**Press Release For Project Launch**

**September 2017**

**Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**

**Minister Humphreys launches - The Living Bog – Ireland’s largest single bog restoration project**

The Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys TD, has today (Friday) launched The Living Bog Project in Clara, Co Offaly.

The €5.4 million project, funded by the European Union’s LIFE Programme and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will see restoration measures take place on 12 raised bog Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in a total of seven counties: Offaly, Westmeath, Longford, Roscommon, Galway, Meath and Cavan.

**Speaking at the launch, Minister Humphreys said:**

**“**This is biggest single raised bog restoration project in the history of the state. It will see an area of raised bog the equivalent of 7,000 Croke Parks brought back to life. The project, in consultation with landowners and local communities, will use active restoration measures to establish suitable conditions for peat to once again form on the bogs. I hope this project will go towards the creation of a ‘Peat District’ for Ireland – an area of raised bogs which will give visitors a chance to discover 10,000 years of history.

“As an education and tourism resource, the natural eco-system that is a raised bog is without equal in Ireland. ‘The Living Bog’ team will encourage youngsters from National School level right up to University to visit project sites to learn more about this unique landscape. The project will also support some community-led amenities at the bogs, with new walking trails and boardwalks currently under consideration as the bogs become educational and environmental amenities.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editor:**

**Irelands Raised Bog SAC Network**

Ireland’s 53 raised bogs SACs are part of the European Natura 2000 network of sites selected for the purposes of conserving natural habitats and species of plants and animals which are rare, endangered or vulnerable. The EU Habitats Directive lists certain habitats (listed in Annex I) and species (listed in Annex II) that must be conserved by designating and appropriately managing SACs. Habitats and species on these lists which are considered to be particularly endangered are called “priority” habitats and species. There are 59 habitats listed in Annex I in Ireland, including raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes and limestone pavement. Annex II species found in Ireland include salmon, otter, freshwater pearl mussel, Killarney fern and bottlenose dolphin. Each SAC is designated for one or more Annex I habitats and/or Annex II species. 439 SACs have been nominated for designation throughout the State.

Dating back over 10,000 years, raised bogs once formed extensive wetland complexes over much of the central lowlands of Ireland covering an estimated 310,000 hectares of land - over 26% of the total land area of Ireland. Just over 50% of the remaining raised bog habitat in Western Europe is held in Ireland.

The most recent ecological surveys (Fernandez, 2014) indicate that the area of active raised bog within Ireland’s 53 SACs was 1,940 ha in 1994 (the year in which the Habitats Directive came into effect). This decreased to 1,210 ha in 2014, which is a loss of 730 ha.

**The Living Bog Project (EU LIFE NAT/IE/000032)**

‘The Living Bog’ restoration work will re-create over 750 ha of Active Raised Bog and improve a total of 2,649 ha of raised bog habitat – the equivalent of almost 7,000 Croke Parks. The project be restoring a habitat which supports hundreds of native species including the shy Red Grouse (under threat) and the endangered Curlew, rare invertebrates, amphibians and insects and a bewildering array of plant-life not found elsewhere which call raised bogs their home.

Under the Living Bog Project over 200 km of drainage channels will be blocked on high and cutover bog areas using almost 15,000 peat dams and 1,000 plastic dams. This will raise water table in the peat and re-create the hydrological and ecological conditions under which superabsorbent sphagnum moss habitats will form new peat.

‘The Living Bog’ project ecology team have so far unearthed two new county records for plants in Offaly and Longford and recorded a type of moss not seen in Longford for over 50 years.

It is estimated that although bogs and peatlands cover just 3% of the world’s total surface, they store over 30% of the soil’s carbon and twice as much carbon as all the forests in the world. Ireland’s National Peatlands Strategy emphasises the role of peatlands in sequestering and storing carbon and makes recommendations on continuing research to consolidate our scientific understanding of how peatland management might be used to enhance carbon sequestration and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Often referred to as Ireland’s rain forest,

