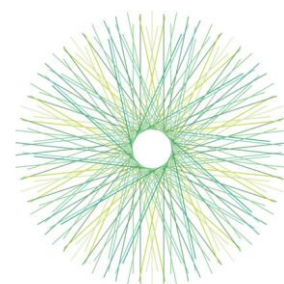




**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

EUROPEAN INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS

Stream B

Sixth Competitive Call for Proposals
December 2022

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

1. Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is inviting applications for funding in the sixth competitive call for proposals under the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative. **This call is specifically focused on reducing losses of phosphorus, nitrogen, sediment and, where relevant, pesticides to water from agricultural lands by promoting the adoption of innovative best practice in nutrient management, the application of Nature based Natural Water Retention Measures¹ (NWRM) and other suitable measures.** The application of measures will be guided by the Pollution Impact Potential Maps recently developed by the Environmental Protection Agency², thereby applying the principle of putting ‘the right measure in the right place’ at field level.

The European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP) under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) comes under the remit of Commission Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council. This co-operation measure is under Article 35(1) of the Regulation and a fundamental rule of this measure is that a supported project shall be granted funding to promote forms of co-operation involving at least two entities.

EIPs involve the establishment of Operational Group(s) to develop ideas or take existing ideas/research and put them into practice. The aim of these innovation partnerships is to road-test new ideas and practices which can then be used more widely by farmers and others to improve productivity, enhance resource efficiency and pursue sustainable farming practices. Innovation is a key element of EIPs, and all proposals must clearly demonstrate the innovative element around which the proposal is built.

To succeed, the Operational Group will rely on fostering communication through stakeholder networking, developing partnerships and dissemination of knowledge and ideas across a wide range of stakeholders. It will support innovative concepts and ideas from among farmers, advisors, researchers, NGOs, existing EIP project teams and Agri-businesses.

As the lead environmental authority in water quality protection and restoration within River Basin Management and Planning process, one or more Local Authorities³ **must be an entity** in any project proposals submitted under this Call for Proposals.

2. Overview

The third national River Basin Management Plan (2022-2027) will soon be published (anticipated December 2022) and will include a programme of measures to protect and where necessary restore each one of Ireland’s 4,842 bodies of water. The quality of the water in any one catchment reflects the cumulative impact of all pressures on that catchment. In the most recent national water quality assessment by the EPA⁴, almost half

¹ <https://www.catchments.ie/download/wfd-natural-water-retention-measures/>

² <https://www.catchments.ie/next-generation-pollution-impact-potential-maps-launched/> Note: The EPA Catchment Science and Management Unit may be contacted to confirm that the most up to date maps are available.

³ “Local Authority” means a city council or county council within the meaning of the Local Government Act, 2001 (No. 37 of 2001).

⁴ <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/freshwater--marine/water-quality-in-ireland-2016--2021-.php>

(46%) of Ireland's waterbodies are below good status – i.e. they are not as ecologically healthy as they should be. It is now unlikely that Ireland will achieve at least good water quality status for all its waterbodies by 2027 without urgent, substantial, and persuasive measures.

The principal causes of the decline in Ireland's water quality are the on-going and, in some cases increasing losses into water of polluting phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment from farmland; inadequately treated wastewater and physical impacts on water bodies (for example, the interruption of river continuity due to river barriers, and drainage of lands and rivers). Climate change, population growth and urbanisation are each adding to the pressures on water resources and water services infrastructure. Strong and targeted action is now needed to protect water from further decline and to restore water quality where past activities have caused damage.

Agriculture represents the main pressure on water quality; each sector within Ireland's farming community along with Ireland's agri-food sector has a role to play in reducing agriculture's impact on water quality. A coordinated response is now urgently required. Ireland's new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan will have a critical role to play in this regard as will the new strengthened Nitrates Action Programme.

The new Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) aims to contribute significantly to achieving improved biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes. These will be achieved through two approaches under the scheme:

- an ACRES General approach offering a range of measures for individual farmers (both targeted and general); and
- an ACRES Co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas, who opt to undertake measures, as well as bespoke farm and landscape actions.

ACRES has capacity to support up to 50,000 farmers in implementing measures. However, it is estimated that there may be up to 60,000 additional farmers in other Areas for Action⁵ covering 13,000km² in need of targeted agricultural measures for the purpose of protecting and restoring water quality. There is a significant proportion of farmers within this group which may be having a significant impact on water quality but do not tend to participate in voluntary Agri-environmental schemes for various reasons. The challenge will be to target, encourage and support these farmers to address the key risks to water quality on their farms. The proposed Water EIP provides a valuable opportunity to complement actions under the new Nitrates Action Programme and ACRES thereby addressing a critical gap in measures to protect and restore water quality in River Basin Management Plan Areas for Action nationally. There are 527 Areas for Action identified in the draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027.

