



**MINUTES OF THE 12th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF
THE IRISH UPLANDS FORUM LIMITED
HELD ONLINE BY ZOOM (*due covid-19 pandemic restrictions*)
WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE 2020 – 7.30pm**

Present:

Frank Nugent - Chairman
Deirdre Lewis – Secretary
Mary Tubridy – Director, Research
Judith Annett – IUF Board/ Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust
Georgia MacMillan – IUF Board, Membership Secretary
John O’Callaghan, Mountaineering Ireland
Helen Lawless, Mountaineering Ireland
Dr. Breandán O’Chaoimh
Sue Iremonger
James Fitzmaurice, Blackstairs Mountains partnership
Jodie Asselin
Padraig Fogarty, Irish Wildlife Trust
Catherine Keena, Teagasc (Countryside Management/ Biodiversity)
Brian Dunne, PM, Wicklow Uplands Council
Conor Hipwell, Communications, Wicklow Uplands Council
Graham Thompson, NIEA
Sineád Cusack
Teresa O’Hare, Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust
Shaun Roarty
Siobhán Ward

Apologies: Tom Byrne – Treasurer IUF/ Wicklow IFA; Pat O’Shea – Director IUF/ Kerry IFA; Micheál McDonnell – Board IUF/ INHFA; David Small – Dept Ag. Environment & Rural Affairs (NI); Derek McCallan - NI Local Government; Cornelius McCarthy – Blackstairs Partnership

Meeting Opening:

The Chairman welcomed all attendees to the meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves and their organisation as relevant.

1. Minutes from the last AGM

The Secretary read the Minutes of the Eleventh (11th) Annual General Meeting, held in Carnlough, Co Antrim, in April 2019. No queries arose on the content of the minutes as read.

Helen Lawless proposed the Minutes of the 11th AGM; Judith Annett seconded. The minutes were approved and adopted by the Meeting.

2. Secretary’s Report

The Secretary’s Report (11th AGM 2019 to present, 2020) was read by Deirdre Lewis to the meeting.

The Report was approved and adopted by the Meeting – (attached Appendix 1).

3. Chairman’s Report

The Chairman’s Report was read by Frank Nugent to the meeting.



IUF Board

Frank thanked the active volunteers in IUF who are involved in multiple actions at any one time. He noted that we needed to broaden the Board and was delighted to welcome two new members during the reporting period: Dr Judith Annett (Northern Ireland), a landscape and recreation expert; and Mr Micheal McDonnell of the Irish Natura Hill Farmers Association (INHFA).

IUF Uplands Communities Research: The study *Socio-Economic Profile of the Irish Uplands 2019 (updating 2016 study, incorporating Northern Ireland uplands)* was published by IUF. The research was undertaken on behalf of the IUF by Dr Breandán O’Chaoimh and Dr Caroline Crowley. Frank noted that we plan to periodically update the study as a benchmark.

The study was formally launched by Dr Virginia Teehan, CEO of The Heritage Council, at an event at the Royal Irish Academy in November 2019. The event was very well attended by members of the IUF, as well as significant numbers of policy and decision makers.

IUF Responses to Strategic Consultations

IUF made five (5) submissions to strategic consultations during the year:

1. Draft National Climate Action Roadmap for the Agri-Sector to 2030
2. Environment Strategy (Northern Ireland)
3. Amendments to Burning Regulations (2019)
4. National Heritage Plan
5. Review of the National Walks Scheme

4. Treasurer’s Report

The Chairman presented the Treasurer’s Report on behalf of Mr Tom Byrne, Treasurer, who could not be present at the AGM.

Re. Audited Accounts for 2019, the IUF reports principal **sources of Income:**

Opening Balance	€10,760
Income	€8,794
Expenditure	€9,285
Closing Balance	€8,683

- Heritage Council have voted €8,000 for 2020 (*based on Service Level contract*). Thanks to the Council for their continued support.

The Chairman thanked the auditors for preparing the Accounts (Directors Report and Financial Statement) for year ending 31/12/2019. The Accounts will be sent to the CRO and registered online (in accordance with the Companies Act 2014), upon approval of the membership.

The Treasurer’s Report was proposed by Mary Tubridy and seconded by Georgia MacMillan. It was deemed approved and adopted by the Meeting.

5. Re-Appointment of Auditors

It was proposed by the Chairman that the accountancy practice, Gerard T Murphy Co. Ltd., should be re-appointed as Auditors of the Irish Uplands Forum Limited. It was also noted that their charges had been very reasonable and work conducted to a very high standard.

The re-appointment of the Auditors was proposed by Deirdre Lewis and seconded by Helen Lawless; and agreed by unanimous approval of the Meeting.



6. Election of Directors

Three nominations were received for election to the Board of Directors at the AGM in 2020. There was unanimous support for the current Board to continue in position at this AGM.

