

Final Report on Facilitation Support to



Ref WUC SUAS T 1

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1 Executive Summary

This is the final report on the facilitation support aspect of the WUC SUAS pilot to 'develop and evaluate a practical, stakeholder led and bottom up, scheme to address the complex agricultural, environmental and socio-economic challenges associated with the land management of the Wicklow/Dublin uplands'¹.

It has been prepared with a view to providing input to the Commonage Management Handbook that will be published at the end of the SUAS pilot. The specific purpose of the facilitation support was to work closely with the project manager to support the establishment and development of Commonage Groups (CGs).

There has been significant progress in the establishment of the first three of five Commonage Groups proposed as part of the pilot.

The work commenced with an inception meeting between the project manager and the facilitator (Facilitation Team), held in Tinahely on 25th June 2018. The Facilitation Team worked closely together, planning and participating in all the group meetings, holding one-to-one meetings as necessary and developing related documentation including the group constitutions and templates for meetings.

It is important to note that the three participating Commonages were selected from 20 expressions of interest submitted to the SUAS pilot. The selection criteria used included:

- Agreed commonage characteristics (area, habitat condition, presence of watercourses, etc.)
- Presence of other features (walkways, archaeological/historical features and environmental designations)
- Level of interest of shareholders (numbers at initial assessment meeting)
- Number of shareholders on commonage
- History of commonage working together as a group
- Legal clearance (no outstanding major conflicts)

This selection process may have influenced the successful outcomes achieved.

The Facilitation Team provided intensive support to each Commonage Group. All the meetings were conducted as planned with good attendance and participation by members. These included an initial communal meetings for all three commonage groups together, followed by 2 meetings for each of the three individual commonage groups and concluding with a second communal meeting.

These meetings contributed to the development of group capacity, notably with the dialogue and decision-making on the group constitutions. Each of the three Commonage Groups has developed its own constitution including:

- Purpose of the group
- Membership details, including who is entitled to be a member and conditions of membership,
- Powers and objects of the group
- Operation of the group, including meeting procedures, election and functions of officers and voting structure.

The groups agreed a process for the development of their commonage management plans, with support from the project ecologist and project manager.

The following are the recommendations from the experience to date:

- Recruitment of commonages to form Commonage Groups should be through running public information events, with advance publicity through established channels (local press, radio, technical press, farm organisations, people who have expressed an interest in receiving such notifications, etc.)

¹ SUAS WUC Request for Tender Proposal June 2018

- Commonage Groups should aspire to include all rights holders and active graziers. To this end, all potential members should be contacted as early in the process as possible by those looking to form the group with support from the facilitation team.
- While the second communal meeting was deemed unnecessary at this stage in the process, the groups suggested a communal meeting after year 1. This meeting could review progress, share experiences and address any emerging capacity issues.
- At least two to three individual group meetings should be allowed for the process of establishing the Commonage Groups, with the project support tapering off as the group takes full ownership.
- There is a need for on-going monitoring and evaluation to ensure the lessons are learned and feed into the process of Commonage Group formation. At a minimum, a facilitated review of Commonage Groups after 12 months and in the final year of the pilot is recommended.
- The composition of the facilitation team was identified as being important to the success of the Commonage Group establishment. It combined a diversity of skills and knowledge capacity to manage the workload involved and had a balance of internal and external perspectives.

2 Goals, Activities and Progress

The goal of the facilitation process was *to support the establishment and development of five Commonage Groups (CGs)*, with the following capacities:

1. Each CG has the space to consider its longer-term vision for its commonage and the commitment and buy-in needed to achieve this vision.
2. Each CG has established a constitution that sets out its ways of working and responsibilities.
3. Each CG has established a constitution to ensure it can develop, implement and monitor a management plan for their commonage.
4. Each CG develops its capacity for analysis of problems and identification of creative solutions including capacity for principled negotiation where conflicts arise whether they be internal or with external stakeholders.
5. Each CG develops its capacity to develop and implement a management plan for their commonage.

Capacity Development: the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives, over time
(UNDP 2009)

The approach has two phases. The first phase involves working with three commonage groups and the second phase with another two CGs. It should be noted that the commonage groups which participated in this activity were pre-selected to avoid obvious issues that could prevent group formation.

This report is based on the first phase of the process.

At the inception meeting in Tinahely on Mon 25/6/18 between Declan Byrne (Project Manager) and Bobby Lambert (Facilitator), hereafter referred to as the Facilitation Team, two main goals (with sub-goals) for this phase were agreed. The table below gives details on progress against these goals.

Goal	Progress
Group Leadership Development Plans	
Draft constitution	Draft constitutions were prepared with each group. This was the main topic for the two individual CG meetings. The legal form of the CG's is an Unincorporated Association
Draft strategy (with vision, values, mission and strategic goals)	The constitutions include Purpose, Powers and Objects and as stated give a good indication of the Vision, Mission and Goals of each CG. Some values are implicitly included (e.g. in decisions on voting and terms of office). At this stage in the process, these statements are adequate for the work of the CGs. Further work on this is not warranted and could be counter-productive, noting the CG desire to get on with practical matters (i.e. development of management plans for their commonage).
Group capacity development plan	The groups worked on this in the second communal meeting and produced their own guidance notes. It is felt that the second communal meeting might be better held after some time, perhaps 12 months, has elapsed.
Commonage Plan 2019	To be agreed between the farmers and technical specialists by December 2018, noting this plan is outside the scope of this report.

Activities and status

The chart below shows the activities agreed to achieve the goals and the status at this report date.

Activity	Notes from Proposal	Current Status, this report date
Inception	<p>The inception phase is crucial to</p> <p>a) establishing a good working relationship with the project team and especially the project manager and</p> <p>b) to clarify and confirm the facilitation plan, critical success factors, risks to be managed, resources available and challenges to be met.</p> <p>A brief, agreed inception report will be produced at the end of this phase, setting out the way forward.</p>	<p>Inception meeting held with Declan Byrne, in Tinahely 25th June. The first communal meeting followed soon afterwards and was part of the inception phase. The outcome of the Communal Meeting was used as an 'inception report' as it indicated the way ahead agreed with the groups.</p>
Document review	<p>This will be kept to the minimum necessary to understand the background, current status and plans for the project. To keep this focused, the client will, at the outset, provide the facilitator with a set of the key selected documents.</p>	<p>The main work here was on reviewing a draft constitution from the Welsh Glastir scheme, which fed into the drafting of the CG constitutions. It also included some literature research on appropriate resources for community groups.</p>
Meetings with project manager	<p>In addition to the inception and lesson-learning meeting (see below), 4 interim one-to-one meetings are proposed for Phase 1, in person or by teleconference. For Phase 2, three further meetings are proposed.</p>	<p>Regular meetings were conducted, by phone and in person mainly before/after the group meetings.</p>
Design, run and report on group sessions	<p>As set out in the Request for Proposal for Phase 1, this involves two communal sessions, one at the start and one at the end, plus two individual sessions with each group, giving a total of six.</p> <p>For Phase 2, a similar pattern is planned, but with a total of four individual sessions. The number, design and content of these sessions will be determined in discussion with the project manager and the stakeholders themselves.</p>	<p>These were carried out as planned. One communal meeting was held on Thursday 12th July in Laragh, followed by six individual meetings. The second communal meeting was held on Tuesday 2nd October, again in Laragh. Participation in the meetings has been very good, with excellent attendance,² discussion and progress.</p>
Lesson Learning meeting	<p>Following the workshops and interviews, a lesson-learning meeting is proposed, involving the project team and selected stakeholders.</p>	<p>By agreement with the PM, this was achieved by presenting and reviewing a near final draft of this report at the project Operational Group meeting held on 5th November.</p>
Documenting and Reporting	<p>The process will be documented throughout, with an inception report, brief Aides Mémoire on workshops/meetings and a final report detailing key processes, progress made, lessons-learned and training blueprints. This final report will be prepared with a view to being part of a proposed Commonage Management Handbook.</p>	<p>This draft report includes notes on the meetings held with agendas ('training blueprints') for the workshops and a participant evaluation.</p> <p>In addition, draft constitutions were prepared in discussion with the groups, appended separately.</p>

² Group 1 - 95 %; Group 2 – 97% active graziers, 89% of total possible members; Group 3 - 75% active graziers, 42% of total possible members

3 Evaluation and Review

Achievement of purpose and goals

The specific purpose of this piece of work was *to work with the project manager to support the establishment and development of Commonage Groups.*

A good working relationship was quickly established and the proposed activities were delivered in a timely manner. The facilitator and the project manager worked closely together, planning and participating in all the group meetings, holding one-to-one meetings as necessary and developing related documentation including the group constitutions and templates for meetings.

The commonage groups have been established, draft constitutions have been agreed, and they have had experience of conducting their meetings in a structured manner, with agendas circulated beforehand and minutes issued promptly. At this stage in the process it was felt to be premature for the groups to appoint their Chair and Secretary, so these roles were fulfilled by the project team, with the facilitator chairing the meetings and the project manager acting as secretary.

The groups have made progress in their own development, through participation in the meetings and familiarity with templates for agendas and minutes. The drafting of their constitutions required considerable debate and dialogue and decisions to be taken, a strong element of 'learning by doing'. They also had the opportunity to review their capacity development requirements. However this might be better done at a later stage in the process, once they have had the opportunity to function together as a group without support from the project management team.

Activities and process

The broad structure of the process worked well, consisting of an introductory communal meeting, with two individual group meetings for each group, followed a second communal meeting. However it is questionable whether the second communal meeting was needed at this stage in the process. The participant evaluation (see below) indicated that they felt the second communal meeting was somewhat repetitive; they were eager to get on with the technical discussions on the commonage management plans. A suggestion was made that a communal meeting be held again after one year and this is worth considering, as this could be used to share experiences amongst the groups.

The project team felt that it is important to keep the group development process somewhat separate from the development of the commonage management plan, not least because the groups 'default mode' is to discuss technical issues. Similarly it is felt that the development and agreement of the constitution requires a minimum of 2 individual group meetings, noting that there was intensive discussion and good participation on this at the six meetings that were held (two for each group).

