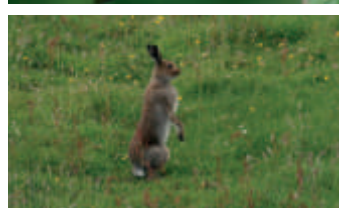
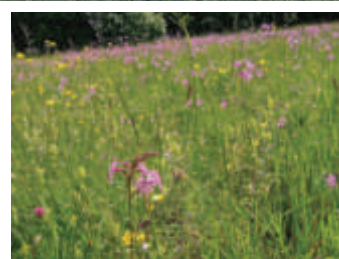


An introduction to the new  
**Countryside  
Management Scheme**



## Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS)

The NICMS (the Scheme) is an integral part of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 (NIRDP). This programme is part-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) with co-funding provided by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The Scheme will play an important role in delivery of Axis 2 of the NIRDP:

- improving the environment and the countryside through land management.

In the DARD Strategic Plan, one of the five Goals – Goal 4 – is “to develop a more sustainable environment”. Key targets, which the Scheme will address, include:

- reversing the decline in farmland biodiversity;
- enhancing the landscape; and
- managing our natural resources to improve the quality of our water, air and soil.

Approximately 40% of the farmed area is currently managed through the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) and the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme (ESAS). A priority target in the Northern Ireland (NI) Programme for Government 2008 – 2011 is to:

- increase to 50% the area of agricultural land in NI covered by environmental enhancement agreements by 2013.



## Introduction

Global issues such as protecting biodiversity, including threatened species and habitats, tackling climate change and improving water quality are key components of sustainability. At the local level, agri-environment schemes give financial encouragement to farmers for adopting farming practices that deliver across these key issues.

### Biodiversity

At the Rio Summit in 1992, the United Kingdom (UK) was among 178 countries to sign the Convention on Biological Diversity. Biodiversity is the immense variety of life on earth. Each country recognised that action was required to halt the global decline in animal and plant species. On the basis of the Convention, the UK government produced its own Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in June 1994, with the aim to:

- maintain and enhance biological diversity within the UK and contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity.

Following on from this, in 2000, the NI Biodiversity Group (NIBG) identified issues affecting biodiversity in NI and proposed a number of specific recommendations. These were largely included in the NI Biodiversity Strategy (NIBS) published in 2002.

The NIBG recommendations included a list of NI priority habitats, with a list of NI priority species being subsequently published in 2004. These habitats and species require conservation action to restore their biodiversity status and include a number of habitats and species which are identified as European or UK priorities. Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and Species Action



Plans (SAPs) have been published at UK, NI and all-Ireland levels with targets and actions aimed at restoring many of these priority habitats and species. For further information visit <http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/biodiversity.htm>. These lists of NI priority habitats and species are currently being reviewed to take account of revised UK priority habitats and species agreed in 2007 and new information and/or changes in status within NI and Ireland.

A key goal of the NI Programme for Government (2008-2011) is to “halt the loss of indigenous species and habitats by 2016”. The Scheme aims to make a major contribution to the conservation action required for many NI priority habitats and species. The NICMS habitat management plans specify how farmers and land managers can best contribute to the conservation of these priority habitats and species.

### **Natura 2000**

The European Union (EU) is committed to the protection of biodiversity. The Natura 2000 network of sites form the backbone of the EU’s internal policy on biodiversity protection.

The Natura 2000 network of sites is made up of Special Protection Areas (SPAs), designated under the EC Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), designated under the EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

The Birds Directive was developed in response to increasing concern about the declines in Europe’s wild bird populations, partly due to pollution and loss of habitats. It also recognised that migratory wild birds are a shared heritage and that their effective conservation required shared international co-operation. The Directive bans activities which directly threaten birds, such as their deliberate killing or capture, the destruction of their nests and taking their eggs without licence.

The chief aim of the Habitats Directive is to promote the maintenance of biodiversity through the conservation of habitats and species that are important at a European level. The Directive gives details of over

150 habitats that should be protected through designation. It also establishes a list of species (other than birds) whose habitats must be protected in order to secure their survival. SACs must be maintained at, or restored to, favourable conservation condition and must be protected against damaging activities or projects.

Over 60 sites have been put forward to Europe as part of NI’s contribution to Natura 2000. These sites may have already been designated as ASSI by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) (Department of Environment) who will have informed landowners, farming within the sites, of their designation.

