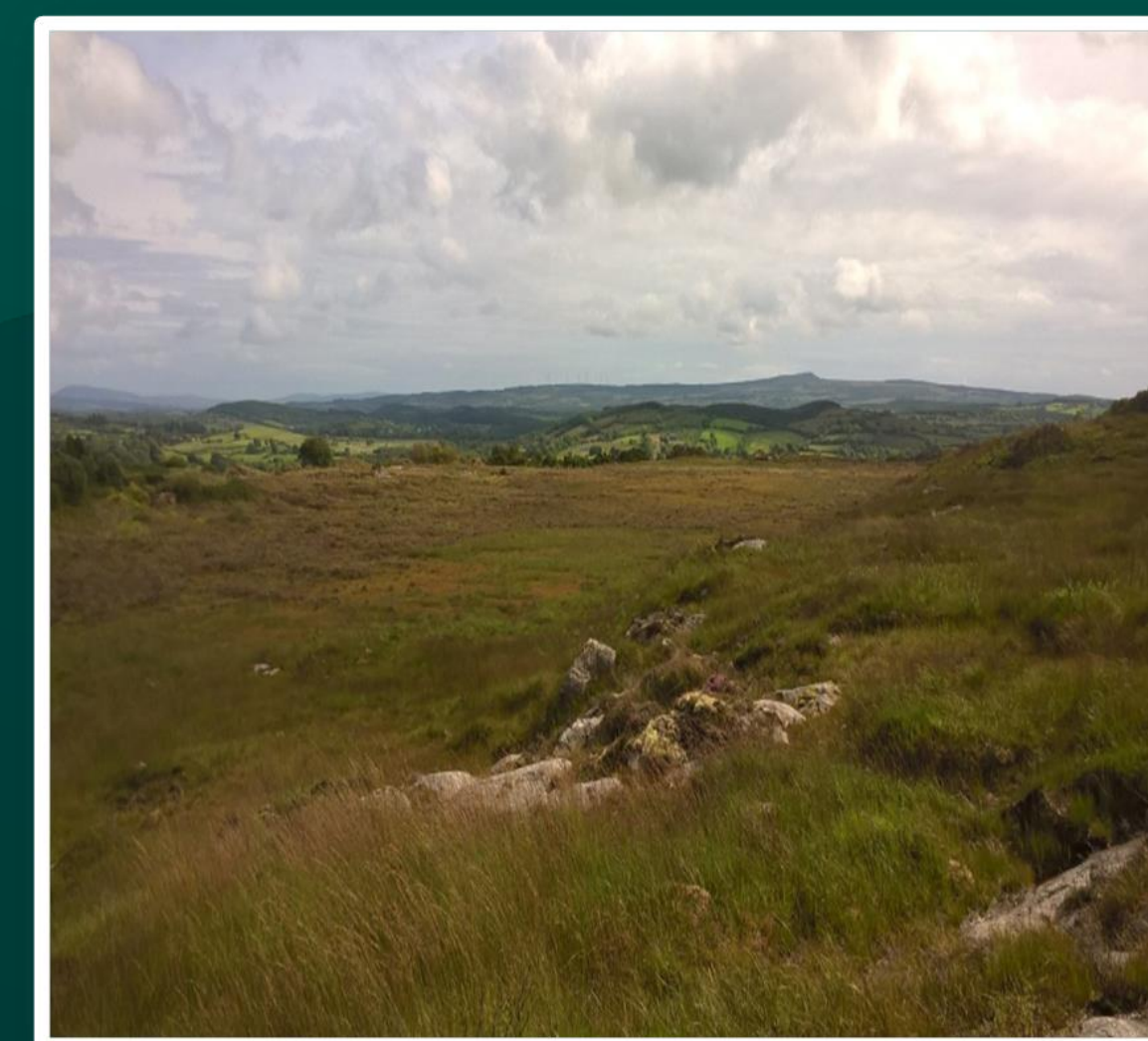
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Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

# Standard for Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition of Land (GAEC)

## GAECs 3, 4, 5 & 6

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Agricultural Inspector





# Introduction



- GAEC requires land to be kept in good agricultural and environmental condition
- GAEC standards now consist of nine standards related to:

**Soil**

**Protection and  
maintenance of  
soil organic  
matter**

**Protection of  
habitats**

**Protection of  
water sources**

- Council Regulation 2021/2115 -  
Annex III





# Previous CAP Cross Compliance GAEC Standards



GAEC 1 – Establishment of buffer strips along watercourses.

