



SECTION 25A REPORT

REPORT DATE	PUBLIC BODY	PREPARED BY
14/02/2024	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Breege O'Reilly

The purpose of the table below is to assist the public body in completing the Section 25A (1) report to the Southern Regional Assembly. This report will be used by the Regional Assembly to complete the Section 25A (2) Monitoring Report to be submitted to NOAC and which will focus on progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES.

It is intended that the Monitoring Report will be succinct, covering the 2-year period 2022-2024, and therefore we would ask that the response to the questions are as short as possible and for example we do not need the full detail of each policy or programme outlined.

For further information, please contact Brigh Ryan at bryan@southernassembly.ie or Claire Breen at cbreen@southernassembly.ie

Please return the report to this office by **Friday, 2nd February 2024**.

This can be submitted by email to: cbreen@southernassembly.ie

PLEASE OUTLINE ANY PROGRESS MADE IN SUPPORTING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RSES WHICH ARE RELEVANT TO YOUR DEPARTMENT-

In framing your response please provide a short overview of key public investment mechanisms and proposals by reference to:

1. The sustainable development of the agriculture and food sector in the Southern Region including implementation of CAP

Food Vision 2030 is Ireland's shared stakeholder-led strategy for the continuing development of the agri-food sector in Ireland. Using a food systems approach, Food Vision 2030 aims to deliver food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, environmental, and social bases to generate food and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. This means that it is profitable throughout (Economic Sustainability), has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (Environmental Sustainability) and has broad based benefits for society (Social Sustainability).

The Strategy was launched in August 2021 and consists of 4 Missions, 22 Goals and 218 Actions that aim for Ireland to be a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems.

A High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, monitors progress on the delivery of the four Missions. It is made up of the main Departments and agencies involved in the agri-food sector. It has met nine times to date and published its first Annual Report in May 2023. The immediate priority identified by the Committee in the context of climate, was to commence work on the important actions to determine the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy and the beef sectors. Work on these actions has progressed.

A formal implementation plan for Food Vision 2030 was published in May 2022. This identifies stakeholders, deliverables and a timeframe for each of the 218 actions under the 22 goals. On a biannual basis, the Department collates updates from across the various stakeholders.

A Food Vision Dairy Group was established in late January 2022 and tasked with producing a detailed plan to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy sector. The Final Report was submitted to the Minister on the 25th of October 2022 and sets out a list of 19 recommended actions for the sector. A Food Vision Beef and Sheep Group was established in June 2022 and tasked with producing a detailed plan to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the beef sector. The Final Report was submitted to the Minister on the 30th of November 2022 and sets out a list of 21 recommended actions for the sector. Some of the recommendations from these reports are now included in the Climate Action Plan 2023 and into policy generally. The groups will continue to meet to progress these and other important actions for the dairy, beef and sheep sectors set out in Food Vision 2030.

A Food Vision Tillage Group was established in 2023, highlighting the significant role the tillage sector plays in Ireland's food and feed security and the ambition to grow the tillage area. Tillage is recognised as one of the most carbon efficient sectors in Irish agriculture, as set out in Food Vision 2030 and in the Climate Action Plan 2023, with a target tillage area of 400,000 hectares by 2030.

The first Food Vision Annual Report detailing progress was published in May 2023. In terms of overall progress to date, 14 actions are complete, 108 actions have substantial action undertaken, 92 actions have commenced and are progressing, and 4 actions have not yet commenced.

The development of a new ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector is a key commitment of the Programme for Government, which called for an ambitious blueprint for the sector for the years ahead, supporting family farms & employment in rural Ireland and adding value sustainably into the future, with a strategic focus on environmental protection.

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) contains measures that address the 9 Specific Objectives of the CAP, and the cross-cutting objective of modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation, and encouraging their uptake.

Specific Objective 2, in particular, is to “enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness, both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation”. The Irish CSP in this context has a number of contributing interventions that enhance the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, including:

- A sectoral intervention granting support for the operational programmes of existing Producer Organisations in the Fruit and Vegetable sector
- a support for administrative and legal costs for new producer groups that wish to form in a number of sectors, including beef, sheep, horticulture, amenities, fruit and vegetable.
- Support for On-farm Capital Investments with a broad variety of categories under which farmers can receive grants to co-fund investments on their farms for equipment, storage facilities, improvements relating to animal welfare, and environmental investments.
- LEADER, a community-led intervention which is currently under development and led by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Once local development strategies are created/selected, specifics about the contribution of this intervention can be shared.

Objectives 3-6 of CAP relate to climate mitigation and adaptation, management of natural resources, protection of biodiversity and landscapes. In line with policy direction, in order to meet national and EU obligations, and to respond to the demands of the market and consumers, there is an increased pressure on the sector to become more environmentally sustainable. This changing dynamic is reflected in the increased environmental focus in this CAP. Many of the measures in the Plan, both individually and combined, will deliver multiple benefits across climate, water quality and biodiversity. They are part of the new ‘Green Architecture’ of the CAP, which will build from the bottom up - starting with improved environmental outcomes from conditionality (formerly cross-compliance), adding further environmental benefits from the Eco-scheme, and culminating in high-impact environmental outcomes from rural development measures.