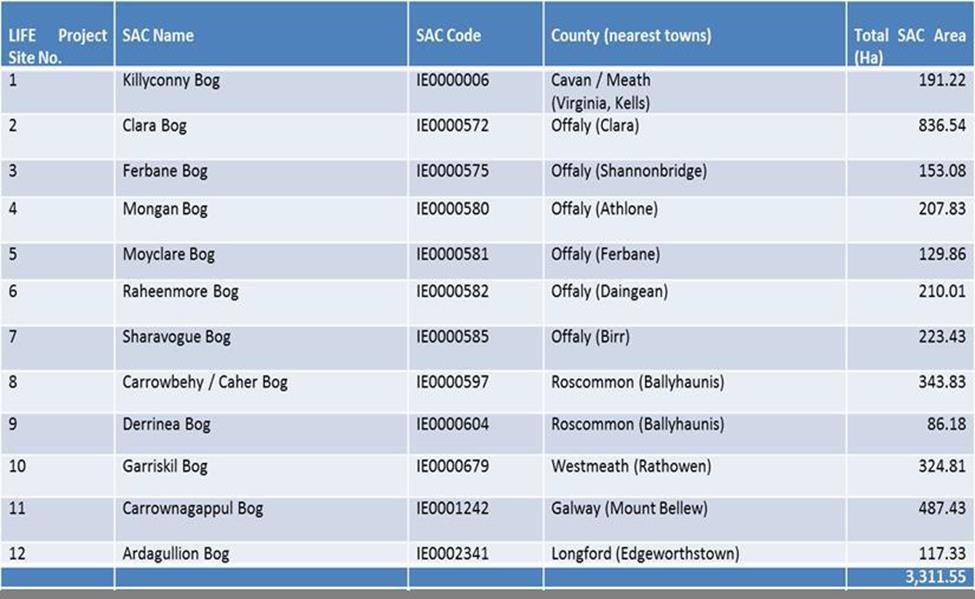
Ireland’s living bogs are of great importance for biodiversity and the control of carbon emissions. The Living Bog project will be developing new methods of monitoring carbon emissions to contribute valuable information to this area.

Improvements to interfaces, infilling of drains, removal of encroaching scrub, fencing and walkway improvements, fire plans and amenity provision all form part of the overall restoration plan.

The towns of Clara, Ferbane and Mountbellew will be among the first to benefit from new community-led amenities at the bogs, with new footpaths and boardwalks currently under consideration as part of the project.

From its base in Mullingar, the five person LIFE project team are Jack McGauley, Project Manager; William Crowley, Ecologist; John Cody, Hydrologist; Ronan Casey, Public Awareness Manager; and Evelyn Slevin, Administrator.

The 12 sites ‘The Living Bog’ project is working on are as follows:



**European LIFE Programme**

‘The Living Bog’ is funded €4.056m by the European Commission’s EU LIFE Nature and Biodiversity Programme 2014-2040 and €1.344m by the Department of Culture, Heritage and

the Gaeltacht, which is the co-ordinating Beneficiary on the project, providing the legislative and policy framework for the conservation of nature and biodiversity in Ireland.

The EU LIFE Nature and Biodiversity Programme is one of the main strands of the European Union’s funding programme. The LIFE Nature and Biodiversity programme co-finances best practice or demonstration projects that contribute to the implementation of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Natura 2000 network. It also co-finances projects contributing to the implementation of the objective of Commission Communication (COM (2006) 216 final) on “Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond”.

Currently celebrating 25 years, the LIFE Programme has funded over 4,500 projects. Almost 400 protected species and 200 rare habitats have been conserved by LIFE projects with over 70,000 jobs created along the way. Since the launch of the LIFE programme by the European Commission in 1992, a total of 58 projects have been co-financed in Ireland. Of these, 38 focus on environmental innovation and 20 on nature conservation. These LIFE projects represent an investment of €130 million, of which €58 million has been contributed by the EU with the remainder coming from the Irish state.

There are currently five active LIFE projects in Ireland, with a total budget of €18.23 million, €11 million of which is EU co-funding. ‘The Living Bog’ follows GeoparkLIFE in Co Clare, AranLIFE on the Aran Islands, KerryLIFE on the Blackwater basin in Kerry and RaptorLIFE in Duhallow, Co Cork.

Further details on the project can be found at: [www.raisedbogs.ie](http://www.raisedbogs.ie/)

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Minister Humphreys with Project Team and DCHG Management Minister Humphreys with community representatives