GAEC 2 – Where use of water for irrigation is subject of authorisation, compliance and authorisation procedures (Not applicable)

GAEC 3 – Protection of Groundwater against pollution.

GAEC 4 – Minimum soil cover.

GAEC 5 – Minimum land management reflecting site specific conditions to limit erosion.

GAEC 6 – Maintenance of soil organic matter through appropriate practices.

GAEC 7 – Retention of landscape features.

# The GAEC's under Conditionality



**GAEC 1** Maintenance of permanent grassland based on a ratio of permanent grassland in relation to agricultural area **(formally part of BPS Greening)**.

**GAEC 2** Minimum protection of wetland and peatland at the latest by 2024. **NEW**

**GAEC 3** Ban on burning arable stubble, except for plant health reasons.

**GAEC 4** Establishment of buffer strips along water courses.

**GAEC 5** Tillage management or other appropriate cultivation techniques to limit the risk of soil degradation.

**GAEC 6** Minimum soil cover.

**GAEC 7** Crop rotation or other practices aiming at preserving the soil potential, such as crop diversification **(formally part of BPS Greening)**.

**GAEC 8** Minimum share (4%) of agricultural area devoted to non-productive features **(formally part of BPS Greening)**, retention of landscape features, ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season & measures for avoiding invasive plant species.

**GAEC 9** Ban on converting or ploughing permanent grassland in Natura 2000 sites designated as environmentally-sensitive permanent grasslands (ESPG) **(formally part of BPS Greening)**.

# The GAECs under Conditionality (1)



**GAEC 3**      **Ban on burning arable stubble, except for plant health reasons (**formally GAEC 6**).**

Objective Maintenance of soil organic matter; no changes in requirements from 2022

**GAEC 4**      **Establishment of buffer strips along water courses (**Formally GAEC 1**).**

Objective to protect water quality; increase in buffer zones in 2023

# The GAECs under Conditionality (2)



**GAEC 5 Tillage management, reducing the risk of soil degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient (Formally GAEC 4 and 5).**

Objective is soil protection and quality; **No major changes - No bare land for more than 4 months**

**GAEC 6 Minimum soil cover to avoid bare soil in periods that are most sensitive (Formally GAEC 5).**

Objective is protection of soils in periods that are most sensitive ; **No major changes – deals with poaching/rutting issues to land.**

# GAEC 3



## Ban on burning arable stubble, except for plant health reasons

**AIM:** To maintain soil organic matter levels

- Is there evidence of burning of crop residues, such as straw or straw stubble, without prior approval from DAFM?
- Encourages the incorporation of arable stubble into the soil which improves soil organic matter and soil health



# GAEC 3:





# GAEC 4



## Establishment of buffer strips along watercourses

**Aim:** To protect watercourses against pollution and run-off from agricultural sources.

- Restrict the application and storage of chemical and organic fertilisers along waters and beside wells/boreholes.
- Compliance with SMR 2 (Nitrates) buffer limits satisfies this GAEC standard.
- **New control:** Has a 4m non-cultivated vegetated buffer been provided along water feature boundaries where non-grass forage crops are being grazed in-situ?

# GAEC 5



**Tillage management, reducing the risk of soils degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient.**

**Aim:** To protect soil from erosion by ensuring minimum land management and minimum soil cover.

- Ploughing restrictions for grassland and arable land are the same as outlined under SMR 2
- Avoid leaving land bare and without any cover on the soil for prolonged periods of time (max. of 4 months).

