



Meeting between Hedge Laying Association of Ireland and GLAS Section within DAFM on Hedgerow Measures in GLAS

2pm Wednesday 3rd February 2016,

Minutes plus follow-up comments (in blue)

Present:

HLAI - Neil Foulkes, Robert Birtwistle, Mark McDowell

DAFM – David Buckley, William Phelan, (and by live feed from Johnstown Castle) Niall Ryan and Damien Flynn.

1. GLAS 1 and 2 Specification for Hedgerow Measures (Objectives)

HLAI opened the discussion by saying we would like to try to relate the topics on the agenda to the stated objectives of GLAS.

DAFM referred to 600km of hedges planted in AEOS and 13-1400 km under REPS.

HLAI raised the subject of one of the Objectives of GLAS as being

To promote and sustain attitudinal change amongst farmers

HLAI made the point that this implies that farmers have wrong or inappropriate attitudes.

HLAI contended that the structure and implementation of the Scheme will induce behavioural rather than attitudinal change. Using financial incentives to change behaviour does not necessarily translate into attitudinal change.

To tie individual Measures to the Objectives of the Scheme HLAI feel that for each Measure it would be helpful if;

- Problems with current farmer attitudes were identified
- Preferred attitudes were stated
- The methods for trying to change the attitudes was described

HLAI can advise on what we see as problems and appropriate attitudes if requested.

HLAI requested the Department's definition of the term "rejuvenation" as it applies to the Objectives. There was some discussion on this point.

Rejuvenation – definition - to return to a juvenile state.

In respect of hedgerows, rejuvenation is where new growth is secured directly from the rootstock. New growth passing through a conduit of older wood is not rejuvenation; it is just that – new growth on old wood.

A laid hedge is not necessarily rejuvenated. Rejuvenation only occurs with correct trimming of the stump (coppicing) or heel (laying) to secure the new, rejuvenative growth directly from the rootstock. Since rejuvenation is the Objective of the Measure this should form part of the verifiable criteria for successful completion.

Laying Of Hedgerows

HLAI suggest the Objective be amended to

“To rejuvenate old or degraded hedgerows to improve structure, ensure sustainability and increase biodiversity.”

2. GLAS Specifications – Response to Queries and Concerns

There was a general discussion about various aspects of the specifications for the Hedgerow Measures in GLAS. In particular there was focus on the amounts of work permissible and the cutting height for coppicing. On ecological grounds the HLAI sought changes to the maximum figures of 1000m and 750m for Hedge Laying and Coppicing respectively. DAFM stated that it was down to Advisors to produce appropriate plans for particular farms. DAFM stated average figure for Hedge Laying in Tranche 1 to be 217m and that the amount of hedgerow work in Tranche 3 may be reduced based on overall budgeting restrictions.

In producing plans Advisors should be encouraged to consider the following factors:

The management of individual hedgerows should not be seen in isolation. There needs to be consideration given to the wider ecological significance of hedge selection. How do hedges connect with other natural and semi-natural habitats on the farm and in the area? Care should be taken not to isolate other farm habitats. Hedgerow works should be consistent with other Measures in the GLAS plan. For example coppicing hedges around Wild Bird Cover plots would be counterproductive as birds need the security of hedgerows to benefit from the increased feeding opportunity.

Hedge laying and coppicing are major management interventions and are not good for biodiversity *per se*, they are beneficial in the context of long term programmes of cyclical management which result in sustainable hedgerows. Consideration should be given to landscape and movement ecology in plans. Large amounts of work in a relatively small area, particularly coppicing, have the potential to disrupt ecosystems and be detrimental to species that need corridors for safe movement. Coppicing removes habitat temporarily for a long term good; plans should minimise the short term consequences of this temporary loss of habitat. The scale of the works should be proportionate to the amount of hedges on the farm and in the surrounding area.

The prior condition of the hedge should be taken in to consideration. Is management necessary? Will it be beneficial? In the case of older hedges is the hedge healthy enough to survive the treatment?

