

## EIP Operational Group – The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme

A results-based scheme to reduce the level of bacteria issuing from agricultural pollution in the Irish coastal streams that flow onto Duncannon Beach.

### EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** Wexford County, Ireland

**Programming period:** 2014-2020

**Priority:** P1 – Knowledge transfer and innovation

**Focus Area:** Innovation and cooperation

**Measures:** M16 – Cooperation

**Funding:** Total budget: 721 197 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 10/2018 – 10/2023

**Project promoter:** Wexford County Council\*

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### Summary

Elevated bacteria levels in bathing water at Duncannon Beach, Co. Wexford, Ireland, have formed as a result of pressures on local water resources, including a lack of wastewater infrastructure and surface water connections. This resulted in the loss of its important 'Blue Flag' status of environmental excellence in 2007. The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme was set up to reduce the bacterial level of the two coastal streams that flow onto Duncannon Beach, thereby reducing pollution (mainly faecal bacteria but also nutrients and sediments) from rural agricultural and domestic sources, whilst simultaneously protecting farm incomes through a results-based reward scheme to improve water quality. The project's innovative, farmer-centred, community-led measures, such as farm-specific 'Pollution Potential Zone' (PPZ) plans for each participating farm and a community-wide engagement strategy, aimed to significantly help the area to recover its Blue Flag status, and subsequently ensure its long-term retention at Duncannon Beach.

\* The project promoter/beneficiary is an EIP-AGRI Operational Group ([https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/operational-groups\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/operational-groups_en))



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### Project results

- › The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme helped improve the bacterial, chemical and ecological quality of the two coastal streams at Duncannon Beach.
- › The project has resulted in a major improvement in farm management practices which ensure compliance with the Nitrates Directive.

### Key lessons and recommendations

- › This cooperation project provides evidence that the methodologies developed for results-based land payments protecting biodiversity are transferable and can protect other resources, such as water quality and rural tourism assets.
- › The project showed that CAP supported, results-based reward schemes can make a significant contribution to the Nitrates Directive.



## Context

In 2007, Duncannon Beach, Co. Wexford, lost its blue flag status due to the high levels of bacteria found during the bathing water season. From 2011 to 2016, the annual water quality rating was poor, and, for 2017, was rated as 'sufficient'. The elevated bacterial levels at Duncannon occurred due to a number of significant pressures in the area, such as the lack of wastewater infrastructure, surface water connections, and the two coastal streams flowing onto Duncannon Beach. In an effort to first recover and then ensure the long-term retention of the Blue Flag status at Duncannon Beach, Wexford County Council Local Authority applied for funding under the EIP-AGRI initiative to work with both the farming and wider community to improve the bacterial quality of the two coastal streams that flow onto Duncannon Beach, by reducing pollution from both agricultural and domestic sources.



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The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme assigned a full-time Sustainability Manager to work with farmers, colleagues from the Environment Section of the local municipality, and the project's broader Operational Group members to alleviate various pressures on bathing water in the area through innovative, farmer-centred, community-led measures.

## Objectives

The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme aimed to protect the resilience of rural tourism revenues by improving the bacterial quality of the two coastal streams that flow onto Duncannon Beach, Co. Wexford. To achieve this goal, the project pursued the following specific objectives:

- Sustainably restore, protect and enhance the quality of the bathing and riverine waters at Duncannon by reducing pollution (mainly faecal bacteria but also nutrients and sediments) from rural agricultural and domestic sources, whilst simultaneously protecting farm incomes.
- Develop an effective model for the future sustainable management of similar catchments.
- Foster positive relations between the farmers and householders in the catchment area and the local natural landscape, particularly the water environment and associated biodiversity.

## Activities

Project activities included:

- Creating farm-specific Pollution Potential Zone (PPZ) plans for each participating farm.
- Providing farmers with a full-time Sustainability Manager to help them achieve the objectives of the project by guiding them through their PPZ plans and by developing and delivering a number of knowledge exchange initiatives.
- Monitoring farm practice change and water quality in the wider catchment area.
- Creating a local awareness programme for domestic wastewater treatment systems.
- Developing community-wide engagement with the project with the objective of creating a sense of local ownership, responsibility and appreciation for the local water environment.

## Main results

- The resilience of rural tourism revenues has been reinforced by the Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme because it has helped improve the bacterial, chemical and ecological quality of the two coastal streams at Duncannon Beach through its intense water quality monitoring programme.
- The project resulted in a major improvement in farm management practices, which ensures compliance with the Nitrates Directive.





- There has been a reduction in septic tank failures in the area as a result of continued inspections by the local authority, thanks to the work carried out by the project.
- A greater sense of local ownership, responsibility and appreciation amongst the farming and wider community for the local water environment has been created by the project.
- The project has successfully demonstrated a range of innovation and cost-effective farm management practices for water quality protection.
- The project's proven template for a water quality-focused, results-based reward scheme can now be used in other sensitive catchments to improve water quality.
- The project's range of local education and awareness initiatives has resulted in increased levels of community buy-in for the scheme.

## Key lessons and recommendations

- This cooperation project provides evidence that the methodologies developed for results-based land payments protecting biodiversity are transferable, and can protect other resources such as water quality and rural tourism assets.
- The Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme is an example of how localised Operational Groups can be established across multiple actors including local authorities, and research and advisory services, in order to address pertinent local issues.
- The project demonstrated the merits of providing farmers with a dedicated sustainability advisor. It also highlighted the value of generating 'buy-in' commitments and project ownership from local farmers for working with a local authority to help improve water quality. This was achieved through catchment workshops enabling local community members to become 'citizen scientists'.
- Whilst this scheme was implemented on a local scale, it showcases the importance of staffing needs at local level, particularly towards the broader community engagement side of the project. The sustainability manager worked closely with farmers for five years as part of this project, however the demand for change and improvements in the local area by local farmers made it difficult for the project to provide the same level of engagement to wider community groups.



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## Quotes

*"It was great to see a Local Authority work with farmers on this project and give us the time and expertise on a full-time basis".*

Participating farmer

*"The incentive and grant scheme for works was the most important aspect to me".*

Participating farmer

## Additional information:

[www.facebook.com/duncannonblueflagaip/](https://www.facebook.com/duncannonblueflagaip/)



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