ASSI/Natura 2000 sites can be entered into the NICMS. If these sites are not in favourable condition, they can only be entered into the NICMS when accompanied by an Individual Management Plan (IMP) prepared by EHS, to bring them into favourable condition.

### **Water protection**

The Water Framework Directive (WFD), implemented in NI under the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (NI) 2003, aims to establish an overall framework for the protection of surface waters and ground waters. It will ensure that all European waters are protected according to a common standard. Waterways rise in mountainous uplands and flow to the sea through various stages, including rivers, lakes and estuaries providing a variety of habitats for aquatic plants and animals. Physical modifications, including land drainage, flood defences, weirs and dams, can remove habitat and change natural flows and waterway structures.

The Directive requires the active involvement of all interested parties, with farmers and landowners playing a very important role. Land use practices close to waterways can adversely affect both water and habitat quality. Habitat enhancement will help to achieve good status and protect waterways already at good or high status. The overall aim is to achieve good status for all waters by 2015. Plans identifying pressures and impacts on waterways will be

drawn up and measures put in place by 2009 to help achieve good status where required.

Agriculture has been identified as one of the sources of diffuse pollution of the water environment in NI. Compliance with the Nitrates Directive will help NI to meet its WFD goals. In addition, DARD and EHS are working closely to ensure that agri-environment schemes deliver water quality benefits that will help with WFD compliance.

### Climate change

The Sustainable Development Strategy for NI (2006) identified climate change as “the most severe problem we are facing today”. Nine of the 15 warmest years here since 1841 have occurred since 1990.

Human activities that contribute to climate change include burning fossil fuels, agriculture and forest clearance. The Kyoto Treaty (1997) commits industrialised countries to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide. The Kyoto Protocol was ratified by the EU in 2002 and requires that emissions of greenhouse gases in the period 2008-2012 are 8% below 1990 levels.

In NI, the Programme for Government seeks to protect our environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025 and increasing the area of forest and woodland by 1,650 hectares (ha) by 2011.

Where appropriate, climate change objectives have been identified in the NICMS.

### EU Health Check

The 2008 EU Health Check identified a number of key priorities for rural development policy. These include biodiversity, water management and climate change. NICMS has the potential to deliver on these important issues.

## General Information on NICMS

NICMS is open to farmers with a trading DARD Farm Business Identification Number and with at least three hectares of eligible land. The Scheme is voluntary and includes all owned eligible land. Land taken in conacre is not eligible. However, leased in land that is entered on the IACS Single Application Form is eligible to be included. We may request proof of lease. A Scheme agreement normally lasts for seven years. The annual claim for payment is made using the IACS Single Application Form.

### Applying for NICMS

Applications will be invited by us during specific periods and can be made by contacting us by telephone, in person, by email (cmbenquiries@dardni.gov.uk), by fax or by writing in. If there are too many applications for the Scheme, selection criteria and a scoring system may be applied to prioritise entry and to achieve greatest environmental benefit.

### Outline of Scheme requirements

Participants must:

- Follow the management requirements for the Whole Farm Payment.
- Manage all farmland habitats and historic monuments.
- Complete Minimum Entry Environmental Benefit.
- Carry out all chosen Habitat Enhancement Options, for example, hedge restoration, leaving stubble over the winter months, planting wild bird cover.
- Take part in environmental training.

Table 1 provides an overview of the Scheme structure.





**Table 1: Scheme Structure**

## Management Requirements for the Whole Farm Payment

All of these requirements are compulsory.

- General Environmental Requirements
- Field Boundary Management
- Agreement Management
- Cross-Compliance
- Farm Nutrient and Waste Management

## Farmland Habitats and features

If these habitats are present on the farm, they must be managed according to the management requirements.

- Grasslands
- Wetlands
- Woodland, scrub and parkland
- Bird breeding, feeding and nesting sites
- Moorland and lowland raised bog
- Historic monuments

## Minimum Entry Environmental Benefit (MEEB)

All agreement holders must achieve a minimum level of environmental benefit in their NICMS agreement which will be agreed at the farm audit.

## Habitat Enhancement Options

These are optional. They may be chosen for MEEB.

- Farm waterway and riparian zone management
- Grass margins
- Traditional orchards
- Semi-improved and semi-natural grassland – low input
- Organic management
- Annual heather regeneration
- Annual rhododendron/non-native species control
- Field boundary restoration
- Farmland bird and insect habitat
- Delayed cutting and grazing of grassland
- Traditional breeds – Irish Moiled cattle
- Annual bracken control
- Annual scrub control

## Enhancement Measures

These measures aim to enhance biodiversity, landscape and water quality. Some of these measures can be chosen for MEEB.

