

# Capacity Building for Commonage Groups within the Wicklow SUAS

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## Background/Rationale

- Failed policy and intensification causing environmental impact and biodiversity loss – **McSharry Reforms, Agri Environment policy**
- Upland farms decreasing in viability leading to decreased succession and abandonment – **Suggested to reach between 3 and 8% by 2030 (Keenleyside et al., 2010)**
- Causing environmentally damaging under grazing, over burning, encroachment and secondary issues – **Result of Commonage framework plans (1998) and the decoupling of payments (2005)**

## SUAS

- Uses collective management of natural resources and sustainable farming approaches for remediation
- The project forms commonage groups to aid collaboration and internal teamwork on a commonly farmed land mass



Over burning of Heather

## Why commonages?

- Commonages account for 428,000 Ha in Ireland (CSO, 2016)
- Farmed by between 11,000– 15,000 farm businesses (CSO, 2019)
- Mostly in Upland areas of high nature value (Buckley et al., 2009)



Encroachment by Bracken

The project is designed to get farmers back grazing and managing the Wicklow/Dublin Uplands in a sustainable manner which will improve habitat quality, biodiversity value and agricultural productivity.

## Objectives

- Investigate commonage group formation and operation
  - Identify catalysts for successful formation
  - Highlight attributes aiding independent manifestation
- Determine effective KT aimed specifically at upland farmers
  - What information do upland farmers need
  - What form to deliver this information
  - What outlets do they utilise and prefer

## Preliminary Findings

### SUAS – Pilot

- Instilling of equality promotes collaboration
- Facilitators important to start the conversation and bridge gaps
- Skill of hosting meaningful meetings and addressing issues vital

### Knowledge Transfer

- Upland Farmers tend towards Newspaper and Radio
- Large Events are better for general sector specific information
- On site consultations with the ecologist lead to a high level of engagement in a two-way exchange

## Methodology

### Observational Research

- 5 Events
- Recorded farmer interaction and comments with the activities or speaker(s) and asked Farmers opinions
- Qualitative approach .Opinions are passively recorded.

### Surveys

- Two Surveys - SUAS Participants + Non SUAS Participants (All upland farmers)
- Open, closed and ranking questions.
- Quantitative and qualitative information
- Following piloting slight change in conduct of SUAS survey.

“The commonage groups have been good they’ve shown that with the right framework, commonage users who don’t necessarily like each other can still work together to a shared goal”

“It was great, I think it’s the first time I could see were farming in the uplands will be going in an understandable way”

“I like many other upland farmers feel Teagasc has neglected the hill farmer”

## On Going Work

- Survey the remainder of the SUAS participants in order to achieve a saturation of information
- Survey upland farmers from alternative parts of the country to ensure an accurate representation

## References

- Buckley, C., van Rensburg, T. and Hynes, S. (2009). Recreational demand for farm commonage in Ireland: A contingent valuation assessment. *Land Use Policy*, 26(3), pp.846-854.
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