



Irish Upland Forum Company Limited by Guarantee

Twelfth AGM - to be held online *by ZOOM call, 24th June 2020*

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the twelfth AGM since the IUF became a limited company. It is in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that the Board, in order to meet our corporate requirements, has decided to conduct this meeting online this year. I want to thank our Company Secretary Deirdre Lewis for organising the meeting via a social media channel.

The AGM process offers an opportunity to reflect on progress regarding our aims and objectives in this the 24th year since our foundation and to receive formal accounts of our work and transactions.

The IUF was busy in 2019. Our activities include organising and conducting upland community network events, commissioning and publishing research reports, engagement with other state and NGO bodies, making written submissions in matters relating to uplands, and communications with upland communities. These activities listed below were financially supported by the Heritage Council Grant allocation of €8,000, for which we are very grateful.

Community Network Events

IUF organised two successful upland community network events - one in County Antrim which focused on upland management in NI and a second in County Wicklow which brought upland EIP's together for the first time. Both of these events provided an opportunity for the various upland communities and project organisers to share knowledge, methodology and experiences with each other regarding innovative projects which emphasise the value of managing upland in harmony with nature for farming, recreation and good water quality.

Event 1: Antrim Coast and Glen Upland Partnership Network Event 6th April 2019

The event consisted of IUF AGM, a number of presentations and three field trips. Presentations included two talks from students from WIT and QUB who had been given IUF bursaries to support their research.

Presentations at the event included:



1. *Roles in the Management of The Antrim Coast and Glens* by Sarah Rocks and Judith Annett
2. *Hearth of the Glens Local Partnership* by Theresa O'Hare
3. *A study of Settlement History in the Comeraghs 2018/2019* student bursary research by Carole Melody of University College Dublin.
4. *A study of Upland Carbon Sequestration 2018/2019* student bursary research by Carole McVeigh of Queens University Belfast

The field trips which were organised by IUF member Judith Annett provided an opportunity to examine various uplands and talk to a range of managers and upland scientists.

Locations and themes were:

1. Glenwherry Group Environmentally Sustainable Farming Scheme
2. Ronan's Way Farm choice of upland walks on managed trails
3. Garron Plateaux Sustainable Water Catchment Project – to view blanket bog restoration project

Event 2: Networking Upland European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Agri Projects

A networking workshop at Glencree in County Wicklow October 3rd 2019

This innovative project network event was the second workshop on this topic hosted by the IUF in Glencree and featured progress reports from all upland EIPs. Attendance also included academics interested in agri environment and officials from DAFM.

Presentations were made by all locally led upland EIPs, including: SUAS Wicklow EIP-AGRI, Inishowen EIP- AGRI, REEKS EIP-AGRI and Blackstairs EIP-AGRI as well as those with a regional focus; the Hen Harrier EIP- AGRI, and Freshwater Pearl Mussel EIP-AGRI. While the Connemara EIP was not represented due to an exceptionally bad weather forecast they later sent their presentation which was added to the account of the workshop (which is on the IUF website). Two separate group discussions focused on the concerns 1) of Project Managers and 2) of Project Ecologists. The feedback from each group was presented and discussed in a final general discussion. All concerned stressed the value of the meeting and requested another meeting next year. Negotiations are currently on-going to identify a suitable venue at an upland EIP for 2020.



Launch of “A Profile of Ireland’s Uplands”

The publication of a major new socio-economic geography commissioned by IUF titled “**A Profile of Ireland’s Uplands**” An All-Island Study Highlighting Their Strategic Importance authored by Dr Caroline Crowley and Dr Brendan O’Keeffe was launched at the Royal Irish Academy in November by **Virginia Teehan** CEO of the Heritage Council. Attendance included community development activists, academics and policy makers.

Realising the importance of this all-island report findings for the future management of the Irish upland landscape, the IUF is investing heavily on its time and effort following up with relevant departments of state to initiate appropriate policy responses. The budget spending reflects that emphasis for which we sincerely thank the Heritage Council for their vital continuing financial support. Maintaining vibrant communities in our remote uplands is an important aspect of retaining our living heritage in some of our most scenic and important heritage reservoirs.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

The Chairman of IUF was represented at the reconstituted **Comhairle na Tuaithe** (concerned with government outdoor recreation policy) and was also invited to act as a rapporteur at the International European **Ascent** Footpath Restoration Project conference hosted by Donegal County Council in the Spring in Gweedore.

Burren Winterage

The research officer Dr Mary Tubridy represented IUF at the Burren Winterage, the annual workshop which brings together a wide range of academics, policy makers concerned with agri-environment, farmers and local community development interests from the Burren to this annual networking event which has grown out of the very successful Burren Farming for Nature project. Presentations included some which had been presented at the IUF event in Glencree.

Should mention the Uplands Partnership Management Board. Must have held at least one meeting in 2019?

Uplands Research

Our Research Officer, Dr Mary Tubridy has developed contact with two upland researchers Dr Ray Flynn, Hydrogeologist QUB and Dr Flou Wilson of UCD who are carrying out research on upland ecosystem services and both keen to support the work of IUF. Assistance was also



provided to the Heritage Council concerning the Life Project proposal being developed by the NPWS of which the Heritage Council is a partner. Assistance was also provided to upland research proposals in Ireland (Kilkenny Nore Vision) and internationally (possible LIFE project looking at monetising carbon sequestration in uplands).

Representation of Farming interests

Following their participation in the Mulranny conference INHFA joined the board of IUF. Their addition with existing IFA hill farming board members ensures that IUF is widely informed of upland issues and opportunities for sustainable development from a farming perspective.

Written Submissions

The IUF made written submissions to the following:

- Ag-Climatise – A draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond
- Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland –Public Discussion Document
- Proposal to change the Burning Regulations January 2019
- National Heritage Plan March 2019 (written submission and representation at workshop to discuss the plan in Kilkenny)
- Walking Trails (document submitted by the Sports Council to C na T in November 2019)

Website Update

The IUF website has undergone a significant update in 2019 and is being managed by our membership secretary Georgia Macmillan .

Looking Forward to 2020

I will finish by saying thanks to all my fellow directors for your work in the last year and thanks to our members and particularly everybody who has taken time out to participate in our events or deliberations.

We are facing into another challenging year, but the goal of achieving a sustainable economic and ecological future for the Irish uplands looks brighter than ever. We will participate actively with communities on the North-western seaboard in conjunction with NPWS and Heritage Council in the recently approved Blanket Bog LIFE project which will commence shortly.

Frank Nugent –Chair Irish Uplands Forum