All of this has consequences for the biodiversity objectives of the Scheme.

HLAI appreciate that framing specifications to cover all of this would be difficult to manage.

- **HLAI requests that DAFM issue a circular to advise Advisors in this regard?**

An EIA is required where it is proposed that 500m of hedge be removed. Coppicing is effectively short term removal.

- **HLAI request DAFM carry out an ecological review of a proportion of plans which have hedgerow works greater than 500m to ensure that landscape ecology / movement ecology issues have been adequately considered by Advisors.**
- **HLAI request that it be specified in Tranche 3 onwards that plans should contain no contiguous length for hedgerow rejuvenation works of >500m.**
- **It was agreed that the completion date for Tranche 2 works be extended until the end of December 2017.**
- **It was agreed that dates for Hedge Laying and Coppicing works will be restricted in the Specifications to September to February (inclusive) irrespective of any potential changes to Section 40 of the Wildlife Act.**

Hedge Laying Specification Item 4

- **It was agreed that the item on the use of heavy machinery to be reworded solely to permit the use of hand-held machinery or hand-tools.**
- **HLAI request that the prohibition on the use of heavy machinery for crushing hedgerows forms part of cross compliance.**

Hedge Laying Specification Item 5

- **HLAI requests that DAFM produce a definition as to what constitutes a gap.**

Hedge Laying Specification Item 6

HLAI pointed out that permanent fencing next to hedgerows can impact on ground flora diversity. The potential impact on pollinator species was pointed out.

Do inspectors have a working rule as regards distance between hedge and fence?
If a hedge is made stockproof by laying why is there need for a fence?

Verifiable standards for hedge laying work were discussed.

- **HLAI to submit City & Guilds Assessment criteria to DAFM. (done)**
- **DAFM agreed that more detailed requirements can be put in place for Hedge Laying.**

HLAI pointed out that in A-E Schemes in England photographic evidence is required prior to and on completion of capital works such as hedge laying and coppicing.

- **HLAI request that a similar protocol be established for GLAS**

There was a lengthy discussion on the importance of cutting stumps low to the ground. Justification for the increase from 10cm to 15cm for coppicing from REPS & AEOS to GLAS was that farmers weren't cutting low enough so rather than enforce the standard it has been relaxed. HLAI consider the figure of 15cm to be unacceptably high.

- **HLAI request that the Specification for Tranche 3 be amended to indicate that the cutting of stumps (coppicing) or heels (laying) should be made to promote regrowth from the rootstock (ground level). The height of the cut should be proportionate to the size of the stem and in ordinary circumstances this should be a maximum of 10cm. Where it is not possible to get the heel down to this level the stump should be notched or cut in a way that will stimulate rejuvenative growth from the rootstock.**

The validity of some of the guidance information and references was questioned. DAFM indicate that some changes have been made. HLAI are happy to review changes.

- **HLAI agreed to make suggestions regarding useful information for future editions.**

Coppicing of Hedgerows

- **The Objective “*enhance the visual landscape*” should not form part of this Measure.**
- **HLAI request that the Objective of this Measure should be modified to – “*To rejuvenate old or degraded hedgerows to ensure sustainability and increase biodiversity.*”**
- **HLAI request that it should be a condition of the Scheme that any hedges planted under REPS or AEOS should be laid not coppiced.**

Since the Planting of New Hedgerows has been dropped from Tranche 2 we did not focus on this during the discussion. However, if Hedgerow Planting is re-introduced in to subsequent Tranche’s the HLAI would like to engage in discussion with DAFM over the structure and details as we would have some concerns over the Specifications in Tranche1.

The issue of the lack of a requirement to use stock of native provenance for any new or infill planting was discussed. Availability of sufficient quantities was cited as the reason. It was agreed that this was an infrastructural issue.