Group support team

In the pilot the process was supported by a project manager and external facilitator.

The project manager was well known to the groups, by virtue of his Teagasc background, was familiar with the local and technical issues of the commonages and was strongly committed to implementing the project.

The external facilitator brought expertise in facilitation, group formation, organisational development and governance. Another important aspect was the external perspective, providing a balance to the Teagasc perspective.

The team element was important, partly because of the value of 2 brains and 2 perspectives and partly because of the workload in preparing for, chairing, facilitating, documenting and following up the meetings. The experience in the pilot suggests that 2 people are required to support each meeting (acting as interim chair and secretary).

Participant Evaluation of Process

A brief participant evaluation of the process was conducted at the end of the second communal meeting using a group evaluation (3x3) exercise.

Participants worked in small groups identifying good points to keep, changes to make and other suggestions. Each participant had the opportunity to vote on each proposal of all the groups. The chart below shows the consolidated list of proposals, as written by the participants.

It shows the numbers of votes recorded as agreeing and disagreeing with each proposal, ranked according to the majority for each proposal. Copies of the actual charts are appended for reference (see section on Communal Meeting no 2).

Participants wished to keep the manager informed of all decisions and appreciated the communication, interactions, pre-planning and meeting other groups. There was strong support for the communal meetings, particularly the first one and for the first group constitution meeting (perhaps implying that 2 individual group meetings on the constitution were too much?).

On changes & improvements, a technical comment about bracken spraying was strongly supported. Participants wanted 'less talk and more action' and wanted the technical report sooner in the process. They suggested simplifying the process and that the second communal meeting was repetitive.

A suggestion was made by the participants during the evaluation process to have a communal meeting after 1 year and that a delegate from the 3 groups be co-opted onto Wicklow Uplands Council. There was reiteration of the point about some meetings being repetitive and a question raised about the need for a constitution. Other comments included some 'technical' comments relating to funding for fencing and clarification on public liability.

SUAS Communal Meeting no 2 – evaluation of process to date			
Keep:	Agree	Disagree	Majority
Keep the manager informed of all decisions	19	0	19
Communication within group, interaction with other groups - informative, Pre-planning for meetings	18	0	18
1st meeting - communal	18	0	18
Keep the communal meetings	17	2	15
1st group constitution meeting needed	15	0	15
Meeting other groups	15	3	12
3 meetings at least before formally creating groups	10	8	2
Change (Even Better if):	Agree	Disagree	Majority
Change the spraying laws on bracken spraying?	19	1	18
Have mountain reports & potential measures sooner	15	0	15
Less talk, more action, danger of people losing interest	16	2	14
Simplify process	15	3	12
Today's meeting repetitive	13	3	10
Other	Agree	Disagree	Majority
Funding for fencing boundaries on enclosed commonages	20	0	20
The need for a constitution? Project team helpful & patient	18	0	18
Public liability (insurance) needs to be clarified	18	2	16
Delegate from the three groups to be co-opted to the Wicklow Uplands Council	18	2	16
Each group deciding measures without benefit of other groups knowledge / ideas	16	0	16
Communal group meeting after 1 year	16	1	15
Some meetings repetitive	16	2	14
As pilot groups no proto-type available	15	1	14
Looking forward to environmental report	16	3	13

Formation of Communal Groups

A review by the Facilitation Team of the process to date on the formation of CGs highlighted the following points.

The recruitment of groups would be through the running of a public event with advance publicity through established channels (local papers, radio, technical press, social media etc.).

The CGs that participated in the process were selected from expressions of interest submitted following the initial SUAS pilot public meeting. The selection criteria used in the evaluation of these expressions of interest included:

- Agreed commonage characteristics (area, condition, water etc.)
- Other stake-holding characteristics (walkways, proximity to sensitive areas)
- Level of interest of rights-holders (voting with feet, turning up to first meeting)
- Group size / numbers
- History of working together as a group
- Legal clearance (no outstanding major conflicts)

This selection process may have influenced the successful outcomes achieved.

Any group should include a significant proportion of those with commonage rights. To this end, all potential group members should be contacted as early in the process as possible.

Allow for a process of group development over the first 2-3 meetings, with the project support tapering off as the groups takes full ownership. This will depend on the nature of the group, some may require more support than others.

There is a need for on-going monitoring and evaluation to ensure that lessons are learned and feed into any further process of CG formation and operation. A review of commonage group performance after 12 months is advisable. Also, a facilitated review in year five to provide evidence of how the shareholders found the CG experience after operating for a number of years is highly recommended. The members of the CGs should be actively involved in this review, such as through a facilitated communal meeting.

The composition of the Facilitation Team, with a combination of local knowledge and governance and facilitation expertise, is very important in providing support to the CG formation process.

4 Constitution and Legal Form

Each group was supported in drafting its constitution. These constitutions are now with a legal expert for review, with a view to formal adoption by the groups at their next meeting.

Copies of the draft constitutions are attached separately to this report.

The legal form for the groups is to be that of an informal association.

Glossary

CG	Commonage Group
SUAS	Sustainable Uplands Agri-Environment Scheme
WUC	Wicklow Uplands Council