Following the election of the nominees, the following members will comprise the Board of the Irish Uplands Forum for the forthcoming term:

Chairperson:	Frank Nugent
Vice-Chairperson:	Judith Annett
Company Secretary:	Deirdre Lewis
Treasurer:	Tom Byrne (Wicklow Uplands Council/ IFA)
Membership/ web:	Georgia MacMillan
Research:	Mary Tubridy
Regional Members:	Pat O'Shea (Kerry/ IFA) Michéal McDonnell (INHFA) John O'Callaghan (Clare/ Mayo, Mountaineering Ireland) Teresa O'Hare (Antrim/ Causeway Coast & Glens)

This concluded the election to the Board of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited.

It was agreed that further co-options could be enacted to address any skills/ sectoral gaps.

7. Research Update

Our IUF Director for Research, Dr Mary Tubridy, gave a brief update on key elements of IUF research undertaken during the year.

- **Socio-Economic Profile (2019)** study involved significant background definition of 'upland' (pure vs marginal) based on CSO and NI Statistics offices, as well as local data sources.
- **Student research bursaries** (2 x €250 /total €500) were awarded during the year:
 - Agricultural impacts on the ecology of Achill
 - Coillte – impacts of forestry on amphibians in the Wicklow Uplands
- **NPWS/ EPA research** (IUF have no direct role, but watching brief)
 - Habitats mapping for uplands in SACs – condition monitoring in Ballyhoura Mountains and Slieve Aughty ranges.
 - EPA restoration of blanket bogs/ SACs
- **EU LIFE Atlantic Bogs:** Potential involvement via 'associate beneficiary' Heritage Council in an upcoming LIFE project on major restoration of Atlantic Western blanket bogs, involving 24 SAC areas along the western seaboard. Opportunity for IUF to become involved through community engagement programme (with our community and farming members) as well as advancing environmental education at local level.
- **Upland Partnership Network (UPN) Coordinator** role was 'dissolved' this year due to lack of funding – a real shame and loss to the ongoing support to community partnerships across the island of Ireland.
- **Priorities 2020:** farmer members of IUF are dissatisfied with CAP payments system that does not take cognisance of ecosystems services in the Uplands. Working with EIPs to identify learnings and adapt approach to upland agriculture, carbon sequestration, biodiversity etc. Upland areas are inherently suited to EIP approach given the number of SACs therein.



8. Discussion / Q&A Session

Discussion on EU Biodiversity Strategy and EU targets.

Seeking 13% to 30% of total national lands as designated area by 2030 (doubling over 10 years) – very challenging. By 2024, member states will need to demonstrate that they have moved substantively on the issue. There will need to be CAP supports to achieve this. All funds will be channelled through a 'biodiversity' lens. This matches the IUF vision to some extent as we advocate that upland ecosystems services need to be recognised and supported through farm payments (not subsistence).

However, upland farmers interpret it to mean that more upland areas will be designated and agriculture will be sterilised as a result - is creating significant and real fears among farmers, as previous designations have not been supported sufficiently.

Suggestion that this could be an opportunity to serve both farming and biodiversity. We need to look at the IUCN Landscape categories e.g. Living Landscapes (allowing people living in uplands to positively manage the landscape) and use policy instruments to support upland ecosystems services & biodiversity. Design appropriate farm policies that are compatible with extensive systems of traditional farming e.g. small stands of native woodlands along valleys.

The 2020 Programme for Government in Ireland is directing carbon taxes to support agri-food sector, water quality and climate mitigation measures. However, there is a disconnect in policy between Agriculture (big spending/ CAP) and the NPWS (starved of funds) as to how 'landscape' should be regarded. There is a sense that only tourism initiatives in the uplands (e.g. Connemara National Park) get funded, while core agricultural livelihoods are not regarded in the same way.

It was agreed that it is critical that IUF work with farming groups as we collectively face massive changes in land use over the coming decade.

9. Any Other Business

The Chairman thanked all attendees for their positive input. There being no further business, the meeting was duly closed at 09.00pm on 24th June 2020.

Chairman

Mr. Frank Nugent

On behalf of the Board of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited

Date June 2020



The Irish Uplands Forum Limited: 12th AGM SECRETARY'S REPORT

Date: 7.30pm Wednesday, 24th June 2020

AGM 2019

The Eleventh AGM was held on Saturday 6th April 2019 at Carnlough, Co Antrim.

Fourteen members attended, including four members of the Board of the IUF.

- Chairman's Report (Frank Nugent) was accepted.
- Minutes and Secretary's Report (Deirdre Lewis) were accepted.
- Treasurer's (Tom Byrne) report and Accounts were accepted.

