



# LIFE on Machair Project launch

SAOL ar an Mhacaire

FRIDAY April 21<sup>st</sup>  
10am-12.30pm



Join us for our official launch by Ministers of State

**Malcolm Noonan T.D.** (Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform)

& **Senator Pippa Hackett** (Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity)

**Killeen Community Centre, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo**

Please register through Eventbrite

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/life-on-machair-project-launch-tickets-594088503707>



An tSeirbhís Páircéara Náisiúnta agus Fíadhláir  
National Parks and Wildlife Service



An Buidéil Talmhaíochta, Rís agus Mada  
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



Fuair an tionscadal seo maoiniú ón gCéir LIFE an Aontais Eorpailigh faoin Comhcheartú Deontais Uirbh. LIFE20 NAT/IE/000268 LIFE on Machair.  
This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under Grant Agreement No. LIFE20 NAT/IE/000268 LIFE on Machair.

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@LIFEonMachair

## LIFE on Machair project launch

Killeen Community Centre, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo

21<sup>st</sup> April 2023



## Introduction

LIFE on Machair is a six year EU funded project running from 2022 to 2028. The project was developed to work with farmers, landowners and local communities in a bid to protect and restore Ireland's network of Machair systems and associated breeding wader and pollinator communities.

There are nine target areas in the project, ranging from Connemara and South Mayo, to Erris in northwest Mayo, and Gweedore and Horn Head in Donegal. These target areas represent a sample of Machair sites in Ireland which are important sites for breeding waders and pollinators.

The LIFE on Machair project is being coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage through collaboration with project partners the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland.

The dedicated LIFE on Machair project team will seek to build on the successes of locally adapted programmes, including European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) and other active LIFE projects, in assisting farmers and other stakeholders to forge sustainable farming and tourism that supports rural communities.

The official launch of LIFE on Machair took place in Killeen Community Centre on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023. The event was attended by more than 80 people representing a cross-section of society including government, businesses, civil society and academia. The project was launched by Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD and Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett TD.

Guest speakers included Joe Cannon, Killeen Community Council, and Vincent O'Malley of the local Cross commonage group and member of the INHFA branch. Other speakers included David Cabot, writer and ornithologist, Karina Dingerkus of the Great Yellow Bumblebee EIP and Brendan Dunford of the Burren Programme. The event was widely covered in local media including The Farmers Journal, Agriland, The Connaught Telegraph and Highland Radio. The event was widely publicised and cited on social media. The event coincided with launch of the [project website](#) and [brochure](#).



## Speakers

- Catherine Farrell, LIFE on Machair Project Manager
- Joe Cannon, Chair Killeen Community Council
- Video footage Inishkeas: Wild Islands
- David Cabot Writer, Ornithologist
- Karina Dingerkus, Ecologist & Great Yellow Bumblebee project
- Vincent O'Malley, INHFA, Cross Lake commonage
- Brendan Dunford, the Burren programme
- Minister Malcom Noonan, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister Pippa Hackett, Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine

Recording of speeches were uploaded to the project YouTube channel and can be viewed at

[LIFE On Machair YouTube Channel](#)





LIFE on Machair project team with Minister Hackett and Noonan on Cross Beach, Killeen

## Attendance

The project launch was attended by more than 80 people including farmers and members of the local community, local and national organizations, community development groups, and local and regional media.

**Table 1: Organizations represented at launch of LIFE on Machair**

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage | University of Ireland Galway          |
| Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine      | Irish Farmers Association             |
| Burren Programme                                     | Mayo County Council                   |
| Community Wetlands Forum                             | Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP          |
| Killeen Community Council                            | Corncrake LIFE                        |
| Faite Ireland  | Lough Carra LIFE                      |
| Irish Rural Link                                     | ACRES CP West Connaught               |
| National Parks and Wildlife Service                  | Irish Natura Hill Farmers Association |
| LAWPRO   | Teagasc                               |
| Leave No Trace                                       | Community Wetlands Forum              |





LIFE on Machair project beneficiaries: Maeve Walsh (Fáilte Ireland), Catherine Keena (Teagasc), Niall Ryan (DAFM), Ciara Carberry (NPWS), and Catherine Farrell Project Manager LOM.



LIFE on Machair project launch: a snapshot of attendees.

## Media coverage

The event received considerable media attention, with many positive articles published by local and national media outlets. A list of media appearances associated with the event is provided below. The Press Release associated with event is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 2: Media coverage of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature project launch

| TITLE   | OUTLET                              | DATE       |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Donegal to benefit from new LIFE on Machair Project                 | <a href="#">Highland Radio</a>      | 22/04/2023 |
| Ministers in Mayo to launch €7.4m. coastal nature project           | <a href="#">Connaught Telegraph</a> | 22/04/2023 |
| 100 farmers sign up to €7.4m coastal nature project                 | <a href="#">Agriland</a>            | 21/04/2023 |
| Kilkenny Deputy launches coastal nature project on World Curlew Day | <a href="#">Kilkenny People</a>     | 21/04/2023 |
| Protecting Mayo's magical machair                                   | <a href="#">Mayo News</a>           | 17/5/2023  |



Minister Hackett, Ciara Carberry NPWS, Catherine Farrell LOM and Minister Noonan.

## Appendix 1: Press release – project launch

**21<sup>st</sup> April 2023 11am - Mayo**

### **Press Release: *Ministers Noonan and Hackett launch €7.4m coastal nature project on World Curlew Day***

- *Over 100 farmers have already registered to take part in the new LIFE on Machair Project across nine sites totalling 5,000 hectares from west Connemara to north Donegal*
- *The project will conserve and restore unique coastal grassland habitats known as ‘machair’, found only in northwest Ireland and Scotland*
- *It will also support the year-round protection of some of our most vulnerable wading birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe*
- *Minister Noonan also announced that, through the NPWS, the LIFE on Machair Project will adopt the Great Yellow Bumblebee EIP*

A €7.4m nature project funded by the EU and led by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) that will restore some of Europe’s most unique coastal habitats and also protect vulnerable breeding waders such as the Curlew was launched today on World Curlew Day 2023.

***LIFE on Machair*** was officially launched in Killeen Community Centre, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo by the Ministers of State Malcolm Noonan TD and Senator Pippa Hackett.

The project, which will run until 2028, is primarily aimed at the delivery of environmental and social benefits for people and nature through the conservation and restoration of machair habitats and species. It will work on nine sites covering over 5,000 hectares along the western seaboard, from west Connemara in Galway, to South Mayo, Achill Island and the Erris region in northwest Mayo to north Donegal.

The project is led by the NPWS and co-funded by the European Commission’s LIFE fund. Three Associated Beneficiaries are involved in the project: the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland.

Speaking at the launch, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan TD, said:

*“To ensure long-term success on complex environmental issues, we need to empower and incentivise communities to take action for nature and put them at the heart of the effort. I’m delighted that over*





*100 farmers have already signed up to take part in LIFE on Machair to restore these special coastal grasslands, which hold enormous biodiversity value. Collaborative approaches like these are the best way to deliver real and enduring results for nature that are good for people as well as wildlife.*

*“On World Curlew Day, it is particularly welcome news that, through the project, participants will also support the protection of some of our most threatened wading birds, such as the Lapwing, Dunlin, Snipe and Redshank, which breed in these habitats, and of course, the much-loved Curlew, which is a winter visitor.*

*“I’d like to congratulate the project team on what promises to be a hugely impactful initiative for nature in this region, and also the participants, who are embarking on a journey as leaders in the national effort to restore nature. They should be heartily commended for their efforts.”*

Minister of State Hackett highlighted the importance of the work already done by LIFE on Machair and other LIFE projects supported by DAFM:

*“LIFE on Machair is a fantastic project developed by the agencies responsible for farming, nature conservation and tourism to support rural communities which will deliver results for nature and biodiversity. The results based element is very key to the success of the project. Monitoring results helps farmers to really engage and deliver for their local ecosystem. I was delighted to be in my home county of Mayo today with my colleague Minister Noonan, in particular on this 2023 World Curlew Day to see real community effort on biodiversity and farmland birds first hand. This is a great example of a systems approach to combining valuable outputs for farming and nature conservation, while leading the way to informing wider restoration projects. In particular, I am delighted to see that learning from the Great Yellow Bumblebee EIP have now been integrated to the LIFE on Machair project, highlighting the effectiveness of European Innovation Projects which I will continue to champion and fund”.*

At the launch, Project Manager, Dr Catherine Farrell, underlined some of the challenges and opportunities for coastal communities and natural systems:

*“Healthy ecosystems underpin healthy societies and communities. Nowhere is this more obvious than for the coastal communities of the northwest of Ireland. Here on western shores we find that daily life is intertwined with the ever-changing forces of the Atlantic. Change is inevitable, but as our farming and recreational practices have changed, this has impacted on the health of our coastal systems, rendering them less capable of buffeting the storms and weather patterns of our now changed climate. This matters, as the resilience of natural systems is integral to protecting the coast where we live and work, but also in protecting the present and future livelihoods of those reliant on*

*farming and tourism in Machair systems. This matters also, and significantly, for the breeding waders and pollinators of Machair systems, both groups with species that are threatened nationally and internationally. If we don't act now, species such as Dunlin and the Great Yellow Bumblebee will succumb to local extinction. And at what cost?*

Whilst in Killeen Minister Noonan announced that LIFE on Machair through the NPWS will adopt the "Great Yellow Bumblebee" (GYB) EIP. In making the announcement Minister Noonan said:

*"I am delighted to confirm the Machair project, through the NPWS has taken the wonderful European Innovation Project," the Great Yellow Bumblebee" under its wing so to speak. The steady and sound approach of the GYB team in meeting with farmers, and resultant relationships developed by the team with the farming communities, and building the scientific evidence about pollinators in the Mullet area are what LIFE on Machair recognised, applauded and will integrate to ensure this work continues and can be built on. "*

--- ENDS ---

#### **Editors Notes:**

##### ***About Machair systems***

Machair grassland is a coastal habitat characterised by a plain of lime-rich, wind-blown sand that is unique to the north and west of Ireland and Scotland. The typical flower-rich vegetation of Machair is traditionally maintained through low-intensity livestock grazing, but is susceptible to pressures from recreational activities and over grazing. Machair is also used to describe the wider system of coastal habitats which range from the beach, peatlands, Machair grassland and wetland habitats.

Machair is a complex system of coastal habitats found only along the northwest of Ireland and Scotland. Within Machair systems, the habitats stretch from the beach, through extensive dune systems, Machair grassland plains and into adjoining wetlands. These Machair systems have provided valuable grazing land for farmers for millennia. In a similar way to the limestone pavement of the Burren landscape, traditional farming practices have created a rich diversity of Machair habitats that in turn support significant breeding areas for rare and threatened bird species and rare pollinator species.

Machair systems provide an important refuge for pollinators and threatened breeding wader bird species, such as Dunlin, Lapwing and Redshank. Post-Brexit, the entire EU land cover of the habitat occurs in Ireland, meaning the conservation of Machair in Ireland is of significance on a European

scale. Farming and farmers are central to the project in the role that they can play in protecting and restoring Machair systems.

### ***About LIFE on Machair***

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The LIFE on Machair project is being coordinated by the NPWS through collaboration with project partners; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland.

The dedicated LIFE on Machair project team will seek to build on the successes of locally adapted programmes, including European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) and other active LIFE projects, in assisting farmers and other stakeholders to forge sustainable farming and tourism that supports rural communities.

LIFE on Machair has developed a participatory programme whereby farmers and landowners can share knowledge of traditional and recent farming practices to help the project team develop restoration measures and sustainable farming guidance for each site. This will support the ACRES programme Cooperation Project teams (coordinated through DAFM) to deliver the Results-Based agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBPS) approach adopted in the current Common Agricultural Policy programme. Teagasc will also assist in delivery of training for farmers and farm advisors through knowledge exchange groups, facilitating transfer of learnings between counties and project sites. In tandem with the farming side, the project team will work with Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities and local communities to develop sustainable guidance for recreational and tourism use of these sites.

In addition to the restoration programme and practical works undertaken through the project, LIFE on Machair will also implement a number of actions aimed at enhancing wider community engagement including:

- Establishing local support groups in the project sites,
- Developing and implementing farmer and community knowledge exchange programmes,
- Coordinating community outreach activities,



- Delivering a schools' education programme in conjunction with other educational programmes such as those delivered by Clean Coasts and Leave No Trace,
- Supporting communities to develop and manage tourism and recreational activities and develop appropriate infrastructure and signage.

Fundamental to all these actions are ecological site surveys, ecological assessments, training for nature conservation and restoration, predator control and the use of temporary fencing to reduce predation of breeding wader nests and chicks, control of invasive species, development of appropriate grazing and agricultural best practice measures, visitor and access regulation and signage. These activities aim to deliver environmental and social benefits for local areas and inform broader policy and practice across Ireland and the EU.

A common thread among these different project activities is the integration of various policies with practical land use and the agencies regulating / awarded responsibility for farming, nature conservation and tourism working together for shared and mutual benefits.

Further quote from project manager:

*LIFE on Machair presents an interface for communities and state agencies to work together to ensure we do no harm while restoring a sustainable future for the people of these coastal communities, by working with nature. In preparation for the Project, we have already made significant progress in identifying some of the barriers to communities and agencies working together to restore and conserve the habitats and species of the Machair sites. The solutions lie within the hearts and minds of the local custodians of these sites - LIFE on Machair provides the mechanism for the delivery of those solutions. By bringing people together through the LIFE on Machair project, we will continue to forge new ways of working together, for people and nature. There is still a distance to go, but the results thus far are inspiring”.*

The Great Yellow Bumblebee Project:

The Great Yellow Bumblebee EIP project was a one-year (2021-2022) pilot agri-environmental project. The EIP aimed to improve the abundance of native flowers on our Irish farmlands in order to benefit the endangered Great Yellow Bumblebee and other pollinators. LIFE on Machair is partnering with the team supporting the Great Yellow Bumblebee team (GYB) which ran from 2021-2022 on the Mullet peninsula. LIFE on Machair and the team will continue the GYB programme with those farmers within the LOM project area and roll the approach out to farmers in the Cross Lake area of the Mullet peninsula.



***For project information contact:***

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***Photos available upon request to Press Office.***

National Parks and Wildlife Service can be contacted via the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Press Office

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