# Background

- ACRES Co-operation operates in 8 Co-operation Areas
  - These contain a large proportion of Irelands HNV farmland and High-Status Watercourses.

- Roll out and support of ACRES Co-operation is facilitated by 8 local teams
  - A public procurement process was used to recruit these teams
  - Teams provide expertise in archaeology, ecology, data analysis and remote sensing to support farmers and farm advisors in their areas.

- 23,000 farmers participate in ACRES Co-operation

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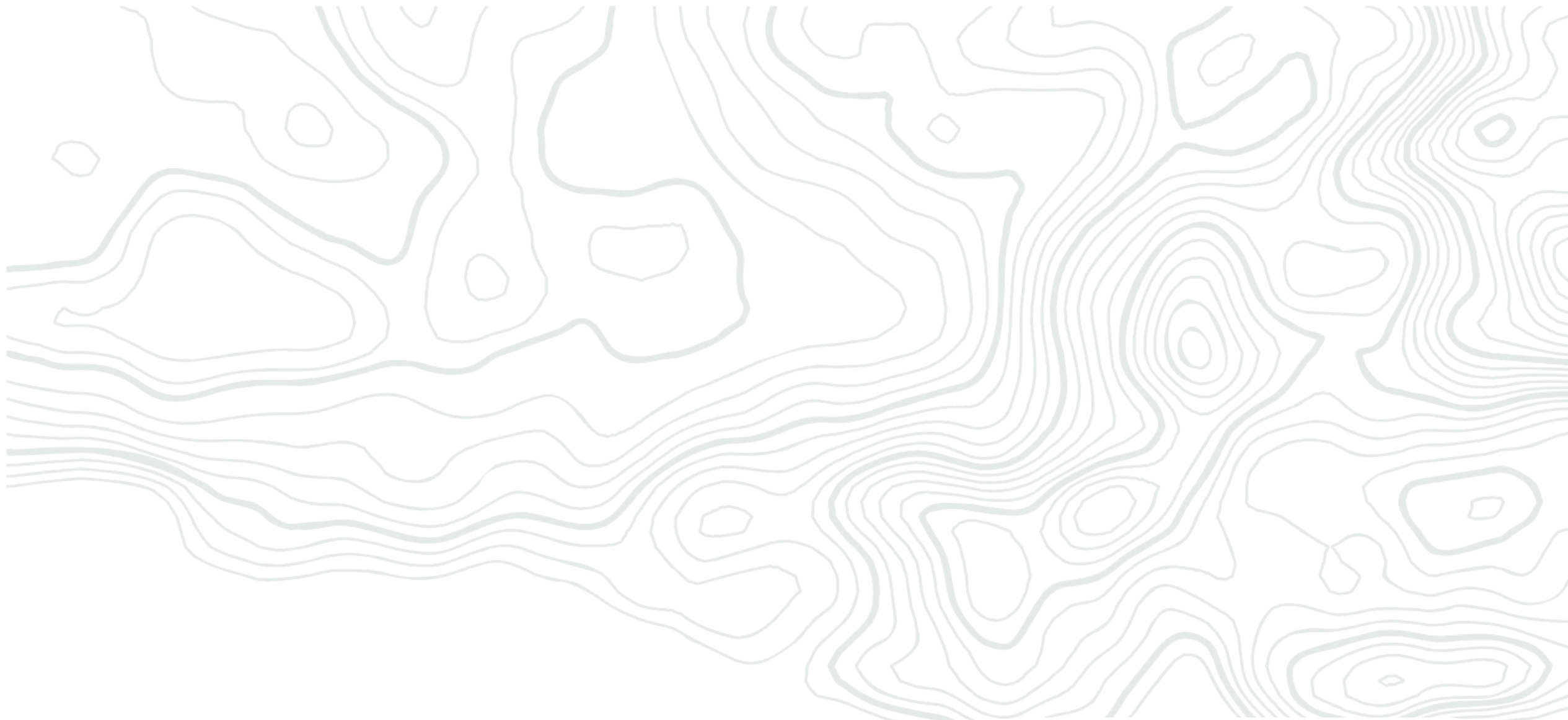
Part 1

Ireland's Experience
Prior Understanding of RBPS
by key Actors

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Prior Understanding

- Steep learning curve for all involved

- Lack of clarity on objectives, structures, systems and resource requirements prior to commencement
  - Basic concepts
  - What is a results-based payment system for ?
  - How does it leverage support, provide incentives, foster pride of place ?
  - Does this clash with desire to spread funds widely, administrative complexity ?

- Insufficient lead in time
  - Constrained by need for approval of CAP strategic plan and desire for a January 1st opening date.
  - Multiple systems involved
  - Applications, scoring, payments, audit trails, screening etc

- Resources proved inadequate,
  - Software development had to follow scheme design

- Linkages with MEA in LPIS system proved challenging

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Scheme Applications

- At the start of the current CAP cycle all farmers were out of agri-environment contracts. This had not happened before

- Strong demand for participation

- **19,000 APPLICATIONS** in the first round overwhelmed the original plan for two intakes of 10,000

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Scheme Applications

- Political decision to accept all applicants
  - Considerable imbalance between tranche 1 and tranche 2
    - Understandable, perhaps inevitable
- Significant Impact on Co-operation Project Teams, DAFM and most significantly on Farm Advisors
- Introduced an imbalance in future labour requirements
- Incentivised development of sub optimal business models within FAS, leading to a reduction in capacity to accumulate experience and build skills base.