Nominations were received for election to the Board of Directors at the AGM in 2019. Some of the serving officers had resigned for personal reasons and new nominations were sought. The remainder of the existing Board indicated their willingness to continue for the forthcoming term. The following members were elected to the Board:

Chairperson:	Frank Nugent
Vice-Chairperson:	Frank Bergin (Slieve Blooms)
Company Secretary:	Deirdre Lewis
Treasurer:	Tom Byrne (Wicklow)
Membership/ web:	Georgia Macmillan (Mayo; Mountaineer Ireland)
Research:	Mary Tubridy
Regional Members:	Judith Annett (Northern Ireland) Ross Millar (Northern Ireland) Pat O'Shea (Kerry) Michéal McDonnell (INHFA)

IUF Directors' Meetings

There were seven monthly meetings held since the 2019 AGM. Given the geographical distribution of the Board across the island of Ireland, this year we have experimented with using teleconferencing and 'zoom' to expedite the meetings, cutting down on travel time for contributing Board members. Physical board meetings were held principally in the Maldron Hotel in Dublin, and remotely by telephonic meetings.

Corporate Actions & Achievements

- The Companies Registration Office (CRO) was notified of the composition of the Board and Directorships following the AGM 2019 in April last.
- Company accounts for 2019 were prepared by IUF auditors Gerard T. Murphy Ltd. and have been filed to the Revenue Commissioners. These will be presented at the AGM 2020 to the members.
- The IUF is continuing to explore Charitable Status and is undergoing the registration process with the Charities Regulator.
- Preparation of a Draft '*Membership Handbook*' for Board members is underway to ensure good governance and institutional continuity, with various amendments to be updated.
- Updating of the *IUF Statement of Strategy & Action Plan (2016-2020)* for the final years of the current strategic term was prepared in February 2019. It was intended to have a further strategic meeting early this year (Feb. 2020) to prepare the Strategic Action Plan 2020-2025 but unfortunately this had to be postponed and then CV19 restrictions prevented the meeting. As a result, a *Draft Strategic Plan 2020-2025* is been prepared remotely by a working group of the Board and will be circulated to the membership upon completion.



- A renewed call for the **IUF's small grants for uplands research** was issued in March 2020. Research is coordinated by IUF's Research Director (Dr Mary Tubridy) with a focus on issues pertinent to the uplands, such as ecology, landscape, ecosystems services and carbon sequestration.
- Publication and launch of the joint IUF/ Heritage Council all-island research '**A Profile of Ireland's Uplands – An All-Island Study Highlighting their Strategic Importance**'. Research was conducted by Dr Brendan O'Keeffe and Dr Caroline Crowley, and launched on 30/10/19 at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin by Ms. Virginia Teehan, CEO of the Heritage Council.
- Successful delivery of the **IUF's European Innovation Partnership (EIP) networking event**, held on 3rd October 2019 in Glencree, Co Wicklow. Up to 40 people attended presentations and workshops.
- **Early Summer Networking Event 2020** on rural diversification was due to be held in Kilfinane in the Ballyhoura Mountains in Q1/ Q2 2020 but this has had to be postponed due to CV-19.

Representation on National Bodies

- The IUF continues to be represented on the executive of *Comhairle na Tuaithe* (CnaT) by our Chair, Frank Nugent and Research Director, Dr Mary Tubridy. CnaT has been reinvigorated this year, with a new Chairperson, Mr Liam Twomey. Has been some positive supports for key regions for path maintenance including MacGillycuddy's Reeks, Murrisk, Sliabh Liag, Inishowen.
- The IUF continued its participation on the multi-stakeholder Management Board of the *Uplands Partnership Network*, by IUF Chairman Frank Nugent and Research Coordinator, Dr Mary Tubridy, under the joint auspices of the Heritage Council and the Irish Uplands Forum. However, funding for the role of Uplands Partnership Coordinator was discontinued in 2019 and the Management Board is working to resolve this issue.

Correspondence/ Liaison/ Participation with Agencies:

- Ongoing correspondence and meetings with the Department of Rural and Community Development concerning potential supports for the Uplands.
- Liaison with Mountaineering Ireland as a key partner of the IUF.
- Attendance at Burren Winterage School October 2019
- Attendance at Blue Dot water catchment management, March 2020 (MT)
- Continued engagement and liaison with DAFM and the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) projects.
- Positive discussions with NPWS and Heritage Council regarding participation in an EU LIFE Western Raised Bogs project for community engagement for bog restoration projects (ecosystems, landscape conservation, climate mitigation and education).
- Attendance at NPWS Biodiversity Forum , September 2019 (MT)
- Submission to Northern Ireland consultation on the Draft Environment Policy (Dec. 2019).
- Ongoing engagement with research institutions (TCD, TU Dublin, others as arise), local authorities and statutory agencies for collaborative opportunities on research pertaining to the Uplands.

Membership Issues

- The IUF website has been updated for improved reference by members.
- Communications are ongoing through email/ web/ social media. Special thanks to our Membership Secretary, Georgia Macmillan for her work on communications and the website.

Deirdre Lewis - Secretary of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited