



LIFE on Machair



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



Terms and Conditions for participation in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme

2023 -2027

Open for farmer participation in 2023

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Glossary of Terms

AA – An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is an assessment of the potential adverse effects of a plan or project (in combination with other plans or projects) on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

ACRES – Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

BISS – The Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine which replaces the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

CAP – Common Agricultural Policy.

Conditionality – Conditionality is the baseline mandatory requirements for the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) payment.

CSP – CAP Strategic Plan.

DAFM – The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

DHLGH – The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

EIP – European Innovation Partnerships.

EU – European Union.

Farmer – Landowners, shareholders and eligible land managers.

LOM – LIFE on Machair Project.

LOM Project Team – Persons employed under or contracted to the NPWS LIFE on Machair project.

LOM Restoration Programme – LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme is a participatory programme for eligible farmers in the LIFE on Machair Project areas.

Machair system – a complex system comprised of a number of habitats including Machair grassland (sandy coastal grassland plain), dune habitats and wetlands.

Meitheal – Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or in other tasks.

Natura 2000 Network – Lands designated under Directive 79/409/EEC and Directive 92/43/EEC (Birds and Habitat Directives). The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

SAC & SPA – Special Area of Conservation designated under the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and Special Area of Protection designated under the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC.

The LIFE on Machair project

LIFE on Machair is an EU LIFE funded project ([Code LIFE20 NAT/IE/000263](#)) running from 2022 to 2028. The dedicated LIFE on Machair project team seek to build on the successes of locally adapted programmes, including previous and existing European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs), in assisting farmers and other key stakeholders **to protect and restore Ireland’s network of Machair systems and associated breeding wader and pollinator communities.**

Working with local communities, the core objectives of the LIFE on Machair project involve the development of guidance for sustainable farming and tourism of Machair systems with a view to, at minimum:

- Improving the habitat quality across the array of Machair system habitats,
- Maintaining the existing populations of breeding waders at each of the project sites, and
- Enhancing populations of pollinators within and between Machair systems.

The LIFE on Machair (LOM) project is being coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland.

LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme

The LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme is a participatory programme for farmers (landowners, shareholders and eligible land managers) in the LIFE on Machair Project areas to support conservation management and where relevant carry out restoration actions under the support and guidance of the LIFE on Machair project team.

Machair systems

Coastal dune habitats range from the beach and drift-line, to mobile dunes (where sand gathers) and fixed dunes, Machair grassland and wetlands. Two of these habitats are listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, namely fixed dunes or grey dunes (EU Code 2130 - Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation) and Machair (EU Code 21A0 – Machairs).

Machair grassland is characterised by a species-rich grassland plain typically with both wet and dry areas. This rare and valuable habitat is unique to the north and west of Ireland and Scotland and Post-Brexit, the entire EU land cover of Machair occurs in Ireland, meaning its conservation in Ireland is of significance on both a European and a global scale.

Machair sites provide important refuges for nationally and internationally threatened breeding wader bird species, such as Lapwing, Dunlin, Snipe, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope and Ringed Plover.

Pollinator groups are important insect groups to be found on Machair sites, with a number of species within the LOM project target groups of pollinators (bees, butterflies, hoverflies and moths) in decline across Ireland and the wider EU region.

Where will the LIFE on Machair project operate?

The LOM project seeks to restore Machair and associated dune habitat types to favourable conservation status, maintain existing populations of breeding waders and enhance pollinator communities at nine sites (Figure 1; Table 1). The restoration sites include nine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and overlap with four Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway.



Figure 1. LIFE on Machair Project Sites

Preparation of Restoration Plans

Each of the LIFE on Machair project sites is subject to varying levels of pressures from agriculture and tourism, and in recent decades, climate change is becoming a more significant pressure.

Following baseline field surveys and the collation of relevant data (biological, geological, hydrological, geomorphological etc.) a draft restoration plan will be compiled by the LOM project team in order to

- Consider and address the ecological interests of each of the project sites and
- Ensure that Ireland meets its obligation under relevant EU Nature Directives to restore, maintain and improve the habitat and species populations on the LOM sites.

The plans will highlight **the restoration priorities for each site** which will **underpin the key actions** required over the course of LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme.

The draft restoration plans will also outline an indicative list of actions proposed to meet restoration targets. Each draft plan will be further refined and developed through a process of ongoing consultation and engagement with farmers facilitated through the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme.

Details of restoration actions and site management will be developed in consultation with participating farmers, relevant specialists and with other local stakeholders over the duration of the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme. In this way, restoration of the site can be adapted as learnings from restoration activities inform future actions.

Restoration plans for each site will therefore be developed collaboratively in an ongoing way through 2023 and updated as site restoration and knowledge sharing progresses.

Potential restoration actions

Based on restoration case studies in Ireland and the broader EU region, examples of potential restoration actions include:

- Chestnut fencing – used to rebuild dunes at eroded / eroding sites.
- Marram planting – this is a long recognised action which can assist in the stabilisation / revegetation of dunes.
- Native seeding – where native plants have been lost, collecting local seed and spreading / stitching in to existing grassland swards can be used to restore plant diversity and richness.
- Nurse crop – these are often used in restoration projects to create shelter to help native plants establish.
- Fertiliser application – in some instances seeds / plants will need nutrient to support plant growth.
- Sea-weed application – seaweed was traditionally used to enrich soils and has been used elsewhere in Ireland to stabilise soils and support plant establishment.
- Breeding wader sanctuary and nest protection fencing.
- Grazing adjustments – with expert guidance, tailored grazing approaches will be developed for each site based on the carrying capacity of each site to inform sustainable farmer practices.

Where they are not covered by existing schemes / state funded programmes, the full cost of restoration actions will be covered by the LIFE on Machair project with scope to apply for additional funding as deemed required over the course of the programme.

LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme participation

Underpinning principles and structure

Critical to the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme is the principle of working towards protection and restoration of Machair sites with a view to securing sustainable farming and farming livelihoods aligned with nature conservation into the future.

All activities funded through the project must support this basic principle. **Any activities identified as being in conflict with sustainable farming and tourism cannot be supported by the project.**

Given the varying levels of time constraints according to individual farmers, two levels of participation have been designed to enable farmer participation according to the time availability of each participant.

Initial drafting of restoration plans

As outlined above, initial plans developed by the LOM project team will highlight restoration priorities for each site in 2023. These inform key actions and further likely potential actions that will be required through the course of LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme. These will be added to over the course of the programme.

Note that actions developed and implemented through the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme Actions will be subject to Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening and will adhere to regulations under Nature Directives as regulated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The LOM project team will carry out the screening and AA process for the restoration plans at each site.

Farmer participation

Farmer participation in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will be central to delivery of the restoration plans. **There are two available levels of participation:**

1. Building the local knowledge of the site (*Level 1 participation option, see below*):

Governance: Building on existing local knowledge, traditional practices, knowledge of the local land use history and resultant changes in habitat quality, baseline information will be gathered with farmer participants to build a picture of past and present management.

2. Building local knowledge and capacity for future sustainable farming practices on the sites (*through both Levels 1 and 2 participation options, see below*):

Active protection and restoration: Following from and building on the knowledge base developed through *Level 1 participation*, workshops and training tailored for each LOM site, in conjunction with *meitheals* (implementation of restoration actions) at each site will be coordinated by the LOM project team. This will serve to build the capacity of participant farmers and other related key stakeholders local to each site. Participants will actively take part in the short and long term restoration and management of Machair and associated habitats as well monitoring of progress and outcomes. Working to share knowledge between sites, a network of knowledge sharing between LOM project areas as well as other coastal farming communities will be developed.

The outcomes of both steps and associated levels of participation, will form the basis for the development of sustainable farming guidance for Machair systems in Ireland, which will be incorporated into the next round of agricultural guidance promoted and delivered under future iterations of the EU CAP Strategic Plan.

Level 1 participation – Governance = shared knowledge, planning and support

Level 1 participation will include:

- Supporting the ethos of the project,
- Supporting the over-arching restoration priorities,
- Supporting the implementation of key restoration actions (such as adjusting grazing levels) as outlined in the initial restoration plans drafted by the LOM project team,
- Input to successive updates to the site restoration plans as refined through farmer participation over the course of the programme.

Level 1 will involve attendance at **three core events** per year of the programme and participation in a survey / questionnaire, with the aim of:

- Identifying pressures and causes of pressures at each site,
- Supporting the finding and testing of solutions to pressures / and causes of pressures at each site (pressures can include farming, tourism, amenity, climatic erosion etc.),
- Providing input into project outputs (e.g. management advice, technical specifications).

The core activities will comprise a combination of planning events, site visits, and discussion workshops. Participants will be required to take part in the completion of attitudinal, farming & socio-economic questionnaires (probably online and applies to Year 1 of the Programme only).

There will be opportunities offered for participation in other events, field sites, visits to other LOM project sites and workshops which may be organised by other coastal groups / communities which will be at the discretion / interest of the participants and the availability of places.

Level 2 participation – active restoration - learning by doing

Level 2 participation will include active protection and restoration, which may include training, workshop and restoration activities. The proposed conservation actions will be outlined in the restoration plan and discussed in Level 1 workshops.

Level 2 participants will attend workshops to gain knowledge and training in the site specific restoration actions and ecological understanding of each site before participating in actions or *meitheals* to carry out restoration actions informed by the input from relevant experts. This may include for example input from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and the Marine, agricultural agencies such as Teagasc, input from local farm advisors, as well as ecological, local heritage, tourism and recreational, and archaeological expert inputs. All activities will be overseen by the LOM project team. Specific themed workshops will be site relevant and may include for example:

- Dune dynamics and stabilisation techniques,
- Habitat and pollinator ecology and requirements,
- Breeding wader requirements (e.g. predator proof fencing etc.),
- Hydrological dynamics and management,
- Farming practices to support nature conservation.

Note: Level 2 participation can vary depending on availability of the participant and will be agreed on an individual basis with the LOM project team.

The focus of the Restoration Programme for each site will be adjusted annually to ensure effective delivery of restoration actions and sustainable long-term management of sites. An outline of the expected focus in each year is provided here:

Year 1 focus: Site restoration planning and identifying priority actions.

Year 2 focus: Ecological monitoring to ensure decisions are well informed going forward.

Year 3 focus: Comprehensive sustainable management to address the wider pressures.

Year 4 focus: Understanding outcomes, developing long-term management advice, planning for post-LIFE project management of sites.

Activities to be undertaken as part of the site restoration will be outlined and scheduled in the initial meeting in each year, tailored to specific actions required for the restoration of each site (see Sample of activities and actions under LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme in Table 1 below).

Table 1. *Sample* of activities and actions under LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme (this will be developed on a site by site basis):

Participants	Indicative Timing	Activities and actions (a subset will be selected for each site)
All (Level 1 & Level 2)	Kick off meeting (May/June 2024)	Site overview and restoration planning (Identifying key pressures and priority actions) and discussion.
Level 2	Spring /early Summer	Restoration of previous supplementary feed damage, including weed control, reseeding etc.
Level 2	Spring / Summer	Chestnut fencing workshop (<i>how, what, where?</i>) combined with <i>meitheal</i> activity.
Level 2	Spring / Summer	Grazing management for habitat and pollinators.
Level 2	Summer	Monitoring and assessment (establishing what the condition of each site is).
All (Level 1 & Level 2)	Summer	Summer session: Site walk with the LOM project team and topic specialists.
Level 2	Late summer	Seed collection and propagation.
Level 2	Autumn / Winter	Flood management for protection of habitats and birds.
Level 2	Winter	Developing sustainable supplementary feed practices.
Level 2	Winter / Spring	Grazing management for the breeding bird season.
Level 1	Year 1	Reflect & review on year one. Discussion, Feedback.
Level 1 & Level 2	End of Year 1	Questionnaire.

All actions incorporated into the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will be supported by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and the Marine. Where farmers are part of ACRES CP, there will be ongoing engagement with local ACRES CP teams to ensure alignment of focus and action.

Participant payments

Participants will be remunerated based on their level of participation:

Participation Level	Activities and Meetings /workshops / <i>meitheals</i>	Annual payment
Level 1 – Governance.	Engagement, knowledge sharing, planning and support. (includes 1 summer meeting & 1 winter meeting minimum, 1 questionnaire*)	€560 - €1,120
Level 2 - Active restoration.	Implementation of restoration activities identified as priorities for the site. Each activity will include a briefing (or workshop to find a solution) and implementation of required action.	<i>€290 per activity completed</i>

*Applies to year 1 of the programme only.

Payments for participation in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will be made annually in arrears provided

- Adherence to the Terms and Conditions and general ethos of the programme and
- The required activities have been completed (relevant workshops and trainings attended).

Payment will be made based on number of meetings attended and suitable completion of agreed activity and/or actions.

Eligibility to participate in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme

To be eligible to apply to join the programme applicants must be 18 years of age or over on the date of the first site meeting.

Private lands or commonage shares which are under the control of the applicant farmer (with documented proof of permission) for the duration of LIFE on Machair programme and within the LIFE on Machair target area are eligible for entry to the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme.

To participate in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme requires a plot of farmed land within the LOM project target areas and / or a registered commonage share within a LOM target area. Each plot will be reviewed upon application.

There are no area based payments involved in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme and therefore participation in other Agri-Environment Schemes, for example the national ACRES scheme, does not exclude farmers from participating in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme.

Application procedure and likely timeframes

Entry to the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will be on a phased site by site basis from March 2023 to March 2024. The initial round of recruitment will take place in Spring 2023 with those sites supporting (the near extinct) Dunlin populations prioritised in the first round. The second round of recruitment is likely to commence in Summer 2023 with phased intake of applicants over the course of March 2023 and March 2024.

Information meetings will be held in villages (community centres etc.) adjacent to each site with application forms distributed in advance of the first participation meeting for each site.

Selection criteria

The project aspires to include all eligible farmers within the target areas.

Where the number of applicants exceeds the capacity of the project, selection criteria based on site specific conservation priorities (for example Dunlin breeding populations, and/or presence of other target species such as Great Yellow Bumblebee) and the need for targeted restoration actions will be used to prioritise entry on private lands (for example if degraded habitat occurs on private lands and hydro-seeding or chestnut fencing is required).

Deadline for applicants

All farmers at each site will be welcome to the initial participation meeting for their site. This will allow for participants to have a clear view of the key actions in Year 1 and discuss with the LOM project team how they can support / commit their own time.

All farmers that wish to apply to participate in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme for their site must submit a completed application form *at the latest* by one week after the first Level 1 participation meeting at which the restoration priorities and actions will be outlined for Year 1.

Note: Assistance will be provided to applicants where requested / necessary (in advance of and at the first Level 1 participation meeting) to assist in completing the application. Successful applicants will be notified within a month of receipt of final fully completed and signed application.

Proof of registered folio must be supplied.

Completed applications can be submitted by email to info@lifeonmachair.ie or post to:

LIFE on Machair Project Office,

Castlebar Street, Carrowbeg,

Westport, Co. Mayo.

Eircode: F28 Y273

Land access

Participants in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme must facilitate access to lands by the project team, and associated contractors working on restoration activities and monitoring outcomes at an agreed time.

Checks and controls

Attendance will be recorded at each project event (workshops, meetings, completion of questionnaire etc) by the LOM project team.

Site visits will be carried out routinely over the duration of the project by the LOM project team.

Habitat quality and restoration actions will be assessed on a continual basis over the course of the LIFE on Machair project by the LOM project team.

LIFE on Machair Breaches and Deductions

Payments may be deducted from participants under a number of scenarios:

- *Where there is failure to attend key activities a participant has signed up to as part of Level 1 and/or Level 2, **payments will be deducted for those events not attended**.* As stated in Participant Payment section, where a farmer has planned on completing Level 2 participation but has only been able to attend Level 1 events (& associated activities) then payment will be made at the lower rate based on number of meetings attended.
- *If any activity is undertaken by a participant that is contradictory to the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme priorities and key actions (such as causing damage to a re-seeded area by introducing livestock / machinery) it may affect payment.* This will be assessed on the basis of the extent, severity and permanence of the impact of the activity and reviewed with the LOM project partners. Depending on the nature of the breach it may result in expulsion from the LOM Restoration Programme and disqualify the participant from payment.
- *Participants in the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme in receipt of a Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, BISS payment must be in compliance with all conditions set out under Conditionality in the CSP (CAP Strategic Plan).* Where a farmer has been found in breach of conditionality this will be reviewed by the LOM project team and depending on the nature of the breach it may result in expulsion from the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme and disqualify the participant from payment.
- All Participants will adhere to regulations under the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC and EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

Learnings and outcomes

Learnings and outcomes from the LIFE on Machair project will inform best practice for Machair and coastal systems in general Ireland. By understanding the sites and aligning nature, farming and recreational uses, this will inform future agri-environmental programmes and schemes delivered by DAFM to work for the farmer, adding value by increasing habitat quality and resilience of systems to future pressures such as climate change.

Increasing awareness and building local capacity will help to inform sustainable management of these valuable ecologically sensitive sites and help ensure their long-term stability for future generations.

The benefits of the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme participation for farmers are outlined here:

- A farmer led approach with guidance from the LOM project team: be part of the solution to long-term challenges.
- Local ownership of restoration plans and activities (participants co-design the annual programme schedule).
- Develop a plan suitable for your site and address pressures and find solutions to local issues; build local capacity.
- Help to understand and act to improve your ACRES score while ensuring avoidance of potential penalties / loss of payments.
- Avail of an annual restoration payment with the assistance and support of the LOM project team, as well as input from national and local specialists.
- Help build a network of support with other coastal communities and identify common challenges / potential solutions relating to farming and recreation / tourism.
- Input to the development of appropriate and relevant farming guidance across project sites.
- Ensure alignment of farming and nature conservation into the future, while supporting farming livelihoods for this and the next generation.
- Identify other potential streams of funding for work additional to and beyond the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme.

EU LIFE Audits

The LIFE on Machair project team may be subject to audits and controls from the EU LIFE programme, which may include administrative and on-site inspections. These are solely to provide checks of the project team, not the farmer.

Further information - www.lifeonmachair.ie

Further information on the administration and operation of the programme is available on the project website (www.lifeonmachair.ie). All project related documents and forms will be made available to download from the website or can be requested directly by contacting the project team, info@lifeonmachair.ie.

Appendix I

LIFE on Machair Project Areas (SAC and/or SPAs). Sites are listed south to north.

Project Area	SAC/SPA overlap
Horn Head and Rinclevan, Co. Donegal.	Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC (000147) Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA (004194)
Gweedore, Co. Donegal.	Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC (001141)
Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo.	Mullet Peninsula SPA (004227) Mullet/Blacksod Bay Complex SAC (000470) Blacksod Bay/Broadhaven SPA (004037)
Inishkeas, Co. Mayo.	Inishkea Islands SAC (000470) Inishkea Islands SPA (004004)
Doogort, Co. Mayo.	Doogort Machair/Lough Doo SAC (001497) Doogort Machair SPA (004235)
Roonagh, Cahasy, Baun Loughs.	Lough Cahasy, L. Baun and Roonah Lough SAC (001529)
Dooaghtry	Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (001932)
Doonloughan	Slyne Head Peninsula SAC (002074)
Murvey	Murvey Machair SAC (002129)

Frequently asked questions

I've applied to be included in ACRES – will this affect my payments?

No – the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme is standalone from other agri-payment schemes. Payments are aligned to Natura 2000 site targets and will support sustainable guidance for future use.

I've heard there may be a requirement to de-stock areas – will this affect my BPS payments now or in the future?

No – the LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will trial grazing management and stock removal / reduction will be essential in some areas. This will not result in any penalty or loss of payments. In some instances, the stocking level may need to be increased where there is under-grazing.

Will restoration affect my ACRES score for the results based payments?

The LIFE on Machair Restoration Programme will help to increase your score if restoration activities are adhered to and successfully implemented.

What if I sign up for Level 2 participation but I don't complete all required activities?

Where a farmer has planned on completing Level 2 participation but only been able to complete Level 1 events (& associated activities) then payment will be made at the Level 1 rate.

What if I started out at Level 1 but want to participate at Level 2?

The level of participation by farmers can be adjusted (increased or decreased) on an annual basis at the outset of each programme year.

My family member is the registered name on the Folio – can I participate in their stead?

Once the application is completed with the proof of registered folio (and/or long term lease agreement) with a letter from the registered owner identifying you as their representative, then participation is eligible.

Is this compulsory if you own land in the SAC?

No – however, there are a number of benefits in joining which will support sustainable farming of your land into the future and help avoid penalties / lost income due to land degradation.