In ACRES, the CSP target is for participation by 50,000 farmers across the entirety of the territory, including both the general and cooperation measures. Farmers in ACRES will work to provide significant benefits at landscape level for biodiversity, climate and water quality. Actions in ACRES will also contribute towards our LULUCF targets through improved management of grassland on mineral soils, use of cover crops on arable lands, and reduced management intensity on drained organic soils.

In the new Eco-schemes, farmers in every part of Ireland can choose from 11 options to reward existing practices or implement agricultural practices positive for the environment. Actions include supporting reduction in chemical nitrogen, planting of trees and/or hedges, more targeted use of fertiliser and/or plant protection products using GPS controlled equipment, encouraging extensive livestock production. 97% of farmers in receipt of CAP support are participating in Eco-schemes.

For the Organic Farming Scheme, significant progress has been made towards the target of reaching 7.5% of Ireland's agricultural area in organic farming. By the end of 2023, we have achieved approximately 4% (200,000 ha), already doubling the previous area. The scheme is expected to contribute 0.3 MTCO₂eq to emissions reductions and will also contribute to water quality and to biodiversity through changes in practice around use of chemical fertiliser, pesticides and anti-biotics and soil management.

The Suckler Carbon efficiency programme is designed to reduce absolute emissions by improving the environmental sustainability and genetic merit of the suckler herd. Contribution is expected to be 0.2MTCO₂eq. with over 20,000 herds participating.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 for Ireland is part of the Common Agricultural Policy: a common set of objectives, principles, and rules in order to co-ordinate the EU agricultural support in Member States.

The RDP 2014-2022 funding of €5.6 billion comprises a projected expenditure of €2.54billion in national funding, €2.882 billion in EAFRD funds and €189 million in EURI funds. The RDP reflects several national policy objectives in the area of rural development as well as the development of the farming and wider agri-food sectors and the priorities set out in agri-food strategies such as Food Harvest 2020 (FH2020) and Foodwise 2025 (FW2025).

For example, FW 2025, recommended that the RDP should maximise farmer participation under GLAS to help enhance the natural environment through, inter alia, retaining carbon stocks in the soil, margins/habitat preservation. and improving water quality to ensure compliance with the Water Framework Directive. GLAS proved very successful under the RDP and has now been replaced by ACRES under the CSP 2023-2027. FW2025 also recommended that uptake on other RDP initiatives such as, organic farming, priority freshwater pearl mussel catchment sites and the Burren farming for conservation project should also be maximised as separate key RDP enabling instruments to achieve environmental objectives.

The overall objectives of the RDP 2014-2022, which runs until 31st December 2025, include enhanced competitiveness and are further detailed into six broad priority areas. These priorities are distributed into key focus areas related to the competitiveness and viability of agriculture and agri-environment objectives. The largest measure directly relating to enhancing the competitiveness of agriculture in Ireland's RDP is TAMS which involves investment in physical assets and will promote increased competitiveness and sustainability in relevant sectors. A higher grant aid was made available to farmers under the RDP in 2023 (up to 60% for certain schemes).

TAMS and other schemes, including for example, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), are targeted at improving the competitiveness of agriculture. EIP-AGRI schemes also improve long-term sustainability through research and innovation.

The success of the Organic Farming Scheme has resulted in an increase in the number of hectares of agricultural land under organic farming methods. There are 4030 farmers currently being supported under the Organic Farming Scheme, managing approximately 180,000 hectares of land. (4% of agricultural land area).

2. Details relating to the transformation of our food systems in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and building climate resilience

Ireland's agri-food strategy, Food Vision 2030, was developed by the sector for the sector, adopting a food systems approach, with an ambition for Ireland to be a "World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems" and sets out four high-level missions for the sector to work towards.

Food Vision 2030 has an international focus and a goal to have “Policy Coherence and Synergies in Sustainable Food Systems between Ireland’s Domestic Policy and its Development Cooperation and Foreign Policy”. The Sustainable Development Goals are incorporated in the Strategy and linked with Food Vision 2030 Goals. Ireland has been proactively engaged in the UN Food Systems Summit, with sustainable food systems and Food Vision 2030 being the central themes of Ireland’s engagement. In 2021 Ireland was one of the first countries to submit a national Food System Transformation Pathway, “Food Vision 2030,” to the United Nations Food Systems Summit. Since then, Ireland has been promoting food systems transformation in Ireland and in our bilateral and multilateral engagements globally.

Mission 1 of Food Vision is to progress “A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector” with an overall target of a climate-neutrality by 2050, with verifiable progress to be achieved by 2030. There are seven Goals in this Mission encompassing emissions reductions, carbon sequestration, improvements in air quality, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity, improvements in water quality, development of diverse forests, enhanced seafood sustainability, exploring the bioeconomy and strengthening Origin Green.