- Riverbed enhancement
- Bird and bat boxes
- Provision of alternative water sites
- Traditional wooden gates
- Traditional metal gates
- Traditional pillars and caps
- Parkland tree guards
- Bracken control
- Scrub control
- Features of historic interest
- Tree planting and management
- Red squirrel feeders
- Scrapes, pools and raising water levels
- Gates posts – wooden and stone
- Composite gates
- Protective fencing
- Plastic recycling bin
- Heather regeneration
- Rhododendron/non-native species control

## Special Environmental Project

These may be carried out by individuals or jointly with others.

# Minimum Entry Environmental Benefit (MEEB)

## Farms with at least one farmland habitat or historic monument

If there is at least one eligible farmland habitat (Table 2), with a minimum area of 0.2ha, or an eligible historic monument, MEEB habitat enhancement must be carried out on one of the farmland habitats or on the historic monument.

**Table 2: Eligible farmland habitats for MEEB**

Eligible farmland habitat/monument
Semi-natural grassland
Species rich grassland – dry, calcareous, wet
Species rich grassland cut for hay – dry, calcareous, wet
Breeding wader site
Fen
Swamp
Reedbed
Moorland – dry and wet heath, blanket bog, degraded heath
Rough moorland grazing
Lowland raised bog
Woodland – mixed ash, oak, wet
Scrub
Parkland and lowland wood pasture
Historic monument

The range of MEEB options that can be chosen for farmland habitat enhancement is given in Table 3. Where a farmland habitat is considered by DARD to be in need of enhancement or requires specific management to achieve targets within a SAP or HAP, the option relevant to that habitat must be carried out.

Where more than one farmland habitat is present, MEEB habitat enhancement is required on only one of the habitats. If the farmland habitat(s) requires no enhancement, one of the 'biodiversity'

options or one of the 'water quality' options must be carried out (Table 3). Depending on the option, the farmer/landowner is required to complete a specified area/length of the measure to achieve MEEB. The chosen option must be in place each year for the duration of the Scheme. In the case of habitat enhancement, management must continue until the habitat no longer requires enhancement.

Farmland habitats within ASSI/Natura 2000 sites which are in 'unfavourable condition' can only be entered into NICMS with an Individual Management Plan, prepared by EHS, with the aim of bringing the site into favourable condition. Condition is assessed by EHS.

## MEEB requirements for Scheme participants with no farmland habitats/historic monument

This applies where the farmland is improved or semi-improved grassland or arable land only with no farmland habitats/no historic monument, or where the area of farmland habitat is less than 0.2ha. These farmers must choose one 'biodiversity' option and one 'water quality' option from the list of activities in Table 3. If there are no waterways or no suitable waterways on the farm, then two biodiversity options must be carried out. The selected biodiversity and water quality options should target a relevant HAP or SAP. DARD advisers will have information on the species and habitats present on the farm that may be in decline. Using this information, advice will be given to farmers on the most suitable biodiversity and water quality options to benefit these important species and habitats, and achieve MEEB.

Depending on the option, the farmer/landowner is required to complete a specified area/length of the measure to achieve MEEB (Table 3). The chosen option must be carried out each year for the duration of the Scheme.



**Table 3: MEEB enhancement options**

Enhancement Options	Area/length	Farms with at least one habitat/historic monument	Farms with no habitats/historic monuments
<b>1. Farmland Habitat Enhancement</b>			
Annual bracken control - tractor	0.50 ha/year	<b>One</b> must be carried out	-
Annual bracken control - knapsack	0.30 ha/year		
Annual burning heather	1.00 ha/year		
Annual flailing heather	2.00 ha/year		
Annual control of scrub	0.30 ha/year		
Annual control of rhododendron/non-native species	0.30 ha/year		
Semi-natural grassland - low input	0.40 ha*		
Scrape creation (site specific plan)	-		
Plant standard parkland trees (site specific plan)	-		
Habitat management (site specific plan)	-		
Historic monument (site specific plan)	-		
<b>2. Biodiversity Options</b>			
Ungrazed grass margins/field corners	0.20 ha*	One biodiversity <b>or</b> one water quality option if none of the farmland habitat enhancement options above are required.	One biodiversity option must be chosen. Where no suitable water quality option can be chosen, two biodiversity options must be undertaken.
Ungrazed grass margins planted with native trees	0.10 ha*		
Coastal grazing option	2.00 ha*		
Winter feeding sites for swans and geese	1.00 ha*		
Lapwing breeding sites	1.00 ha*		
Lapwing fallow plots	1.00 ha*		
Retention of winter stubble	1.00 ha*		
Conservation cereals	1.00 ha*		
Wild bird cover	0.20 ha*		
Undersown cereals	0.50 ha*		
Rough grass margins	0.20 ha*		
Pollen and nectar mixture	0.20 ha*		
Field boundary restoration	10 m/year		
Traditional orchards	0.20 ha*		
Delayed cutting and grazing of grassland	1.00 ha*		
Semi-improved/semi-natural grassland – low input	0.40 ha*		
Irish Moiled cattle	1 breeding female		
Organic management	3.00 ha*		
<b>3. Water Quality Options</b>			
Riparian zone - standard	0.20 ha*	One biodiversity <b>or</b> one water quality option if none of the farmland habitat enhancement options above are required.	One water quality option must be chosen if suitable waterway present.
Riparian zone - enhanced + riverbed enhancement	(0.10 ha* + 10 m <sup>2</sup> *)		
Riparian zone - planted with native trees	0.10 ha*		

\*This area must be retained for each year of the Scheme. You must contact DARD if you want to change the MEEB options.

# Special Environmental Project (SEP) option

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A limited amount of funding is available for Special Environmental Projects (SEPs) under the NICMS. SEPs are available to Scheme agreement holders only, including those within designated sites, for example ASSI/Natura 2000. A SEP may be carried out individually or jointly with a number (one or more) of other Scheme agreement holders.

Proposals for the SEP must meet the aims of the NICMS and deliver value for money. The total maximum grant payable for individual projects is £5,000, and for joint projects £6,000 per applicant.

Examples of SEP work may include:

- restoration of traditional farm buildings;
- restoration of historic items such as iron railings in historic parklands;
- specific measures to protect a declining species in a particular location where the requirements cannot be addressed by existing NICMS options;
- enhancement work within a designated site, for example ASSI/Natura 2000, where the work cannot be addressed by existing NICMS options;
- specific silage cutting regimes to benefit ground nesting birds and the Irish hare;
- access, for example, stiles and footpaths;
- grass leguminous systems;
- water protection projects; and
- habitat creation, where this is not addressed by existing NICMS options.







## 1 Farmland Habitats and features

Land category	Tiered payment areas (ha) and additional information	Payment rate (£)*
<b>Whole Farm Payment</b>	0-10	40
	10.01-50	25
	Over 50	5
<b>Grasslands</b>		
Improved/arable		0
Semi-improved	0-100	40
	100.01-200	25
	Over 200	5
Semi-natural	0-100	60
	100.01-200	35
	Over 200	15
Species rich grassland		265
<b>Breeding wader sites</b>		140
<b>Wetlands</b>		
Fen, Swamp and Reedbed		85
<b>Moorland</b>		
Heather moorland and lowland raised bog	0-50	65
	50.01-100	35
	Over 100	15
<b>Rough moorland grazing</b>	0-50	45
	50.01-100	25
	Over 100	15
<b>Woodland and scrub</b>		
Ungrazed oak, ash, wet	0-10	125
	10.01-20	70
	Over 20	35
Lightly grazed oak, ash, wet and scrub	0-10	90
	10.01-20	50
	Over 20	25
<b>Parkland and lowland wood pasture</b>	0-100	65
	100.01-200	35
	Over 200	15
<b>Historic monument</b>	0-2	320
	2.01-3	160
	Over 3	80

\*Payment rates are per hectare unless otherwise indicated.

