



“Restoration of the Lower Shannon SAC (Mulkear River) for Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon and the European Otter”

## Press Release

18<sup>th</sup> July 2012

### Report on LIFE Seminar Celebrating 20 Years of the LIFE Programme in Ireland

MulkearLIFE was delighted to stage a tremendously successful one day seminar ‘Celebrating 20 Years of the LIFE Programme In Ireland’ in May 2012. The event, attended by over 75 invited guests, was specifically planned to mark the 20th Anniversary of the LIFE programme. It coincided with other similar events, held in May across Europe, marking the 20th Anniversary of the signing into law of the Habitats Directive and the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network in May 1992.

The seminar was jointly organised by MulkearLIFE and co-hosted and supported by the four current LIFE+ projects in Ireland, as represented by MulkearLIFE – Inland Fisheries Ireland; ‘Demonstrating Best Practice in Raised Bog Restoration’ – Coillte; IRD Duhallow LIFE – IRD Duhallow and CAISIE LIFE+ Project – Inland Fisheries Ireland. The following brief report on the seminar has been compiled by MulkearLIFE. It is intended to give a flavour of the excellent presentations made on the day, but more importantly, to give a flavour of some of the input from the World Cafe Sessions (workshops). The report is designed to highlight key areas to strengthen the LIFE programme and individual LIFE projects in Ireland. All presentations remain the property of the individual concerned and as such cannot be used without the consent of the party concerned. Similarly, all images remain the property of the individual concerned as such cannot be used without their consent.

The full day seminar was held in the Castle Oaks Hotel, on the banks of the River Shannon, in Castleconnell, Co. Limerick. It included an evening field trip to review the work of MulkearLIFE at Annacotty on the Mulkear River. The seminar brought together many of Ireland’s leading experts, across a wide range of disciplines, involved in the conservation of Ireland’s rich heritage, habitats and species. It included those dealing directly with the LIFE programme in Ireland, those implementing LIFE projects (past and present) and those with an interest in future LIFE applications. The highly informative and participatory event, which included workshops (World Cafe Sessions) and an evening field trip, was deemed by delegates to be an overwhelming success. The full programme is available here: [Seminar Programme](#).

The seminar was one of four events organised by MulkearLIFE in the month of May to mark the 20th Anniversary of the LIFE Programme. These events, together with similar events staged right across Europe, brought a real sense of meaning as to what is best about contributing to the development of the Natura 2000 Network.

#### Opening Session

The seminar was opened by MulkearLIFE’s Project Manager, Ruairí Ó Conchúir who acted as Chairperson for the morning session. He welcomed all delegates and outlined the seminar objectives. He noted that this was the first time in 20 years that the Irish LIFE projects had come together so it was indeed a day of celebration if not history making. In setting the scene for the day, he noted that assembled in the room were some of the leading experts in Ireland, the ‘Best of the Best’ in terms of LIFE awards and the successful implementation of ground breaking projects. He encouraged all to fully engage, to make the most of the networking opportunity, to engage in the World Cafe Sessions

and the evening field trip. Mr. Ó Conchúir's opening presentation is available here: [Setting the Scene – Seminar Objectives](#)

Mr. Ó Conchúir then welcomed, Ms. Amanda Mooney to the stage as the Director of Inland Fisheries Ireland in the Shannon River Basin District. In her presentation, Ms. Mooney celebrated the success of the LIFE programme in Ireland. She gave an overview of what had been achieved over the past 20 years and noted the work of current LIFE projects and successful past projects. She outlined the importance of LIFE as a funding stream for the environment and future changes to the LIFE programme. Ms. Mooney noted that the EU LIFE programme has contributed €2.5 billion to over 3,500 LIFE projects. Of this, 50 Irish projects received LIFE funding investment of €41 million with a further €59 million contributed by co-financiers. Ms. Mooney stated that this represents a total investment of €100 million for Ireland. Ms. Mooney's address is available here: [Opening Session 2](#)

### **Second Session – Current LIFE projects**

The Chairperson then outlined that the next session, with presentations from current LIFE projects, would concentrate on the key conservation actions of current projects. He introduced his work colleague, Mr. Glen Wightman, MulkearLIFE's Project Officer. Mr. Wightman gave an overview of the key conservation actions involved in the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation. He noted in particular the work of MulkearLIFE with sea lamprey, Atlantic salmon and otter and the achievements of the project over the past three years. He highlighted the commitment of the project's key partners, the Office of Public Works and Limerick County Council, coupled with the funding support of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. He noted the exceptional work undertaken by the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers throughout the catchment in support of the project. Mr. Wightman's presentation is available here: [Session 1.1](#)

Next to present was Ms. Angela Wallace from Coillte. Ms. Wallace outlined the work of Coillte's Demonstrating Best Practice in Raised Bog Restoration. Ms. Wallace reviewed the steps involved in the implementation of the project. This involved the return 636 ha of raised bog habitat, on seventeen different sites, spread across seven counties in Ireland, to more favourable conservation status. She noted that a key objective on site was to raise water levels to within 10cm of the surface of the bog and to retain as much water as possible on the site. She noted that Coillte will be hosting a Platform for Bog Restoration Projects in May to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of LIFE to discuss some of these issues in such projects in an Irish and European context. Ms. Wallace's presentation is available here: [Session 1.2](#)