Food Vision 2030 acknowledges that in general, future environmental targets are likely to be set by legislation and commits to participating in the various target-setting processes with a view to the ultimate commitment to be climate neutral by 2050.

Many worthwhile, innovative measures have been developed over the years, in collaboration with primary producers, to mitigate both climate and environmental impacts and there are examples of real success built on partnerships. From a water quality perspective, the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP); from a biodiversity perspective the locally led EIPs such as the Bride; from a climate, biodiversity and water quality perspective, national scale agri-environmental schemes such as ACRES, GLAS and the Teagasc Signpost Advisory Programme; new, more sustainable fishing equipment; and Origin Green – the world’s only national food and drink sustainability programme.

The Strategy was launched in August 2021 and consists of 4 Missions, 22 Goals and 218 Actions that aim for Ireland to be a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems. The first Food Vision Annual Report detailing progress was published in May 2023. In terms of overall progress to date, 14 actions are complete, 108 actions have substantial action undertaken, 92 actions have commenced and are progressing, and 4 actions have not yet commenced.

Among the key achievements are the development of Sustainability Plans for the Dairy and Beef Sectors; the work of the Seafood Sector Taskforce; the publication of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan; Ireland’s participation in the UN Food Systems Summit; the development of a new strategy for the horticulture sector; the launch of a new flagship environmental scheme, ACRES; and the hosting of the first National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture.

The Climate Action Plan 2023 and the Food Vision 2030 Strategy set out a series of measures and actions to ensure that the sector delivers in terms of its contribution to the climate challenge while also building resilience into the food production system for the future.

The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine have a number of policies and strategies in place to ensure Agriculture plays its role in meeting the national climate targets by 2030 and 2050, while continuing to sustainably produce food and feed. The Food Vision 2030 Strategy sets out a pathway to become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems over the next decade. Food security, food safety and nutrition are key components of Sustainable Food Systems.

The Food Vision Strategy will deliver significant benefits for the Irish agri-food sector itself, for Irish society and the environment. In demonstrating the Irish agri-food sector meets the highest standards of sustainability – economic, environmental, and social – this will also provide the basis for the future competitive advantage of the sector.

The Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS) 3 and other schemes, for example, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), are targeted at improving the competitiveness of agriculture but it also improves long-term sustainability through research and innovation.

In relation to climate change, Nitrogen reduction is also supported through the continuation of aid for Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment. Over 5,200 applications have been paid in full under the LESS measure of the Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS) 2 since its launch in 2015.

Under TAMS 3, funding for this measure has increased from 40% to 60%. As well as reducing the chemical fertiliser allowances for farmers under Nitrates legislation, the use of protected urea is also being promoted which will help achieve ammonia emissions targets in addition to GHG emissions reductions.

The National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025 was published in October 2023 and now includes a specific pillar on communities, regions and cities and seeks to enhance regional governance, develop co-creation and co-design opportunities for regional bioeconomy development and to examine funding routes to explore these co-created and co-designed opportunities.

The RDP includes several national policy objectives in the areas of promoting food chain organisation and the development of the farming and wider agri-food sectors. There was an emphasis on supporting the organisation of artisan and small-scale food production, especially in the areas of added value production and participation in quality schemes. There was also an emphasis on strengthening of producers' position in the market that facilitates cooperation and collaboration.

The Fishery Harbour Centres and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme delivers on the Programme for Government action (Balanced Regional Development Section) to *“Implement the climate adaptation plan for the agri-food and seafood sector, and assist these sectors, to adapt with the changed environment.”*

3. Measures aimed at enhancing the rural economy

Food Vision 2030 recognises the importance of the rural economy and includes two notable actions specifically on Rural Development.

- Mission 2, Goal 4, Action 23- Government will continue to focus on Rural Development. DAFM will work with the Department for Rural and Community Development and others, including the agri-food stakeholders, to deliver on Our Rural Future 2021 to 2025 for the economic and social development of rural areas over the next five years. Our Rural Future is the whole-of-Government policy for sustainable rural development, over a five-year timeframe. It is adaptable to the changing needs and requirements of people living and working in rural areas, through the inclusion of new measures and actions in annual Work Programmes. Implementation and monitoring of commitments is frequent and ongoing, through a series of public consultation events and bilateral Government Department meetings. Updates on the actions contained in Our Rural Future are published via a series of six-monthly Progress Reports. The Progress Reports and Work Programmes are available to view on the Department of Rural and Community Development website here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/bcbca-our-rural-future-annual-work-programmes-and-progress-reports/>. DRCD continues to engage with DAFM regarding the completion of measures relating to its remit and on the inclusion of potential additional measures over the course of the policy's implementation period. Two new measures were added in 2023; the 2024 Work Programme is currently being developed.

