

**A MANUAL FOR THE PRODUCTION OF
GRAZING IMPACT ASSESSMENTS
IN UPLAND AND PEATLAND HABITATS**

A JOINT DOCUMENT BY
DÚCHAS – THE HERITAGE SERVICE
AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF) and Dúchas, the Heritage Service, of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (DAHGI), have decided to address the problem of overstocking of the peatland and upland resource by assessing the impact of grazing, if any, in all of the commonages in Ireland. An agri-environmental plan will be produced for every commonage by teams consisting of an environmentalist, with skills in assessing the condition of the vegetation, and an agriculturalist, with skills in assessing the appropriate farming regimes for the commonages in question.

These plans, known as “Commonage Framework Plans” (CPs), will be used to produce individual farm plans which are compatible with the overall strategy laid down in the framework plan.

The initial purpose of producing CPs in the uplands and peatlands is to arrest degradation caused by overstocking, where this has occurred. The recovery of vegetation cover and structure in these degraded areas is deemed to be achievable but it is not the objective to restore “modified” habitats to their “natural” state. Upland habitats, in particular, are viewed as being semi-natural and can vary in floristic composition and structure due to different landuse histories.

A separate system of botanical monitoring will be set up to “fine-tune” the recommendations of the upland and peatland CPs. This detailed evaluation will seek to ensure that sustainable stocking levels and land management practices are achieved and that the degradation of the upland and peatland resource in commonages is arrested and reversed.