

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q.What is the title of the project?

A. Sustainable land use management for the conservation of freshwater pearl mussel. The project is called KerryLIFE for short to reflect the location of the project (Kerry) and the enabling EU funding mechanism (LIFE).

Q.What is the general aim of KerryLIFE?

A. KerryLIFE is a demonstration project that will operate in two freshwater pearl mussel catchments over a 5½ year period from 2014-2019. It will seek to develop and demonstrate effective conservation measures that will restore the freshwater pearl mussel to favourable conservation condition in the Caragh and Blackwater catchments. The pilot project will focus on farming and forestry activities in the project area within the Natura designated sites. KerryLIFE will implement, in co-operation with farmers and forest-owners, a wide range of measures to enable farming and forestry to be practised, in a way that will sustain both the pearl mussel population and the livelihood of the farm and forest enterprises. It will harness local farming and forest knowledge and experience with the scientific expertise of other project partners and supporters to overcome some of the challenges of land use management in freshwater pearl mussel catchments and to improve the conservation status of the designated sites.

Q.Who is involved in KerryLIFE?

KerryLIFE is an integrated project led by the Department of Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc, Coillte and South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd.

Supporters of the project application included the Irish Farmers Association, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, Ring of Kerry Quality Lamb Cooperative Society, Woodlands of Ireland, Heritage Council, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Kerry County Council, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Q. What is the budget for KerryLIFE and who is funding it?

A. The total budget for KerryLIFE is €5,010,581. A total of 50% of the eligible project funding will come from the European Union's LIFE+ funding programme for Nature and Biodiversity while the remaining 50% of the funding is being contributed by the Irish partners.

Q. What exactly will the Kerry LIFE project do?

A. The project team will be appointed in late 2014 and will be based in the Caragh and Blackwater areas over the 5½ year duration of the project. They will work with members of the farming and forest-owning communities in each of the catchments over that period on a wide range of actions including:

- the development of farm and forest management plans
- managing high risk drains
- stabilising river banks with tree planting

- developing sustainable grazing practices
- reducing farm nutrient inputs on farms
- improving access to water for stock
- restructuring of commercial conifer plantations into long-term retention woodlands
- the trailing of continuous cover forestry
- developing and trialling alternative forest firebreak options
- monitoring the impact of these actions ecologically, agriculturally and socioeconomically.

Other actions will focus on education, public awareness, tourism and added value opportunities and will include:

- the development of a website and media campaign
- public information meetings and community events
- farm product brand
- stakeholder demonstration events and training workshops
- establishing a KerryLIFE walking trail linking the catchments
- educational activities focusing on schools.

Q. How many farmers will be involved?

A. It is estimated that to develop and demonstrate effective measures for the conservation of pearl mussels in as wide a range of physical settings and farm enterprise types as possible will require the direct involvement of at least 25 farms in total across the two river catchments. However, many more farmers and the wider community can become involved by way of the project's demonstration events, training workshops, community events, walking trail, product brand development, tourism amenities and other activities over the course of the project. The project has committed to covering up to 2,500 hectares of farmland and 400 hectares of forest to support the conservation of freshwater pearl mussel habitat.

Q. What issues will the Kerry LIFE project not address?

A. KerryLIFE project is not an agri-environment scheme nor is it a replacement or follow-on from either REPS or AEOS (REPS= Rural Environment Protection Scheme; AEOS = Agri-Environment Options Scheme). The project actions will only be implemented within the designated Natura 2000 sites. This is a condition of the LIFE+ funding. Kerry LIFE is essentially a demonstration project which may help to inform future policy and practice in relation to the operation of agri-environment schemes insofar as freshwater pearl mussels are concerned.

Q. Who will run the Kerry LIFE project?

A. The day-to-day operation of the project will be run by a dedicated Project Team, who will be based in the Glencar/Blackwater area in due course. They will be guided by a Project Management Group and Project Stakeholders Group and will report to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The members of the project team will be:

- Project Team Leader
- Project Scientific Advisor
- Project Farm Advisor
- Project Administrator (half time)
- PhD Research Assistant (funded by Teagasc)

Q. Who will be on the Project Management Group?

A. The Project Management Group will comprise key representatives from:

- The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - Nitrates, Biodiversity & Engineering Division
- The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - Forest Service
- Coillte Teoranta
- Teagasc
- South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd
- Representatives of the farming and forestry communities from each of the two catchment areas.

Q. Who will be on the Project Stakeholder Group?

A. The Project Stakeholder Group will be established in due course to support the project. The membership will be decided once the Project Team is established and engaging with the stakeholders. The Stakeholder Group will include representatives of the local farming and forestry communities, farming and forestry organisations, fisheries interests and relevant public Authorities. The Project Stakeholder Group will be attended by the Project Management Group.

Q. How will it be decided which farmers' farms can or will participate or be included in the project?

A. The Project Team will invite farmers from each of the catchments to express their interest in volunteering to participate in the project. Public meetings will be organised in order to publicise and explain the project. Once farmers have been selected for the project, they will be required to enter into a formal agreement and commit to implementing agreed actions on their farm over the course of the project's duration. Suitability for participation will be determined using criteria that will be developed by the Project Team in consultation with the Management Group.

Q. What will be the criteria for the farms that will become part of the project?

A. Criteria will be based around the core objectives of the project, especially in developing and demonstrating measures to support the restoration of the freshwater pearl mussel to favourable conservation condition. Farmer's commitment, the suitability of the farm as a demonstration site, farm size and its ecological significance as well as the condition of the habitats on the farm will also play a key part in farm selection. These general criteria will be further refined by the project team on appointment in consultation with The Project Management Group.

Q. Will the number of participating farmers be split evenly between the two catchment areas?

A. Not necessarily. The application of the final agreed criteria will, for the large part inform the decision as to which farmers and forest-owners are invited to participate.

Q. Will I get paid to be a participating farmer?

A. Participating farmers will qualify for payment in respect of the successful completion of agreed works undertaken as part of the project. Payment will vary in accordance with each farm's agreed management plan and will be determined using trial works that have been undertaken with some of the catchments farmers in recent years. Once a participating farmer has an agreed management plan in place, they will know exactly how much they will be entitled to on successful completion of the agreed works.

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