- **HLAI requests that DAFM make a commitment to the use of native provenance stock in future A-E Schemes. To give the right signals to nursery producers a deadline or target date should be set.**

The HLAI stressed the point that hedge laying needs to be prioritised over coppicing in the structure of the Scheme. The advantages to biodiversity are significant. Coppicing should not be seen as an easy option – it is a drastic intervention. It should be the last resort for rejuvenating hedges that are not suited to laying, not an alternative option. Introducing standards for hedge laying without structural emphasis on this will be driving farmers down the coppicing route which will have negative consequences for the biodiversity objectives of the Scheme.

Hedges coppiced under A-E Schemes should be restored to a condition where future coppicing should not be required. If done properly these hedges should be suitable for laying on the next rejuvenation cycle. Repeated coppicing is not desirable from a biodiversity perspective and should not be necessary. Schemes should be structured to prevent this from happening.

- **Repeated coppicing should not be permitted across schemes – hedges coppiced in REPS, AEOS or GLAS should not be re-coppiced in GLAS or future schemes.**

If hedges have been inadequately “coppiced” and not properly rejuvenated in previous schemes then re-coppicing may be permitted by derogation on specialist advice.

HLAI raised the issue of the knowledge gap with many Advisors over their ability to identify which hedges are and are not suitable for laying. Also, even those that have some idea are generally unsure of what can be laid at a price that makes it a viable option for the farmer going in to the Scheme.

- **HLAI request that some control measures are put in place by DAFM to ensure Advisors are producing appropriate plans on hedgerow measures.**

3. GLAS Inspection Regime

HLAI indicate that its members have greater technical knowledge of hedgerow rejuvenation than Department Inspectors. This is agreed by DAFM.

- **HLAI indicate that they would like to have a role in the verification of technical standards for hedge laying works in GLAS.**

4. Funding Rates

The funding rate for hedge laying work was discussed. HLAI indicated figures of €8/m to €25/m as being the parameters with €15/m as a rough ball park. DAFM consider these costings to be in line with this. HLAI questioned as to whether the figure is adequate to cover requisite fencing and aftercare work within the budget.

5. Training / Guidelines / Promotion

HLAI brought up the issue of training. There was agreement on the inadequacy of the offer from Teagasc / FRS to the HLAI for them to attend the training event for FRS lead advisors in Roscrea.

DAFM indicated a budget of €12 million for training; €8 million for farmers, €4 million for Advisors.

HLAI questioned if DAFM considered that the training provided for farmers should enable them to carry out work to professional standards. No definitive response.

6. Beyond GLAS

The pilot Results Based Agri-Environment Payment Scheme run through Sligo IT was discussed.

HLAI brought to the attention of DAFM the new Countryside Stewardship: Hedgerows & Boundaries Grant in England.

- **HLAI to forward on more details to DAFM once available including details of funding – i.e. National Exchequer or Co-funded by EU.**

HLAI raised the idea of Hedgelink Ireland a multi-stakeholder forum to address hedgerow conservation at a more strategic level. It is our understanding that DAFM could see merit in this idea.

HLAI put forward an idea to be considered for the future where the payment to the farmer is decoupled from the work done. Farmers are paid fixed rates to facilitate environmental improvement works to be done on their farm. Work is carried out to a standard by a contractor and payment for works is between the contractor and DAFM. Farmers should be encouraged / trained to be able to deliver work to the standard. It was generally agreed that this may bring advantages but the administrative implications would need to be considered.

- **DAFM agreed to consider this suggestion**

HLAI feel that it would be worth looking at a small pilot for this system so that it could be trialled and evaluated in advance of 2020.

7. Consultation / Dialogue

- **DAFM agreed to future engagement with HLAI over related matters.**

8. AOB

HLAI raised the independent evaluation of GLAS and requested a copy of the Literature Review that is due to be produced as an output of Stage 1 of the Evaluation. HLAI were referred to Patricia Kelly in the Rural Development Division in Kildare House.

Meeting concluded at approximately 3.50pm.