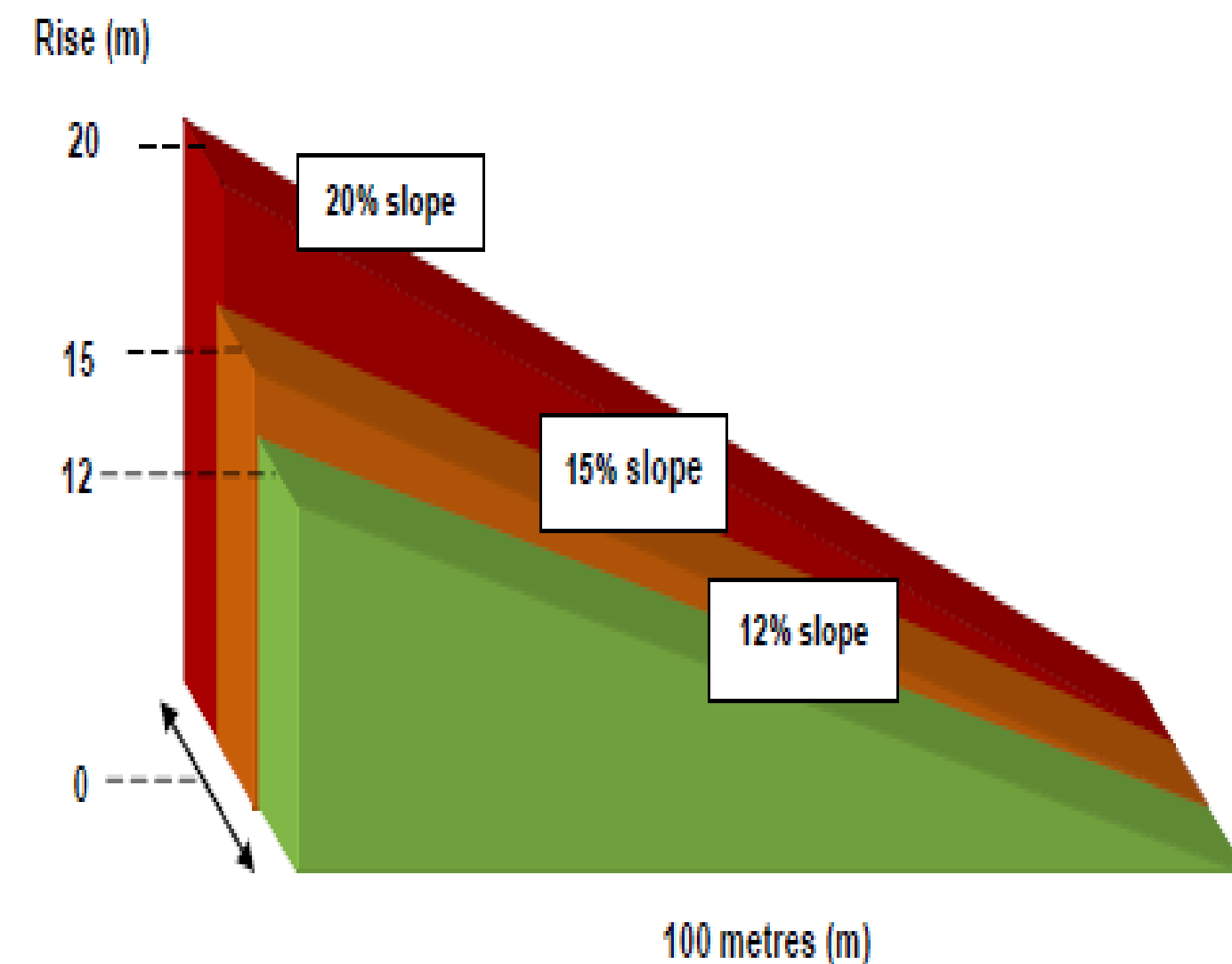


# GAEC 5

Restrictions on the ploughing of arable land with a slope of 15% or more and grassland with a slope of 20% or more



- These lands cannot be ploughed between 01 December and 31 December.
- Effectively this requirement is delaying ploughing by one month where there is sloping ground





# GAEC 5



- Are there any other activities likely to cause soil degradation or erosion, e.g., inappropriate use of machinery, poor cropping practices and crop structures, finely tilled soils not in the process of crop establishment
  - Most common: The use of heavy machinery when the soil is saturated can damage the soil structure.





# GAEC 6



## Minimum soil cover to avoid bare soil in periods that are most sensitive

**Aim:** to limit or reduce soil erosion by promoting minimum soil cover on grassland and arable land.

- Promoting minimum soil cover on grassland and arable land
- Minimise soil loss and damage due to the actions of livestock during sensitive periods

Control question examples (existing):

- Are the conditions in respect of the use of non-selective herbicide (NSH) on grassland being observed, e.g., establishment and retention of green cover following the use of NSH's at certain times during the year? (addressed under SMR 2)
- Is there evidence of rutting or poaching damage to permanent pasture grassland caused by animal grazing activity or the inappropriate use of non-tillage machinery?
- Is there evidence of severe poaching leading to soil erosion in grassland particularly e.g., around supplementary feeding points, the creation of sacrifice paddocks?



# GAEC 6 - poaching





# GAEC 6





# GAEC 6

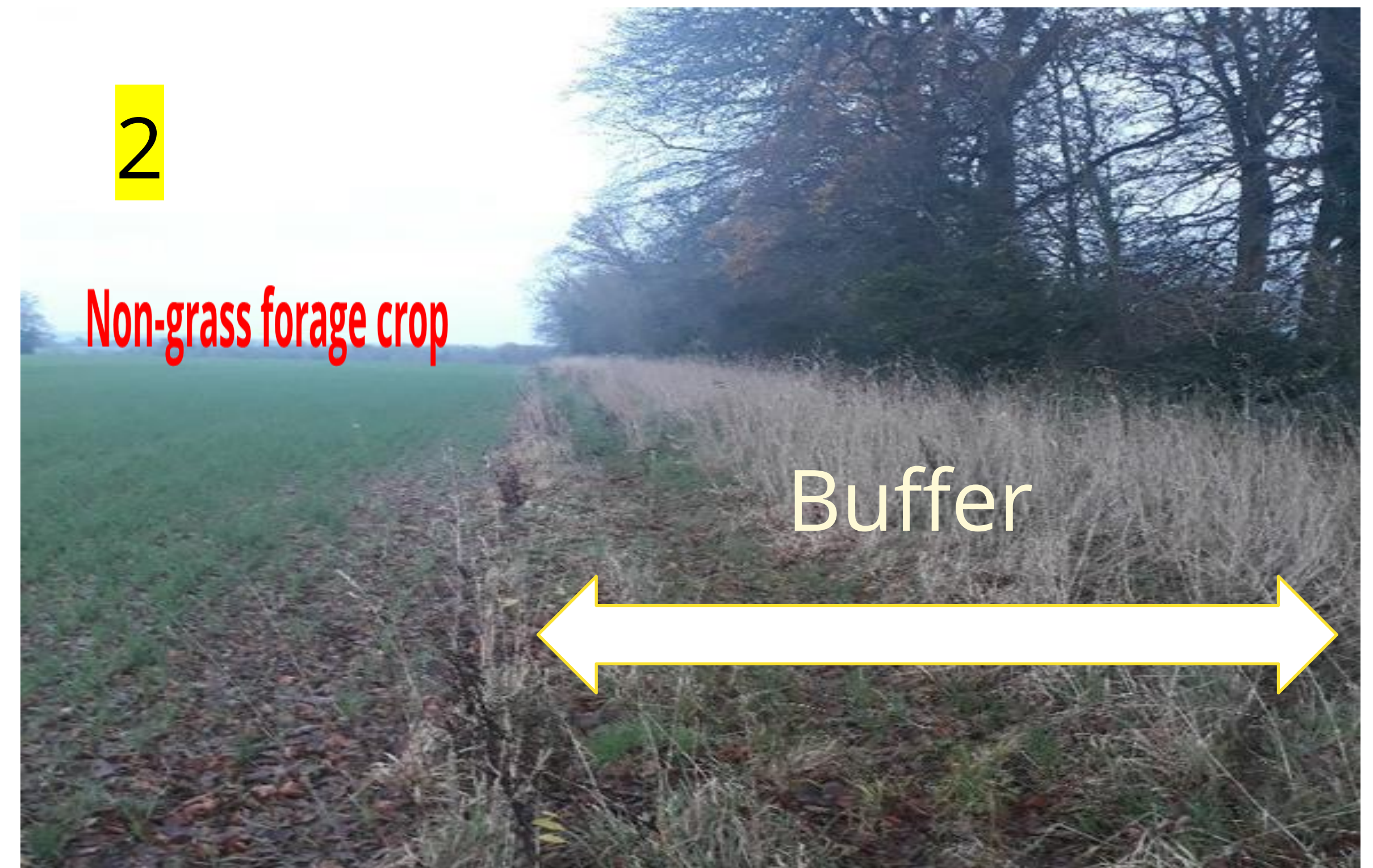




## GAEC 6 – new controls



1. Has an adequate lie back area or a backing fence been provided for non-grass forage crops that are being grazed in situ?
2. Has a 3m non-cultivated vegetated buffer been provided along non-water feature boundaries (hedgerows, treelines, stone walls) where non-grass forage crops are being grazed in-situ?







**Thank You**





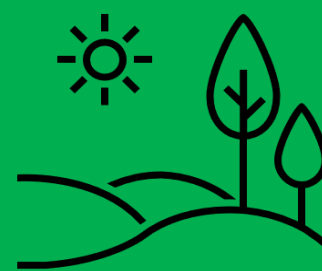
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# FAS Training for New Advisers Conditionality GAEC Standards

**GAEC 7**



**GAEC 8**



**GAEC 9**



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**9<sup>th</sup> February 2023**



**Portlaoise**



# Presentation Outline



- **The GAECs under Conditionality**
- **GAEC 7** Crop Rotation in arable land except for crops grown under water
- **GAEC 8** Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season
- **GAEC 9** Ban on converting or ploughing permanent grassland designated as environmentally sensitive permanent grasslands (ESPG) in Natura 2000 sites