## 2 Habitat Enhancement Options

Option	Tiered payment areas (ha) and additional information	Payment rate (£)*
<b>Riparian zones</b>	Standard	440
	Enhanced	780
	Native tree planting	1290
<b>Grass margins</b>	Ungrazed	440
	Ungrazed planted with trees	1290
<b>Winter feeding sites</b>		
Swans and geese grassland	0-5	125
	5.01-20	65
	Over 20	35
Swans and geese winter cereal	0-5	160
	5.01-20	80
	Over 20	40
<b>Lapwing breeding sites</b>	Improved land	170
	Semi-improved and semi-natural	145
<b>Coastal grazing</b>		
Improved, semi-improved, semi-natural		60
<b>Traditional orchard recreation</b>		420
<b>Delayed cutting and grazing of grassland</b>	Improved	90
	Semi-improved	130
	Semi-natural	150
<b>Low input grassland</b>		
Semi-improved and semi-natural	0-5	250
	5.01-20	125
	Over 20	85
<b>Field boundary restoration</b>		
Laying/coppicing/planting	No protective fence	6 per metre
Laying/coppicing/planting	1 side fenced	9 per metre
Laying/coppicing/planting	2 sides fenced	12 per metre
Dry stone wall	Single skin	12 per metre
Dry stone wall	Double skin	21 per metre
<b>Lapwing fallow plots</b>		375
<b>Retention of winter stubble</b>		100
<b>Conservation cereal</b>		70
<b>Wild bird cover</b>	1 year single-seed crop	550
	1 year multi-seed crop	600
	2 year crop	515
<b>Undersown cereal</b>		220
<b>Rough grass margin</b>		415
<b>Pollen and nectar mixture</b>		460
<b>Traditional breeds</b>	per eligible animal	125
<b>Organic management option</b>		30
<b>Annual bracken control</b>	Tractor sprayer	170
	Knapsack sprayer	305
<b>Annual heather regeneration</b>	Burning	110
	Flailing	60
<b>Annual scrub management</b>	Scrub and non-native control	305

\*Payment rates are per hectare unless otherwise indicated.

### 3 Enhancement Measures

Enhancement measure	Description	Payment rate (£)*
<b>Riverbed enhancement</b>	Stone or aquamat	4 per sq metre
<b>Tree planting</b>	Standard parkland or fruit tree	14 per tree
	Whip	0.86 per tree
	Tree guard and stake	1.00 per combination
	Spiral rabbit guard	0.70 per combination
<b>Nest boxes/feeders</b>	Small bird box, Bat box	12 per box
	Large bird box, Owl box	15 per box
	Red squirrel feeder	84 per feeder
<b>Creation of scrape</b>	Breeding wader or damselfly	2.77 per sq metre
<b>Structures to raise water levels</b>		60% of actual costs
<b>Drinking sites</b>	Trough	41 per trough
	Pipe	1.27 per metre
<b>Gates, posts and pillars</b>	Wooden gate	36 per metre
	Metal gate	58 per metre
	Composite gate	43 per metre
	Wooden post	22 per post
	Stone post	82 per post
	Rebuilding a pillar	161 per pillar
	Rebuilding a pillar cap	35 per cap
<b>Fencing</b>	3 line strained wire	1.93 per metre
	Additional line of wire	0.23 per metre
	Woven wire + 2 lines wire	2.34 per metre
	Woven wire + 3 lines wire	2.57 per metre
	Rabbit/hare proofing wire	1.50 per metre
<b>Tree guards</b>	1.8 metre square	71 per guard
	3.6 metre triangular	117 per guard
	3.6 metre square	142 per guard
<b>Tree management</b>	Tree surgery, pollarding and orchard restorative pruning	60% of actual costs
<b>Scrub management</b>	Scrub/non-native control	305
<b>Bracken control</b>	Tractor sprayer	170
	Knapsack sprayer	305
<b>Heather regeneration</b>	Burning	110
	Flailing	60
<b>Heritage features</b>	Limited availability	60% of actual costs
<b>Recycling bin</b>		60% of actual costs

\*Payment rates are per hectare unless otherwise indicated.



For further information please contact:

### **DARD Countryside Management Branch**

#### **Headquarters:**

Lindesay Hall, Loughry Campus, Cookstown, County Tyrone, BT80 9AA  
Tel: (028) 8675 7507 Fax: (028) 8675 7511

Kilpatrick House  
38-54 High Street  
Ballymena  
County Antrim  
BT43 6DT  
Tel: (028) 2566 2800  
Fax: (028) 2566 2838

Inishkeen House  
Killyhevlin  
Enniskillen  
County Fermanagh  
BT74 4EJ  
Tel: (028) 6632 5004  
Fax: (028) 6634 3000

2 Newry Road  
Armagh  
County Armagh  
BT60 1EN  
Tel: (028) 3751 5659  
Fax: (028) 3751 5611

Rathkeltair House  
Market Street  
Downpatrick  
County Down  
BT30 6LZ  
Tel: (028) 4461 8000  
Fax: (028) 4461 8226

31 Station Road  
Magherafelt  
County Derry/Londonderry  
BT44 5DN  
Tel: (028) 7930 2112  
Fax: (028) 7930 2067

Sperrin House  
Sedan Avenue  
Omagh  
County Tyrone  
BT79 7AQ  
Tel: (028) 8225 1020  
Fax: (028) 8225 3500

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