The Chairperson then introduced a DVD by IRD Duhallow LIFE+ Project. The DVD, which was receiving its first public airing, was commissioned by the IRD Duhallow LIFE+ Project and outlines the work of the project towards the conservation of freshwater pearl mussel, Atlantic salmon, ptter, kingfisher and dipper on the River Allow, a tributary of the River Blackwater SAC. The DVD noted that these species are integral to the river and require high quality river water status to survive. The DVD outlined the work of the project to bring about a sustained enhancement of the river bed and the riparian zone. The DVD was well received by the delegates. It is available from the offices of IRD Duhallow.

The final presentation of the first morning session was by Dr. Michael Millane from the CAISIE LIFE+ Project. The presentation focused on the work of the project 'Control of Aquatic Invasive Species and Restoration of Natural Communities in Ireland'. Dr. Millane noted that the broad objective of the project is to contribute to the halting of biodiversity loss in Ireland by preventing further impacts on native biodiversity from high impact aquatic invasive species. He outlined how Inland Fisheries Ireland had controlled and eradicated a range of high impact invasive species and developed and field tested novel methods of invasive species control. He noted that implicit in the project's work is the target of restoring natural communities and habitats once the invasive species have been controlled. Dr. Millane's presentation is available here: [Session 1.4](#)

### **Third Session – Past LIFE Projects**

Mr. Michael Doyle of IRD Duhallow chaired the next session, which focused on the 'AfterLIFE', namely what had been the achievements of past LIFE funded projects in Ireland. This session drew together three high profile, indeed

award winning, LIFE Nature projects and each made exceptional presentations. This was the first time ever that these Irish LIFE projects had come together to review their achievements collectively and help others in the process.

The Chairperson introduced Dr. Brendan Dunford from the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) formerly the BurrenLIFE project. Dr. Dunford outlined what had been achieved under the auspicious of the LIFE programme. He noted what this has in turn helped achieve in the 'after LIFE' of the five year BurrenLIFE project. He noted in particular that BurrenLIFE had laid a solid foundation for the BFCP and had helped build trust and a good relationship with the local farming community in the Burren. This greatly helped to test ideas, cost actions and create a blueprint for the BFCP. Dr. Dunford outlined the need for projects to be clear and focused and to stay on focus at all times. BurrenLIFE was a recipient of the Best of Best LIFE Award for LIFE Nature projects in 2010. Dr. Dunford's presentation is available here: [Session 2.1](#)

Mr. Lorcán O'Toole from the Golden Eagle Trust presented on the challenges faced by the initial LIFE project for the Reintroduction of the Golden Eagle in Ireland. He noted, that these challenges, like in the case of BurrenLIFE, revolved around building relationships with local communities and land owners in particular. He outlined in some detail what the Golden Eagle Trust has achieved in the period since the end of LIFE funding in 2005. He noted the success of the White Tailed Sea Project, the Red Kite Project and ongoing success of the Golden Eagle project. Mr. O'Toole noted, that these success stories were in the face of the ongoing persecution of birds of prey and the real and ever present threat of poisoning. Mr. O'Toole's presentation is available here: [Session 2.2](#)

The Chairperson noted that Mr. Sean Quealy, who was due to give the Coillte presentation on the Restoration of Priority Woodland Habitats in Ireland could not be present and that Mr. Brendan Lally from Coillte would present. Mr. Lally, one of the site managers for the project, noted the key achievements of the project, namely the restoration and enhancement of habitat quality at four woodland types of over 550 hectares and the development and promotion of woodland restoration techniques. He also outlined the significant public awareness work which had been undertaken to place a value on priority woodland habitats, work which has continued in the after LIFE. The project, one of four LIFE project undertaken by Coillte over the past 10 years was a recipient of the Best of Best LIFE Award in 2010. Mr. Lally's presentation on behalf of Mr. Sean Quealy is available here: [Session 2.3](#)

#### **Fourth Session – Afternoon**

Following lunch, Dr. Francis Lucy, from IT Sligo, welcomed delegates to the afternoon session. She encouraged all to fully engage in the session, especially the World Cafe (Workshop) Sessions which she noted would be invaluable to the future success of the LIFE programme in Ireland.

She first introduced Mr. Frances Jacobs, Head of the European Parliament Office in Ireland. Mr. Jacobs focused on the history and background to the LIFE programme and on the people who have helped the LIFE programme achieve so much over the last two decades. He noted that LIFE has played a significant role in the implementation of major EU environmental legislation such as the Habitats and Birds Directives, and the Water Framework Directive. Mr. Jacobs outlined the impact that LIFE co-funding has had on projects right across Europe, on the environment, on local communities and on their lives. He went on to specify the proposed changes to the new LIFE programme. He noted that the European Commission proposes to allocate €3.2 billion over 2014-2020 to a new Programme for the Environment and Climate Action. This proposed new programme will build on the success of the existing LIFE+ Programme but will be significantly reformed to have a greater impact, be simpler and more flexible and have a dramatically increased budget.