# The GAECs under Conditionality



**GAEC 1** Maintenance of permanent grassland based on a ratio of permanent grassland in relation to agricultural area. **NEW**

**GAEC 2** Minimum protection of wetland and peatland. **NEW but not applicable until 2024**

**GAEC 3** Ban on burning arable stubble, except for plant health reasons.

**GAEC 4** Establishment of buffer strips along water courses.

**GAEC 5** Tillage management, reducing the risk of soil degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient.

**GAEC 6** Minimum soil cover to avoid bare soil in periods that are most sensitive

**GAEC 7** Crop rotation in arable land except for crops growing under water **(previously part of BPS Greening). Not fully applicable in 2023.**

**GAEC 8** Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas or features **(previously part of BPS Greening)**, retention of landscape features, ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season & measures for avoiding invasive plant species.

**GAEC 9** Ban on converting or ploughing permanent grassland designated as environmentally-sensitive permanent grasslands in Natura 2000 sites.  
**(previously part of BPS Greening)**



# GAEC 7 Crop Rotation in arable land except for crops grown under water



The main objective of GAEC 7 is soil protection and quality

- Non exempt arable holdings will be required to follow the following practices;
  - a. Crop diversification; 2 or 3 crop rule for certain holdings (**previously part of BPS Greening**)
  - b. Crop rotation at parcel level by end of 4 year cycle (**NEW requirement for certain holdings**)
- **Derogation for 2023 means Crop Diversification rules will NOT apply in 2023 (but Reference year for Crop Rotation is 2023)**



# GAEC 7 Crop Rotation in arable land except for crops grown under water



## Exemptions from CR & CD (examples)

- Farms with **10 hectares or less** of arable land or more than 75% of eligible area is PG
- **Organic farmers'** certified organic land or land in conversion

## Exemption from CR only

- Farms with 10 to 50 ha of arable where at least 50% of arable area is sown in **barley**

## Alternative to CR & CD

- Crop Rotation with **secondary crops** (catch crops)
- At least **50% of arable area** on farm is sown in catch crops annually AND all parcels must be sown in catch crops over the 4 year cycle. Catch crops under ACREs do not count.



# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



The main objective of GAEC 8 is biodiversity and landscape (protection and quality)

- This GAEC was previously **GAEC 7 under Cross Compliance**

Minimum of 4% of  
agricultural area  
devoted to NPFAs

Retention of  
Landscape Features

Ban on cutting hedges  
and trees during the  
bird nesting and  
rearing season

Measures for avoiding  
invasive plant species  
and noxious weeds



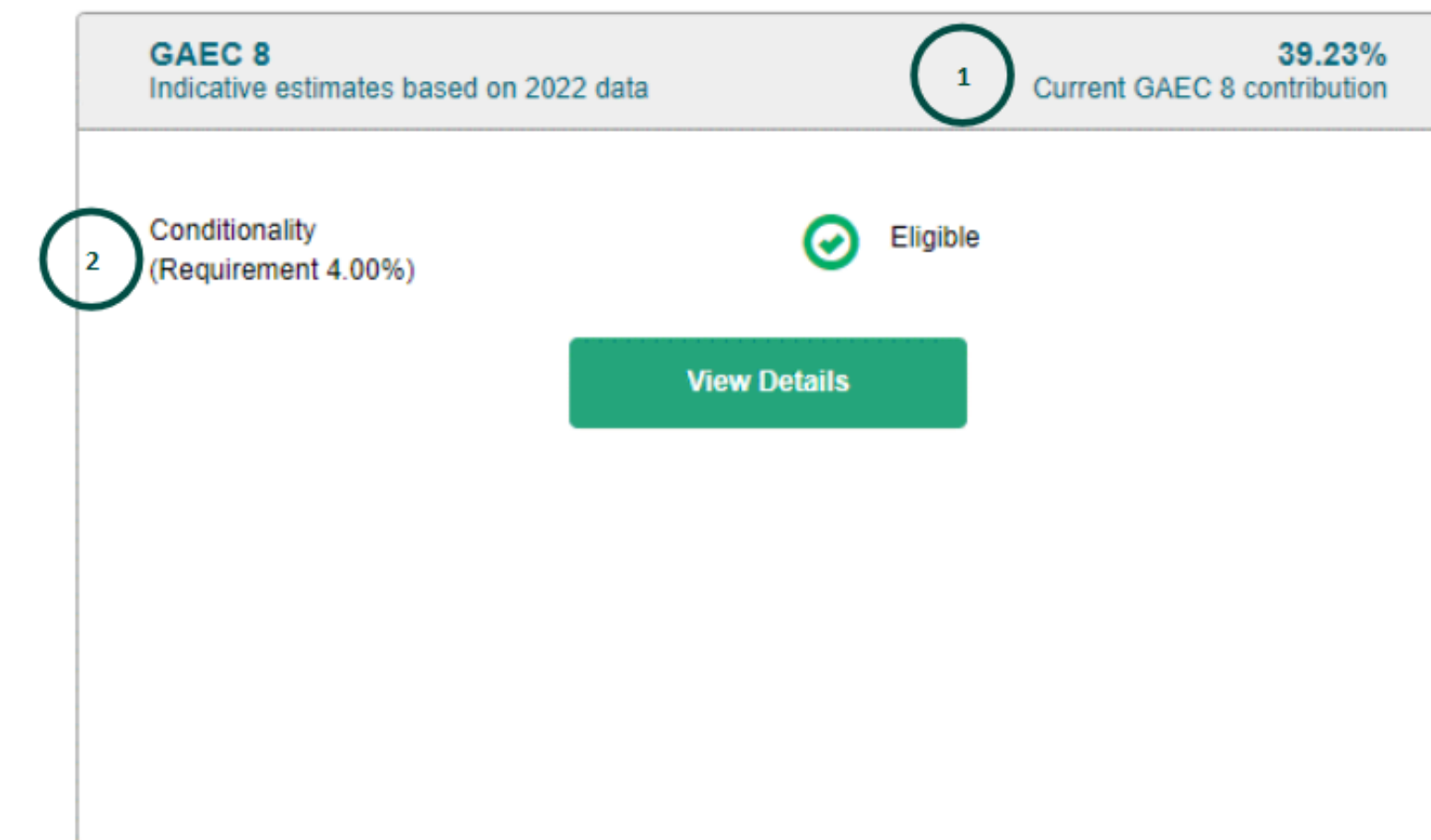
# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Key points:

**Minimum of 4% of agricultural area devoted to NPFAs**

- Minimum share of 4% of agricultural area to non productive areas and features – **Previous requirement was 5% for EFA as part of Greening** but now 4% requirement will apply to **all** farmers including grassland farmers.
- Commonage, Natura 2000, Forestry, GAEC 2 & GAEC 9 land not included.





# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Key points:

- Landscape features include: Hedgerows, Trees in a Line, Drains, Designated Habitats and Archaeological Sites and Monuments
- Ponds less than 0.2ha are now considered a landscape feature from 2023
- **Landscape Features such as hedges/line of trees/ditches or drains may be removed, in limited exceptional circumstances and only to the length that is needed, provided a replacement hedge/line of trees/ditch or drain is planted/dug in advance of the removal.**
- *Hedgerow removal:* a new hedge of **twice** the removal length must be planted in **advance of the removal** and must be as close as possible, within the farm/holding as declared on the applicant's BISS application, of the removed feature.

## Retention of Landscape Features



# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Key points:

- *Exceptional Circumstances include:* Building work associated with the farmyard, Road Safety issues and Farm Safety issues. Further guidance will be available in the Conditionality Handbook.
- **Be aware of EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations**

Thresholds for screening applications		
Type of on-farm Activity:		Screening Required:
Restructuring of rural land holdings :	Length of field boundary to be removed:	Above 500 metres
	Re-contouring (within farm-holding) :	Above 2 hectares
	Area of lands to be restructured by removal of field boundaries:	Above 5 hectare
Commencing to use uncultivated land or semi-natural areas for intensive agriculture :		Above 5 hectares
Land drainage works on lands used for agriculture :		Above 15 hectares

## Retention of Landscape Features



# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas and features on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Retention of Landscape Features

### Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- [S.I. No 407 of 2017 European Communities \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) \(Agriculture\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2017](#)
- [SI 456 of 2011 European Communities \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) \(Agriculture\) Regulations 2011](#)



#### EIA Guidance for Farmers

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#### EIA Summary Information Leaflet

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### Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations

### Guide for Farmers

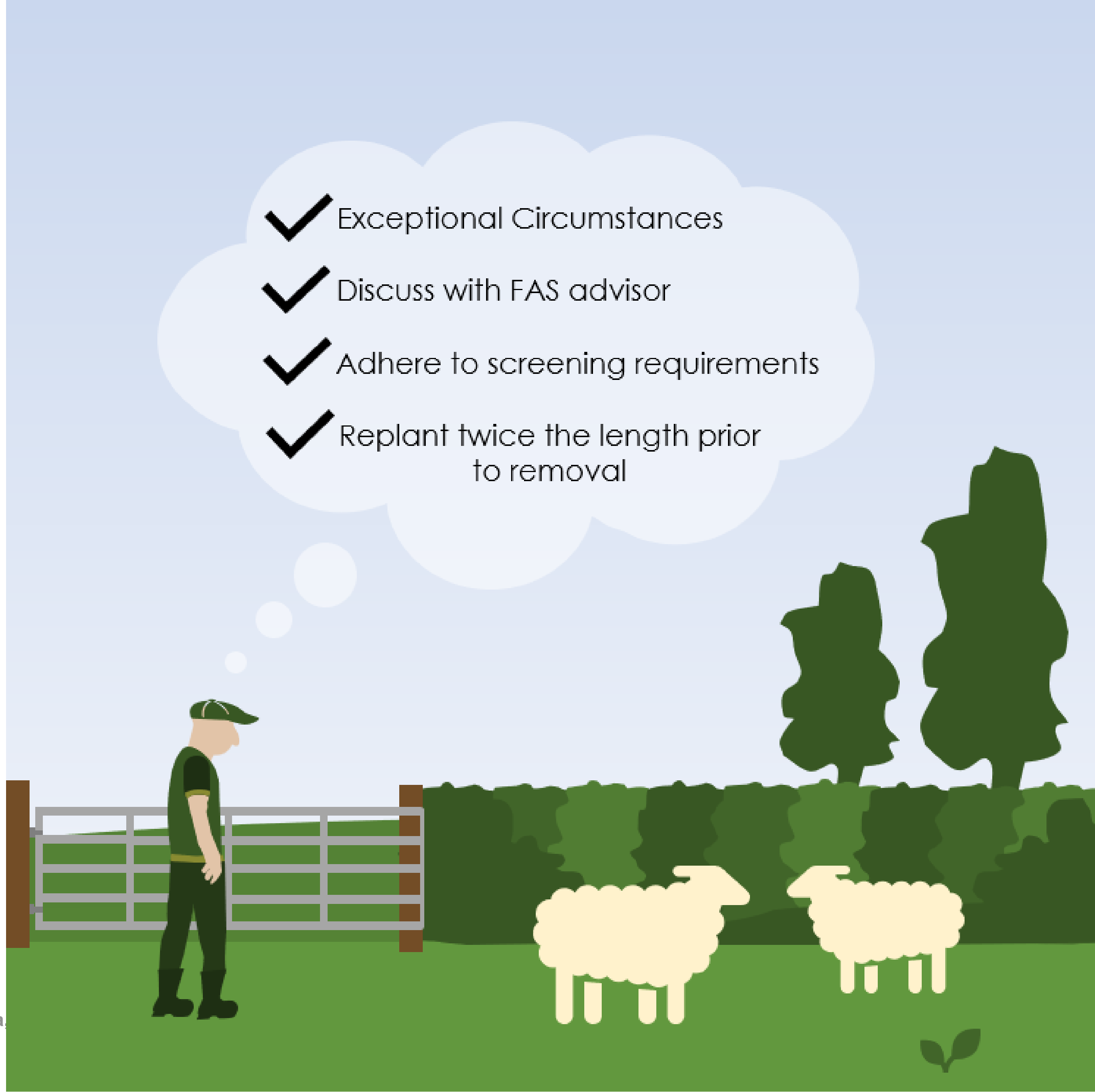


European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment)(Agriculture) Regulations 2011  
European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Agriculture) (Amendment) Regulations 2017





- ✓ Exceptional Circumstances
- ✓ Discuss with FAS advisor
- ✓ Adhere to screening requirements
- ✓ Replant twice the length prior to removal







Hedgerows (2009)



Trees in a line (2009)



Drains (2009)

***Designated Landscape Features under GAEC 8***





**Designated  
Habitats (2012)**



**Archaeological Sites  
& Monuments (2015)**



**Ponds (2023)  
\*NEW\***

***Designated Landscape Features under GAEC 8***



# Sample Imagery



**2010**



**2017**





# Sample Imagery



**2014**



**2015**



**2015**



**2015**





# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas or features and on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Key points:

- Bird nesting season: 1<sup>st</sup> March – 31<sup>st</sup> August.
- Hedge maintenance cannot be carried out during the closed period from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 31<sup>st</sup> August in any year as required under the Wildlife Act of 1976

**Ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird nesting and rearing season**



Photo: Irish Farmers Journal



# GAEC 8 Minimum share of agricultural area devoted to non-productive areas or features and on all agricultural area, retention of landscape features and ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season



## Key points:

- All methods of control should be carried out by trained and experienced personnel

Measures for  
avoiding invasive  
plant species and  
noxious weeds

The screenshot shows the 'gov.ie' website header with navigation links: Departments, Consultations, Publications, Policies, Languages, and a search icon. Below the header, the 'Collection' section is titled 'Crops'. It includes metadata: 'From Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine', 'Published on 8 December 2020', and 'Last updated on 1 February 2023'. A list of seven items is displayed, with the fifth item, '5. Control of Noxious Weeds', highlighted by a red rectangular box. The other items are: 1. Seed Certification Scheme, 2. Plant Breeders' Rights (National Catalogue), 3. Crop Variety Evaluation, 4. Potatoes, 6. Public Consultation, and 7. Pesticide Registration and Control. To the right of the list, a box labeled 'Part of' indicates the page is part of 'Policies' under 'Agriculture and Food'.

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## Crops

From [Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine](#)  
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Policies  
[Agriculture and Food](#)



# GAEC 9 Ban on converting or ploughing permanent grassland designated as environmentally sensitive permanent grasslands (ESPG) in Natura 2000 sites



The main objective of GAEC 9 is protection of habitats and species

- Farmers must refrain from certain actions on ESPG, these include ploughing, the growing of arable or permanent crops and construction
- **Similar to previous requirements under Greening**





*Thank you*