- Mission 2, Goal 4, Action 25- DAFM will ensure that the contribution of the entire agri-food sector to the economic and social fabric of the country is recognised in public policy. The LEADER Food Initiative (LFI) was allocated €15 million as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 -2022 and was launched in May 2018 to support the further development of food and beverage businesses throughout rural Ireland. The timeframe for the initiative was extended to utilise as much of the project funding from projects previously approved. There are 181 projects progressing/completed amounting to €14.3m of allocated funding. Ireland has seen considerable growth and expansion in the artisan food sector over the past decade. In this regard, rural food production is a sub-theme of Economic Development and Job Creation under the LEADER element of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The LEADER programme is well positioned to support this sector with investment in artisan and micro, small and medium food producers to develop and expand rural food production, skills development and marketing.

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 underpins the sustainable development for Ireland's farming and food sector by supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness, by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and by contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels. A budget of approximately €9.8 billion is allocated for the period, with about 60% of this in direct income support and 40% in Rural Development interventions, with a significant increase in the national co-financing of the Rural Development interventions.

Over 20 schemes are supporting over 120,000 family farms and rural communities across the country. This support provides a significant multiplier effect in regional areas, ranging from 1.75 for processors to 2.5 for beef producers. It will have a positive effect for farming families and their communities, generating employment and activity at farm level and through agri-related businesses.

In addition, the LEADER programme continues under the CSP led by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). LEADER is aimed at identifying challenges in rural Ireland and providing resources necessary for communities to support their own development and create capacity at local level. Once local development strategies are created/selected, the details of the specific contribution of this intervention will be apparent. The themes will include economic development, job creation, rural infrastructure, social inclusions and sustainable development of the rural environment and climate change mitigation.

Several RDP measures and schemes are aimed at enhancing the rural economy. Two of the biggest spending schemes are Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme and LEADER. LEADER has proven to be an effective tool for supporting the economic and social development of rural communities by providing the resources necessary for communities to support their own development. LEADER is based on a local-led, bottom-up approach to rural development. The programme supports projects from local community groups and businesses which, amongst other objectives, promote economic development, social inclusion and the protection of the rural environment.

Funding is disbursed nationally under the ANC scheme. It is the largest RDP support available to farmers. The scheme provides important environmental and social benefits by compensating farmers for additional costs and income foregone related to constraints on agricultural production in the areas concerned. A separate category of

support is available to compensate island farmers in recognition of the specific constraints on agricultural activity in those locations.

The RDP is a vital support to the viability of Ireland's rural economy. Estimates indicate that the total direct and indirect impact of RDP expenditure on the rural economy is of the order of €1,863m in output, compared to the aggregate national impact of RDP expenditure of €2,186m. Assuming that the expected level of expenditure is all spent by the end of the original programme, it is estimated that there will be €3,217 million in direct and indirect impacts. It is also estimated that RDP expenditure supports 4,178 jobs on an annual basis in the rural economy. Source: Indecon Mid-Term Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme Ireland (2014-2020).

Fishery Harbour Centres

The Fishery Harbour Centres and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme delivers on the action of the Balanced Regional Development Section in the Programme for Government to "Invest strategically in harbour infrastructure to attract increased landings into Ireland of sustainably caught fish in our waters, driving the development of the seafood processing sector and the blue economy in coastal communities." 3 of Ireland's six state-owned Fishery Harbour Centres lie within the Southern Region - An Daingean, Castletownbere, and Dunmore East. In 2023, a total of €7.8m was allocated to these harbours through the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. Funding for the Programme comes from the Department's Vote and the Fishery Harbour Centre Fund.

In addition to the Fisheries and Seafood Production industries, the Fishery Harbour Centres are accommodating an ever-increasing amount of diverse marine commercial business, including commercial cargo traffic, cruise liners, restaurants and other leisure, tourism and social activities. All of these activities complement the critical economic activity generated by our fishing industry and help to maintain the vitality of these coastal communities.

See link for further details <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/bbd0b-minister-mcconalogue-announces-investment-of-373million-in-capital-projects-in-irelands-six-fishery-harbour-centres/>

The Brexit Adjustment Local Authority Marine Infrastructure (BALAMI) Scheme 2022-2023

The Brexit Adjustment Local Authority Marine Infrastructure (BALAMI) Scheme 2022-2023 provides funding to local authorities to upgrade, modernise and develop public marine infrastructure for the purposes of mitigating the impacts of the EU UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement on the Irish seafood sector. In the Southern Region, 5 coastal local authorities were approved for 68 marine infrastructure projects with a combined maximum Scheme contribution of €16.8m. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is administering the Scheme, and each local authority is responsible for governance and delivery of its own projects. The projects are co-funded at a rate of 95% and is proposed for funding under the EU Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR).

See link for further details. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/01fd7-mcconalogue-announces-increased-brexite-investment-in-public-marine-infrastructure-total-now-553m/>

4. The marine and coastal assets

Food Vision 2030 contains a number of actions for the seafood sector. Mission 1, Goal 5 aims to Enhance the Environmental Sustainability of the Seafood Sector. One key achievement for the sector is the publication of The Seafood Task Force Report in October 2021. Since the publication of the report, 12 schemes have been launched worth a combined total of €271 million. A further four schemes have been developed and submitted for State Aid decision. These will represent the final schemes proposed for funding under the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. Relevant Task Force actions were accounted for in the EMFAF Seafood Development Programme which was adopted by the European Commission in December 2022.