The Chairperson, Dr. Francis Lucy, then invited all delegates to break into work groups and invited Mr. Ruairí Ó Conchúir to outline the process. He noted that there would be three World Cafe Sessions, namely 1: Communicating LIFE & the Natura 2000 Network in Ireland, 2: Making A Success of LIFE Funding In Ireland and 3: Building Partnerships for Concrete Conservation Work on the Ground. All delegates were allocated their session with facilitators, record keepers and timekeepers pre-appointed. It was noted that all delegates would have an opportunity to input within each session. Following a hour and half of lively debate the Chairperson reconvened the seminar and requested reports.

Following a hour and half of lively debate the Chairperson reconvened the plenary session of the seminar and requested reports from each of the World Cafe Sessions.

The following is a summary of the main findings of each of the World Cafe Sessions:

**1: Communicating LIFE & the Natura 2000 Network in Ireland Session No 1**

**2: Making A Success of LIFE Funding In Ireland Session No 2**

**3: Building Partnerships for Concrete Conservation Work on the Ground Session No 3**

**Fifth and Final Session – Priorities and Looking Forward**

Following a networking coffee break, the Chairperson, Dr. Francis Lucy, called delegates for the final seminar session. This session focused on the Next Steps for the LIFE Programme in Ireland. The Chairperson then introduced Dr. Andy Bleasdale of the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Dr. Bleasdale outlined the role of LIFE in the protection of Natura 2000 sites in Ireland. He outlined the priorities of the NPWS for the next number of years and related EU priorities. He outlined the role of LIFE in helping to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU and restore them insofar as feasible, and the EU's contribution to averting global biodiversity loss. He noted that the LIFE Programme sets out the budgetary framework and main orientations for the Europe 2020 Strategy. Within this the Commission decided to address environment and climate action as an integral part of all the main instruments and interventions. He noted that the Commission proposes to continue the LIFE Programme currently regulated by the LIFE+ Regulation. Dr. Bleasdale's presentation is available here: [Session 5.1](#)

The Chairperson the reintroduced Mr. Ruairí Ó Conchúir who proceeded to review the main issues emerging from the seminar, present some concluding comments and offer a word of thanks. Mr. Ó Conchúir noted that this day was a long time coming and that 20th Anniversary of the LIFE programme was an excellent opportunity for all to reflect carefully on what had been achieved and what had been lost over the previous 20 years. He noted that the LIFE Programme is one of the key spearheads of EU environmental funding. Without the availability of such financial support, in these tightened economic times across Europe, and within Ireland in particular, little or no funding would exist for creative environmental protection work. He further noted that if Ireland was to make a success of future LIFE funding it was critical that all parties worked collectively together to ensure that Ireland's full annual allocation was utilised. He noted that the proposals for the new programme build upon evaluations of previous experience. These evaluations clearly demonstrate that projects which build real, meaningful and effective partnerships on the ground and engage in ecoinnovation have been most successful in achieving direct environmental benefits. Mr. Ó Conchúir noted that this had clearly emerged from the LIFE projects which had presented at the LIFE seminar.

**A Word Of Thanks:** In conclusion, Mr. Ó Conchúir thanked all those who had presented at the seminar, who had chaired sessions or facilitated World Cafe Sessions. He thanked all involved in the organisation of the event. He also thanked the delegates who had attended the seminar, especially those who had travelled long distances, and wished those who were applying for LIFE funding in 2012 and 2013 every success. He concluded by thanking the staff of the Castle Oaks Hotel for their wonderful hospitality and welcomed all to join the field trip to Annacotty weir on the Mulkear River to review the work of MulkearLIFE at this important High Nature Value (HNV) site.

The session Chairperson, Dr. Francis Lucy, in her final reflections on the day thanked all involved in the staging of an extremely informative and well run event. She then closed the formal seminar and wished all safe travel.

An optional evening field trip, to review the work of MulkearLIFE at Annacotty on the Mulkear River, then got underway. Full details of the field trip are available here: [Overview of Field Trip Site](#)

## Notes for Editors

1. High Resolution Digital Images are available to accompany this Press Release.
2. Interviews can be arranged with the Project Manager by using the contact details below.
3. MulkearLIFE is a new €1.75 million European Commission funded LIFE Nature project working on the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (with a focus on the Mulkear River catchment) for Atlantic Salmon, Sea Lamprey and European Otter. Further details may be viewed on the project website [www.mulkearlifeproject.com](http://www.mulkearlifeproject.com)
4. Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick) is lead partner together with the OPW and Limerick County Council. Additional funding support comes from National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other supporters include Teagasc, IFA, ICMSA, and local angling groups.
5. The project is one of the first and most important integrated catchment management projects in Ireland. It is a flagship EU LIFE Nature project –covering some 650 sq km which contain a variety of habitats and protected species. Much of the area is designated as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network.

### **Issued by:**

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