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Scoring

Development of scorecards worked well

- Tens of thousands of fields had to be scored. Baseline survey of all fields proved exceptionally challenging

- Use of a mobile app was the only feasible method

- Development of a mobile app took longer than anticipated
  - Leading to inadequate end user testing
  - A lot of flaws in the first version – poor user experience, impact on productivity

- Training of Advisors/ DAFM field staff
  - Many advisors were starting from an inadequate skills base.
  - Habitat scoring requires a new mindset, need to overcome decades of conditioning around eligibility issues
  - Business models of many advisory practices ill-suited to coping with considerable volatility in labour demands

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Big Questions for the Future

- Can the use of scorecards to assess every field be scaled up to a national scale ?

- Is a skilled labour resource available for such a task ?

- Can farmers be trained to self-assess?

- Can remote sensing technologies to supplement/ replace field assessments ?

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Part 2

Time Available:
Timelines for development

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Timelines – the initial plan

- 5-year contract for farmers

- Less than 1-year for design and **development** of Results based Payment Scheme – was this realistic ?

  - Procurement of CP teams – premises, staff recruitment & training

  - Design of Scheme

  - Development of IT systems, both at team level and Departmental level

  - Selling a new concept to farmers

  - Upskilling farm advisors

- Too little time available for development, difficulties exacerbated by slow start

- Constrained by the narrow window between approval of the CSP and Scheme opening.

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Big Questions for the future

- Are 5-year schemes too short ?

- How do we prepare for RBPS in advance ?
  - Do small pilot projects help ?
  - Does a successful pilot give a false sense of security ?
  - How can small pilots inform us of the challenges of scale ?
  - Do small pilots challenge administrative and IT systems sufficiently to help them prepare for large scale roll out ?

- To what extent can development and roll out proceed in parallel

- Can we repurpose existing systems/ structures ? Do we need to start again ?

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Part 3

People, Skills and Capacity

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Skills Base

- Existing Capacity within the Irish economy is limited
  - Very small numbers of ecologists within Dept. of Agriculture
  - No ecologists within the Farm Advisory Service
  - Very limited number of personnel with experience from EIPs, LIFE Projects

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Co-operation teams

- Difficulties recruiting staff

- Very few operators with a balance of agri-ecology skillset and management experience

- Considerable disparities in capacity of different CP teams

- Time frame for assembling and training of teams was very short

- Full employment within the Irish economy makes recruitment difficult

- Housing shortages makes it difficult to attract staff from outside of the area

- Short term contracts (5-6 years) are unattractive compared to permanent positions in an expanding National Parks and Wildlife Service

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Motivations and Morale

- New Systems will encounter challenges
  - Some people will try to exploit these for their own ends
- Delays, negative press coverage impact morale
  - Farmers
  - Advisors
  - Local Co-operation teams
  - Dept. Of Agriculture Staff
  - Government
- Effective Communications
  - Needed to keep all parties informed
  - To address disinformation
  - Without high morale among key actors, we have nothing

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Big Questions for the Future

- How do we communicate with
  - With farmers
  - With our own staff
  - With the general public

- How do we structure and deliver locally based supports for farmers ?

- How do we recruit, train and deploy people within our systems ?

- How do we ensure that skillsets are adequate to support the participating farmer ?
  - Training ?
  - Career development ?
  - Staff turnover ?

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LIFE Projects

LIFE Projects, e.g. Burren LIFE, Machair LIFE, Corncrake LIFE etc

- Specific Focus, species, habitat type etc

- Limited Footprint

- Small Number of Participants

- High Staff/ Participant ratios
  - Corncrake LIFE 7 staff: 150 participants

- Admin Support through a parent organisation

- Unsustainable cost base as a model for National Roll out

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EIPs

- Two large EIPs in the last Cap Cycle
  - Hen Harrier Project - €25,000,000 budget, c 1,600 participants
  - Pearl Mussel Project – 10,000,000 budget, c 400 participants
  - Both had a large and dispersed footprint
    - HHP 5 Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas
    - PMP 8 PMP Catchments
    - Getting there but not there yet

- Numerous smaller EIPs, e.g. Inishowen Uplands EIP & the Reeks EIP
  - Budgets < €1,000,000
  - Small spatial footprint
  - Limited staff numbers

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LIFE Projects/ smaller EIPs

- ADVANTAGES
  - Can develop new approaches
  - Can make real progress on specific issues
  - Can demonstrate alternatives to local participants/ communities
  - Adaptable with ability to make and implement decisions rapidly

- DISADVANTAGES
  - Do not have to address the challenges of scale
  - Solutions/ structures are not necessarily scalable
  - Dependency on parent organisations may inhibit expansion

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Farm Advisors

- Public and Private providers
- Scheme based business models
- Previous CAP cycles front loaded demand for their services
- Almost no experience in archaeology, ecology, hydrology etc
- Opportunities for training and capacity building are limited by business environment

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Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

- Advantages
  - Established Structures

- Disadvantages
  - Very limited capacity in archaeology, ecology and hydrology
  - Bureaucratic, slow to make decisions
  - Slow to implement decisions
    - Public procurement requirements
    - Need to get agreement from other regulatory bodies

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Big Questions for the Future⬚

- Do we have existing structures that could support large scale RBPS ?

- Can we adapt existing structures to the challenge of implementing RBPS ?

- Can we build new structures to support RBPS fast enough

- Can we react to new challenges effectively/ quickly ?

- Can we test structures (quickly and cheaply) in a way that informs development

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