Our long-standing policy in Ireland is that fishing quotas are a public resource and are managed to ensure that property rights are not granted to individual operators. When a quota allocation is not fished by an individual operator, it is returned to the State for re-distribution to the fleet. This is important to ensure that quotas are not concentrated into the hands of large fishing companies whose owners have the financial means to buy up such rights. This approach helps to support a fishing fleet based around the Irish coastline and in rural communities, including in the Eastern region. This means that the Irish fishing fleet is made up of various sizes and types of fishing vessels who have retained a strong economic link with our coastal and rural communities and have provided vital employment in these communities, where there are limited alternative economic activities. Any movement towards privatisation of fishing rights would seriously risk fishing vessels losing an economic link with Ireland's coastal communities and the Minister works closely with the fishing industry to ensure this does not happen.

The Dinish Wharf Extension, Castletownbere Fishery Harbour Centre was completed in 2023. The most recent development on Dinish Island Wharf delivered 216 metres of additional quay space, bringing the overall facility to over 400 metres in length. The navigational channel and the berthing pocket were both also dredged. The outcome is that Castletownbere can now facilitate landings by vessels of 100 metres in length and congestion during peak times is greatly alleviated. In 2022, almost 87% of all fish landed into Ireland was into the six State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres and at Castletownbere Fishery Harbour Centre, these landings were valued at circa €107m.

5. Details relating to progress on the future of former peat production bogs and peatlands, including move towards a Just Transition

For the period 2023-2027, certain new GAECs are being introduced, such as GAEC 2, which relates to the protection of peatland and wetland. The approved CSP sets out that this new standard will be introduced for all farmers from 1 January 2025. Details on the implementation of GAEC 2 will be communicated throughout 2024.

Under the EU Just Transition Fund, DAFM has made available up to €20 million for pilot testing and demonstration bioeconomy facilities in two areas: Optimised and integrated industrial bio-based systems based on agriculture and/or forestry-based value chains; and processing and co-processing of bio-based waste and mixed bio-based waste.

In addition to this, two further EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, under the fourth call for proposals under Ireland's Rural Development Programme, to aid in the re-wetting of former peatlands – Green Restoration Ireland and FarmPeat. These EIPs are due to finish in 2023. A call for EIPs will issue in 2024.

DAFM has developed funding for Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiatives under the EU Just Transition Fund.

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups were set up to research this area including the Blackstairs Farming Futures which aimed to develop a new revenue stream for commonage farmers for the delivery of innovative eco-system services whilst simultaneously improving habitat conditions in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and adjacent habitats including peatlands.

The North Connemara Locally Led Agri-Environmental Scheme developed an incentive system for improving agricultural management of upland heaths and peatlands and enable the restoration of peatland and grassland habitats. Both these EIPs are now closed.

In addition, two further EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, under the fourth call for proposals under Ireland's RDP, to aid in the re-wetting of former peatlands – Green Restoration Ireland and FarmPeat.

ACRES – Agri-Climate Rural Environmental Scheme

The Low Input Grassland on Peat measure in the general ACRES scheme is a results-based climate mitigation action which rewards farmers for sensitive management of grassland on peat soils to help reduce CO2 emissions. The natural transitional area around raised bogs (lag zone) is vital for supporting raised bog ecosystems. The grassland on peat scorecard incentivizes farmers with land in these transitional zones to help restore these important ecosystems and the services they provide.

In addition, ACRES Co-operation projects, such as the South Kerry Development Partnership and ACRES Munster South Connacht Co-operation projects are available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas in the Southern regions and involves results-based payments as well as bespoke farm and landscape actions. The Operational Groups will develop a new revenue stream for commonage farmers for the delivery of innovative eco-system services whilst simultaneously improving habitat conditions in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and adjacent habitats including peatlands.

EU Just Transition Fund

DAFM has recently secured funded under the EU Just Transition Fund which will support research, knowledge transfer and monitoring activities on reduced management measures and overall sustainable land management improvements for farmed peat soils in the Midlands. This will build on several current projects with stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer/exchange activities. Research on rewetted soils will identify suitable land management practices to maintain low GHG emissions and support biodiversity while farming under wet conditions. Actions on the rewetted area may include, but are not limited to, reducing the grazing period with existing livestock and use of alternative crops & grazing animals.

The Just Transition Fund is restricted to the JT Territory which includes the municipal districts of Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles in Tipperary in the Southern Assembly area.