This Call is seeking proposals for the development and implementation of one single EIP with national coverage, targeting water protection and restoration actions on lands under agricultural management within River Basin Management Plan Areas for Action. This EIP should aim to engage with farmers to develop and implement sustainable land management options for farms at catchment level which will meet some or all the following objectives:

⁵ 527 Areas for Action have been proposed for targeted actions during the third River Basin Management cycle (2022-2027), both restoration and protection measures. These are catchment areas with significant risks to water quality. See <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/2bda0-public-consultation-on-the-draft-river-basin-management-plan-for-ireland-2022-2027/>

- Identify the key risks to water quality at field level. This may be guided by the best available scientific evidence, including the Pollution Impact Potential Maps recently developed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),
- Reduce the risk of phosphorus, nitrogen, sediment and, where relevant, pesticide losses to water from agricultural lands by promoting and incentivising the adoption of innovative best practice in nutrient management, the application of Nature based Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM) and other suitable measures⁶.
- Guide the location of measures at field level using the best available scientific evidence, thereby applying the principle of the putting 'the right measure in the right place'. The EPA Pollution Impact Potential Maps may be used as a guide for this purpose.
- Maximise other ecosystem service co-benefits such as the protection of biodiversity, flood attenuation and addressing climate change.
- Contribute to building resilience to the impacts of climate change at catchment/landscape level.

This EIP will be at least a 5-year project with an overall indicative budget of €50m, with at least €30m to be spent by 31/12/25. This indicative budget excludes the EIP's administrative costs which should be calculated and presented separately.

The Operational Group will be required to submit annual reports, and in June 2025 an interim report, to facilitate evaluation of progress under the EIP. The interim report will be subject to review by DAFM, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the EPA. Arising from the evaluation of the annual reports/interim report, the Operational Group may be required to amend the project plan to optimise delivery of the project's objectives.

In the course of the project the Operational Group may process personal data on behalf of DAFM. This data must be collected, stored and managed in accordance with legislative requirements. This personal data may be made available to other Government Departments/Agencies/Local Authorities/contracted parties/LIFE Projects, but only where there is a valid legal basis to do so. Further details on these requirements will be contained in the contract.

Where appropriate, a Data Sharing Agreement(s) must be put in place between the bodies involved in this processing activity. The purpose of this sharing of data is to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States and objectives of the Rural Development Plan (RDP) and/or the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). This includes, but is not limited to management, control and audit purposes, monitoring and evaluation purposes, controls relating to the legislation underpinning all Rural Development measures, as required by Article 65 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 809/2014 and for the performance of the CAP Strategic Plan as required by Article 128 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council. In addition, personal information may be released under the terms of the relevant Data Protection legislation in force and the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

⁶ **Note:** Measures to comply with environmental legislation will not be supported by the project. Landowners are fully responsible for complying with existing environmental laws.

A non-exhaustive list of possible actions for the proposed EIP's project plan includes:

- Nature based Natural Water Retention Measures to reduce/eliminate critical sediment, phosphorus and pesticide sources and transport, particularly along riparian corridors, such as:
 - using flood plain and riparian woodlands
 - overland sediment traps
 - offline storage ponds
 - creation of tailored, functioning high quality riparian zones along drains and waterbodies
 - establishment of new field boundaries, including hedgerows
 - increased riparian buffer strips
- Drain management
- Grazing and livestock management
- Detailed nutrient management planning and reduction in inputs
- Targeted control of access to watercourses by livestock
- Provision of alternative drinking water facilities for livestock
- Decommissioning of sheep-dipping facilities
- Capital expenditure related to Farm Sustainability Plan implementation (including non-productive investments)

It is important to note that these are indicative actions only. The framework approach in this EIP will ensure that there is flexibility to respond to individual challenges on the ground and give scope to test a variety of actions across different conditions and different geographical spaces. The opportunity for innovative measures to be proposed by or developed with farmer input is another key feature of this measure.

This Call is seeking proposals from a group of at least two entities⁷, who will come together to develop new ways of approaching the challenges being faced by lands with the potential to cause water pollution impacts in Areas for Action and which offer a new way forward with wider application. The successful group will develop tailored innovative solutions at catchment level to respond to the challenge of the agricultural management of these lands with the potential to cause water pollution impacts. Solutions must include the farmers who own or manage these lands. This EIP Open Call seeks proposals which will apply nationally, however it will be focussed particularly on River Basin Management Plan Areas for Action.

The Local Authority sector **must be a key entity** in any project proposals submitted considering their lead role in water quality protection and restoration within the River Basin Management and Planning process. Preference will be given to proposals involving strong collaboration across Local Authorities (including shared service entities) as well as those that include involvement from the agri-food sector. At least one of the entities involved in the project must have demonstrable and recent experience in catchment science and management.

⁷ Members of existing EIP Operational Groups can apply to form a new Operational Group.

All applications **must be** from an established group and **must have** a current administrative structure in place to receive funding.

Projects **must** also be guided by sufficient agricultural, biodiversity and catchment science expertise i.e. Ecologist, Catchment Scientist, Agricultural Advisor, etc. Additionally, projects must integrate the programme of activities in line with reporting into DAFM's IT systems.

DAFM will undertake an initial assessment of the applications, to ensure adequate information has been provided, including the detailed Project Plan (see Project Plan Outline at Appendix A). A selection committee will then undertake the detailed assessment of the applications.

Following evaluation of all applications, a panel will be formed from which DAFM may choose one project to set up and administer the EIP programme through an Operational Group. The successful project will design pilot schemes to be rolled out to eligible farmers and administer that scheme for five years with the potential for the project to be further scaled up, with new funding, or by way of an extension to the project based on performance. This pilot scheme, which will be co-developed with farmers in a bottom-up process, will set out a number of measures and actions to address the objectives set out above. It will involve the identification and verification of risks to water quality on lands under agricultural use, the development of appropriate mitigating measures, behavioural attributes to change, community engagement, industry engagement, peer-to-peer development and the monitoring and verification of changes arising out of these actions. Measures will contribute to protecting and restoring water quality and also benefit biodiversity, flood mitigation and ecosystem climate resilience. The successful project will propose a mainly Nature based approach and will provide lessons learned to inform future water and agriculture policy and operations in this area. The application should indicate how the Operational Group will implement the project at the national scale.

The pilot scheme must be designed so as to give priority access to applicant farms in the following order:

1. Farms in a Priority Area for Action in the 2nd or 3rd River Basin Management Plan which have a Farm Sustainability Plan prepared in conjunction with the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP).
2. Farms which are located within a 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan Area for Action, or within the catchment area of a catchment management initiative (e.g. community led initiatives such as group drinking water source protection projects, River Trusts, etc.), as well as within water bodies identified by the EPA or Local Authorities as priorities for phosphorus, sediment, nitrogen or pesticide (where relevant) management measures.
3. Farms which are located within a River Basin Management Plan Area for Action, or within the catchment area of a catchment management initiative (e.g. community led initiatives such as group drinking water source protection projects, River Trusts, etc.) but not necessarily within water bodies identified by the EPA as priorities for phosphorus, sediment, nitrogen or pesticide management measures.
4. Other farms outside of the above areas.

3. Operational Groups

The Operational Group is the collection of people who are in the best position to help realise the project goals. The full operations team should be identified with relevant experience and qualifications. The application

must also set out what the role and contribution of each Operational Group member will be in relation to achieving the goals of the project including which member will be lead partner.

An Operational Group can also bring together any advisors/other multipliers who have the scientific expertise and knowledge needed by the project at various times but who do not need to be a permanent part of the Operational Group. The Operational Group shall establish internal procedures that ensure that their operation and decision making is transparent and that situations of conflict of interest are avoided. Please note that only an Operational Group based in Ireland will be eligible for this funding.

4. Process for Sixth Call for EIP

- Call for the submission of detailed project proposals;
- Proposals to be returned to DAFM;
- Only completed applications produced to a template laid down by DAFM (see EIP Project Plan Outline at Appendix A) received on or before the closing date will be assessed for funding. Please see the selection criteria at Appendix B;
- A Selection Committee will evaluate all proposals based on the plans, projected outcomes, projected costs and timeframes and with reference to the selection criteria listed at Appendix B.
- The Committee will then present the highest ranked project to be considered for funding by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- It is envisaged that all applicants will be informed of results in February 2023
- A steering group will be formed to oversee the development and operation of the project.

As with all Rural Development Schemes, each stage of the process will be subject to a control regime based on inspection and administrative checks to be implemented by DAFM. DAFM are the consenting body for Appropriate Assessments in relation to EIP projects. The successful applicant must comply with the Appropriate Assessment process as required under Council Directive 92/43/EEC.

5. Contract Discussions and Procedure for Award of Funding

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process. The Operational Group selected for funding will be informed of the indicative level of funding and will be invited to address any issues raised by the Selection Committee and/or the DAFM administrative team within a given timeframe.

As part of the contract discussions, DAFM may also:

- Seek additional information it considers necessary on the details of the proposal.
- Negotiate adjustments to proposal details to achieve compliance with the Regulation or to improve the efficiency of the proposal.

Once the project detail has been agreed an award letter will be issued to the successful applicant. This letter will outline the contractual obligations and conditions that will apply to the award. The successful applicant must acknowledge receipt of the award letter and acceptance of the contract conditions.

Deadline for completed applications

5pm on 27th January 2023

to watereip@agriculture.gov.ie

APPENDIX A

EIP PROJECT PLAN

Chapter Outline

The relative 'weighting' of the various chapters below should be preserved. Two hard copies to be provided, plus an electronic version in both Word and PDF format

1. Executive Summary

A concise summary capturing the main points set out in your plan, and reflecting each of the areas listed below, capable of being read as a standalone document. Can include images, charts and tables as required.

Word Count 1,000-1,500 words.

2. Project Abstract

This is intended for upload to the DG-AGRI EIP database which can be accessed publicly. It should explain what your project is about, what it hopes to achieve, who is involved etc under the following headings: Summary, Objectives, Description of Project Activities, Expected Results and Practical Recommendations, Operational Group details (including Group Leader and points of contact), Keyword Category (for searches), Territorial Scope, Project Period, Budget.

Word Count: 500-1,000.

3. Our Approach

This chapter should set out a full description of your approach, exactly what will be done including proposed actions at ground level and the associated costs, with a basis for same.

All proposed actions should be costed on a linear basis, a per unit non-productive investment basis or as a result-based payment. Costings based on a standard rate per unit land area will not be accepted. It is permissible to calculate the associated effort involved in achieving the desired result and propose payment on that basis. All costs must be independently validated by an approved FAS advisor.

Please note that it is a fundamental requirement of the EIP model that all projects include a significant practical component. You need to set out the scope of the project, clearly identifying what is and what is not included, key performance indicators, milestones and deliverables as appropriate during the project. What are the constraints, e.g. environmental, legislative, geographic etc? Care should be taken to identify any environmental impact likely to give rise to Appropriate Assessment. What Quality Controls & Quality Assurances are being incorporated?

Word Count: 8,000-12,000

4. The Team

Your full team must be identified here, with their relevant experience and qualifications. CVs for each team member should be appended. You need to provide a clear identification of who's doing what. Who is the leader? Who are the key stakeholders outside the group and how will each be managed? How will you engage with the 'end user' on the ground? You must provide the expected time commitment of each member to the Project in days per year.

Word Count: 3,000

5. Risks and contingency planning

A simple SWOT analysis should underpin this chapter, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of and to the project. This should be followed up by an assessment of key risks and controls. This

assessment should include likelihood, impact and adequacy of controls, resulting in a low-medium-high classification. You will need to set out a high-level contingency plan, including replacement procedure if an actor drops out/cannot continue with the project, and procedure in the event that it becomes apparent the project will not succeed. This chapter should also cover how the project will address data protection, and adherence to public procurement regulations.

Word Count: 3,000

6. Timelines and milestones

Here you need to set out the overall timeline for your project and the key milestones along the way. This should be expressed both in narrative and by way of a simple Gantt Chart. As well as the key milestones, this needs to show how often the Operational Group will meet together, how often it will meet with key stakeholders, and the procedure for assessing progress and responding where milestones are not achieved. The Key Performance Indicators, milestones and deliverables identified in Chapter 3 should be brought forward here. The process for monitoring and control also needs to be outlined.

Word Count: 2,000

7. Financial Plan

You need to provide a detailed Financial Plan here, setting out your overall projected costs clearly differentiated into Administrative, Research and Practical headings, with the last intended to cover actions undertaken by participants on the ground. This needs to be broken by main sub cost-headings and presented for each year of operation. You will also need to set out the overall structure and procedures for making payments to participants, the basis for such claims, the records to be kept and the reporting structures to be put in place.

Word Count: 3,000

8. Dissemination, Lessons Learned and outreach plan

In this chapter, you need to set out how you propose to disseminate your results over the lifetime of the project, as well as at closure.

Word count: 3,000

APPENDIX B

Selection Criteria for the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups		
Criterion	Components	Marks
Quality of the Proposal	Must follow guidelines laid down in terms of chapter outline; assessed on scientific, technical, managerial aspects as well as proposals for practical application on the ground – key aspect of any EIP; Quality of financial plan and value for money.	350
Relevance and Impact	Clear relevance to the identified priorities and focus areas, innovation, benefits and wider applicability.	250
Quality of the Operational Group	Qualifications and experience which are directly relevant to the project proposed; contribution proposed by each member of the Group; balance and structure of Group, including evidence of strong relevant collaboration, number of Local Authorities involved as well as agri-food sector involvement; Lead proposed, and representative nature (which should include people 'on the ground'.)	300
Risk/Contingency Planning	Identification and mitigation of relevant risks to achieving impact. In particular, appropriate boundaries to the catchment area.	100