6. Details relating to marine planning and the sustainable management of Marine Waters including the National Marine Planning Framework, the protection of the marine environment and growth of the marine economy, including sectoral opportunities in the seafood sector and marine energy for instance

The EMFAF Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 has been strongly focused on sustainable development. Mission 1 of the Programme is developing a climate smart, environmentally sustainable seafood sector. This includes objectives concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation, minimising the impact of fishing/aquaculture activities on the marine environments, managing the fisheries/aquaculture resources in a sustainable manner, reduction of waste in the marine environment and promoting the circular economy, effective control and enforcement and enhancing marine knowledge. These objectives will be achieved through targeted investment in the fishing sector and wider seafood industry to improve sustainability and efficiency, and support for public interest projects to enhance control and enforcement, data collection, research and development and enhancement of marine knowledge.

7. Please outline any progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of your Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities: BIM implemented the BAR Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme which aimed to stimulate growth in rural coastal communities. It was designed to help

strengthen and rejuvenate coastal communities by giving businesses an opportunity to apply for funding for their blue economy activities in areas including seafood, coastal tourism, boat building and repair, marine leisure and sport, and renewable energy initiatives. Over the course of the scheme, a total of 153 project with a grant value of €5.72 million were funded in the Southern region.

Low Carbon, Climate Resilient and Sustainable Society : In 2023 BIM published the Carbon Footprint report for the Irish Seafood Sector. The report showed that Irish Seafood is a low carbon protein source. Irish fishing vessel sample data analysed included both energy costs and tonnes of fish landed - gives an average emissions figure of 1.03 tCO₂ eq./t fish landed. This figure is well below the global seafood average of 1.7 tCO₂ eq./t fish landed. Ongoing work is being carried out to further reduce this figure through innovations in areas such as net design and moving to alternative fuels such as Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO).

The focus of the investment/initiatives carried out by the Marine Institute *are supporting 5. A Strong Economy (competitive, innovative and productive economy); and 8. Low Carbon, Climate Resilient and Sustainable Society.* This is carried out through e.g. the Institute's research programmes and funding, as well as the scientific and data services provided to support a sustainable blue economy. In particular over the reporting period of the monitoring report, there has been an increased focus on informing and supporting government in the area of safe, sustainable and secure seafood production; sustainable development of offshore renewable energy; implementation of marine spatial planning and licensing support; the establishment of marine protected areas; strengthening the strategically important maritime sector; and supporting the transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral blue economy.

Research and innovation Further details of funding awarded to southern regional organisations is provided in the table below.

Through the Marine Institute Blue Bioeconomy Programme, the Institute has and continues to provide policy support towards the development of the Bioeconomy Action Plan, the Irish Macro-Algal Cultivation Strategy to 2030, and the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development. The Marine Institute is a partner in the BlueBio Cofund (Blue Bioeconomy) and Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, providing funding to Irish partners across all the regions. Both of these European funding mechanisms aim to enhance competitiveness, resilience and sustainability in their respective sectors.

The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) is the part of the Marine Institute (an agency of DAFM) which supports Ireland's maritime transport sector. The IMDO provides maritime business development functions and advisory services to government, specifically the Department of Transport. In this capacity, the work of the IMDO over the recent period is targeted at the development of capacity in the shipping industry in response to Brexit challenges – new and expanded routes and services; the quantification of Landbridge traffic pre-Brexit, including agricultural produce; the development of a ports policy statement for Offshore Renewable Energy that creates opportunities for ports in the region (e.g. Waterford & Cork) to contribute to the infrastructure response, with potential long term benefits for importers and exporters; and Digitalisation of the maritime industry: e.g. through pilot and EU projects and programmes. These activities support the RSES Strategy's objectives of 9. Sustainable, Planned and Infrastructure-led Development

According to Bord Iascaigh Mara the 2022 estimated GDP of Irish Seafood was €1.3 billion. The SFPA as the competent Authority for Protecting Sea-Fisheries sustainability, Seafood Safety and Seafood Trade plays a crucial role in every facet of the wild seafood production system by providing independent oversight of activities at sea, at landing, in transport, at processing and at export/import. We are proud to enable this trade which supports the livelihoods of over 15,000 people along Ireland's coastline.

Signpost Programme

- The new Signpost Programme was launched in May 2021. This Teagasc-led, collaborative programme has over 60 agri-food industry partners, and its key objective is to lead and support Irish farmers as they take steps to reduce agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions.
- By the end of 2021, a network of 125 Signpost Farms had been established. These demonstration farms can point the way forwards for all farmers and fulfil two main functions: (1) to adopt climate solutions; and (2) to share their experiences.
- Since 2021, these farmers have received intensive advisory support, and their progress has been shared widely through farm demonstrations, media articles, videos, social media posts etc.
- The Signpost Farms are also part of ongoing research experiments, specifically a number of studies to quantify the amount of soil carbon in their soils, and also the annual rate of carbon sequestration.
- Overall, we have seen progress made by the Signpost Farmers in adopting climate solutions, and there has also been significant shifts at national level, specifically in terms of nitrogen fertiliser use.

Signpost Advisory Programme

- 21 Climate and Sustainability Advisors appointed and commenced in June 2023
- Over 600 workshops took place by the 31st December with an end of year total of 10,000 Signpost participants enrolled
- AgNav tool developed in collaboration with ICBF and Bord Bia (supported by DAFM)

Agricultural Catchments Programme

- The Agricultural Catchments Programme continues to monitor water quality in three agricultural catchments in Ballycanew, Castledockrell and Dunleer and report findings to DAFM and EC
- There are 3 Eddy Covariance Towers monitoring Co2 exchange in arable, grassland (free draining and heavy soils types) in the SE catchments which are part of the National Agricultural Soil Carbon Observatory, results from which are disseminated to farmers and agri industry.
- The Agricultural Catchments Programme organised a major international conference Catchment Science 2023 in Wexford 7-9th Nov. It was attended by scientists, policy makers, farm advisors, KT specialists and local authorities.

ASSAP Programme

- ASSAP have visited 2978 farms in the southern region, assessed the farms for issues impacting water quality and provided recommendation on measures to prevent the loss of nutrients to water from agricultural activities.
- ASSAP has worked in collaboration with LAWPRO and DII to secure funding for a Water EIP from DAFM and DHLGH. this EIP will be available to farmers in certain areas of the southern region from early 2024
- ASSAP has developed a new data capture portal and database structure to support advisors in assessing farms under the ASSAP programme

Climate Centre

- Over 20 new climate and biodiversity research staff have been appointed to focus on a range of options to meet sustainability challenges being faced by the agricultural and land-use sectors
- The Climate centre launched the new marginal abatement cost curve which sets out a pathway for agriculture and land-use to achieve the 2030 agricultural greenhouse gas sectoral targets.
- The National Agricultural Sustainability Research and Innovation centre has been funded which will provide national laboratories to underpin agricultural and land-use sustainability research at Johnstown Castle.

- The new National Agricultural Soil Carbon Observatory has been established to quantify carbon dioxide emissions and soil carbon sequestration across Ireland to enable Irish farmers and landowners to get credit for their carbon sequestration.

Food Innovation Hub

- Advanced packaging unit (for sustainable packaging) commissioned at the prepared consumer foods centre at Teagasc Food Research Centre, Ashtown
- New biotransformation suite developed at the Teagasc Food Research Centre, Moorepark for fermentation of food by-products.
- Food diversification - processes developed within the food programme for extraction of protein from plant / marine resources. Functionality of these ingredients has been characterised in food and beverage systems.
- Selected food processes adapted for monitoring of manufacturing efficiency.
- Digital solutions developed for sustainable food processing and waste valorisation.

In the last five years Horse Racing Ireland's Capital Grant schemes have benefited racecourses in Limerick and the Key Towns of Clonmel, Thurles, Mallow, Wexford and Killarney in areas such as water capture systems for irrigation, equine care and safety, improving public facing amenities and facilities and therefore links with their local communities. As we look ahead to the next five years HRI anticipates assisting racecourses with projects such as installation of EV charging points, further water conservation and management infrastructure and improving the energy efficiency of buildings and operations. In our experience HRI's grant schemes benefit the local economies as many of the projects / contracts are won by local contractors and suppliers, supporting local jobs and rural communities. As HRI rolls out its recently published Sustainability Strategy we will be actively engaging with the racecourses in the Key Towns to promote and assist them with improving biodiversity, reducing waste, promoting the circular economy, increasing community engagement and education programmes for industry participants and local schools.

In HRI's soon to be published 2024 – 2028 Corporate / Group Strategy, the development of a new all weather track is a key objective and while Tipperary Town is outside the main remit of the RSES, the benefits to the wider local hinterland of Limerick, Tipperary and Cork will include:

- Full time employment positions at the venue once it is in operation with an expected 31 race meetings to be held annually up from the current 11 meetings, as well as ancillary services jobs.
- The venue is to form the Tipperary hub for the Thoroughbred Country Experience, an equine based tourism product, being developed by Tipperary and Kildare County Councils.
- In addition, the facility will be available throughout the year for commercial and community events that will benefit the local community and tourism efforts in Tipperary.
- Significant habitat and amenity enhancements are included in the current designs for which An Bord Pleanála recently upheld the grant of planning permission on this major development.
- The hope is that, subject to the necessary approvals being consented by DAFM, the project would commence in the spring of 2025 to be concluded in the autumn of 2026.

8. Please provide details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) contains measures that address the 9 Specific Objectives of the CAP, and the cross-cutting objective of modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation, and encouraging their uptake.

The CSP has programmed approximately €9.8 billion for the period 2023-2027, and this financing will be used to address the economic, environmental and societal needs of the sector.

The CAP Strategic Plan commenced on 1 January 2023 and several interventions have launched. It is early in the programme, but to date application rates have met or exceeded expectation, with very good uptake of environmental schemes including under the flagship Agri-Climate and Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) and the organic farming scheme.

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) is the current agri-environment climate measure under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The Government has committed €1.5 billion to the Scheme over its duration, which is the largest amount ever committed to an agri-environment scheme. This financial commitment highlights the anticipated contribution of the Scheme to the delivery of long-term environmental improvement through the participation by a significant number of farmers on the most appropriate land, with each making a strong improvement on their farm. Some 46,000 farmers have been accepted into this scheme under Tranche 1, which shows the level of interest, the commitment and environmental ambition of our farmers in contributing to the long-term ambition of delivering on environmental and climate objectives. Tranche 2 has now closed for applications with 4000 farmers expected to be accepted to the scheme.

Using a habitats-based approach, delivered through both multi-functional prescription and results-based actions, ACRES aims to contribute significantly to achieving improved biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes. These will be achieved through two approaches under the scheme:

- an ACRES General approach offering a range of measures for individual farmers (both targeted and general); and
- an ACRES Co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas, who opt to undertake measures, as well as bespoke farm, and landscape actions. Farmers participating in this approach have the assistance of a Local Cooperation Project (CP) Team, who will assist with implementation of the scheme at local level.

The ACRES General approach introduces a qualitative approach, compared to its predecessor under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (the Green Low carbon Agri-Environment Scheme [GLAS]), with the inclusion of a number of results-based actions, The ACRES Co-operation approach also includes this qualitative aspect on a wider scale with land included in the Scheme to be assessed using results-based scorecards, with incentives in place to increase scores and improve the landscape being farmed. The introduction of a Farm Sustainability Plan as part of the ACRES application process will help achieve the underlying principle of ACRES which is “the right measure in the right place”.

The purpose of a results-based system is to reward good environmental practice and encourage increased ambition through subsequent increased scores and resulting increased payments.

Contracts under ACRES are for a minimum period of 5 years. The ACRES General approach offers a maximum payment of €7,311 per participant per full calendar year. The level of payment achieved will be determined by the payment rates for the respective actions selected and undertaken. ACRES Co-operation approach offers a maximum payment of €7,000 per participant per full calendar year, with a participant able to avail of an additional €3,500 per annum in respect of Non-Productive Investments and Co-operative/Landscape Actions.

The Teams in each of the eight ACRES Co-operation were appointed following a competitive tendering process and their role is to assist ACRES Co-operation participants in their respective areas to assist them at local level e.g. by the identification of appropriate non-productive investments or landscape actions.

It is envisaged that ACRES will, by means of both approaches, enhance the contribution of the agriculture sector to a range of environmental, climate and biodiversity objectives. The payment rate for each action is based on income forgone, costs incurred and transaction costs and, while ACRES is not an income support scheme, it provides valuable assistance to farmers to enable them to implement the various actions.

The National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025 was published in October 2023 and now includes a specific pillar on communities, regions and cities and seeks to enhance regional governance, develop co-creation and co-design opportunities for regional bioeconomy development and to examine funding routes to explore these co-created and co-designed opportunities.

Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan opened on the 1 January 2023. The programme includes a suite of new supports and environmental measures.

9. Please provide a summary of the funding programmes administered by your Department (or agency under the aegis of your Department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Southern Region with the following details requested:¹

- **Funding Programme**
- **County Project Name and Description**
- **Amount Awarded (€)**
- **Stage of Project**

DAFM Research Funding Programme

DAFM's competitive research programme support 'public good' research projects and innovation in Research Performing Organisations in the regions to address challenges and opportunities in the agri-food, forest and marine sectors. The research Calls also support the development of human capital, skills and innovation in particular for early stage researchers (Masters and PhD students and post-docs). Since 2022, over €57m has been committed to RPOs in Ireland through the agri-food, forest and marine research programme, €14.3m of which has been awarded to projects in the southern region. The DAFM Research Programme also collaborates in project co-funding arrangements with other national (EPA, SEAI, SFI, HRB) and international (EU countries, DAERA NI, USDA, NZ) research funding bodies and their competitive research calls. All projects are ongoing.

Full details of projects funded can be found here: [Microsoft Power BI](#)

2 projects in the Southern Region were allocated funding under the Brexit Adjustment Local Authority Marine Infrastructure (BALAMI) Scheme 2022-2023 but were not completed. These projects are identified as important to address the ongoing impacts of Brexit on Ireland's fishing industry in the Region and €3.67m co-funding is allocated for 2024.

[gov - Minister McConalogue announces funding of €12.7million for Local Authority Marine Infrastructure \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

¹ Southern Region comprises 10 local authorities: Cork City, Cork County, Clare, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford.

Please provide any other comments that you would like to make with respect to your Department (including any agencies under the aegis of your Department) in implementing the RSES and addressing the issue of balanced regional growth, to fully realise the ambition and targets set out for the Southern Region under *Project Ireland 2040- National Planning Framework* and the RSES. This may include any recommendations that you consider would improve the implementation process and provide a greater focus on addressing regional imbalance.

Insert answer here

PLEASE PROVIDE A CONTACT POINT IN THE EVENT THAT WE NEED TO CONTACT YOU ABOUT THIS FORM.

Name: Kevin Galligan

Position: Principal Officer

Email: KevinJoe.Galligan@agriculture.gov.ie

Contact phone number: [01-6072316](tel:01-6072316)