

Axis 4 Factsheet: IRELAND

Geographical map:



1. Context in which Axis 4 is being implemented and main challenges faced.

An island in the eastern part of the North Atlantic and on the continental shelf of Europe, Ireland covers an area of 70 280 km². The Irish Republic is bound on the north by the North Channel, which separates it from Scotland; on the north-east by Northern Ireland; and on the east and south-east by the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel, separating it from England and Wales respectively. To the west, from north to south, the coast of Ireland is washed by the Atlantic Ocean. With a coastline which extends for 4 578 km and significant inland waterways, fisheries and the sea play an important part in the cultural, environmental and economic identity of Ireland.

Ireland has a population of 4.5 million, over 50% of which live within 15 km of the coastline. The coastal cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford account for most of this settlement while 18% of Ireland's population live in rural, coastal areas many of which have a low-density of population.

Annual consumption of fish in 2005 stood at 22.5kg per person which is marginally higher than the EU average of 21kg for the same year. Consumer demand for seafood has been growing strongly over the last ten years with sales value of Irish seafood increasing from €617 million in 2000 to €720 million in 2005 equivalent to 0.45% of Irish GDP in that year. The fisheries industry provides approximately 11 000 jobs in the coastal regions, predominantly on the western seaboard and the harbour towns of the south and east. These jobs are critically important to the survival of many of the remote rural communities dependent on the industry.

In recent years the supply of seafood is facing difficulties mainly due to the decline in fish stocks, declining quotas and structural imbalances at catching and processing levels.

The waters around Ireland contain some of the most productive fishing grounds in the EU and it is estimated that in 2004 the total catch by all fleets within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone was 700 000 tonnes of fish valued at €500 million, the greater proportion of which was taken by non-Irish vessels. Despite the considerable overall catch, Ireland's Marine Institute reports that "over 75% of these stocks are outside safe biological limits with either a low stock size or unsustainable levels of exploitation".

From a high in 1997, Ireland's share of the key demersal stocks has fallen from 55 470 tonnes to 32 662 tonnes in 2006, a fall of 41%. Landings also have declined by some 33% over this period, from 48 000 tonnes in 1997 to just 32 331 in 2004. For the key pelagic species (mackerel, horse-mackerel, herring, and blue whiting) a similar pattern is also evident and between 1995 and 2004 landings fell by 26% (305,000 to 226,783 tonnes). In contrast to the decline in landings of demersal and pelagic stocks, landings from the main shellfish stocks all increased significantly over the same period with a combined increase of 48% (18,179 tonnes to 26,832 tonnes). There are questions however, regarding the sustainability of this level of exploitation of shellfish in the medium to long-term.

As of 2008 the Irish fishing fleet consisted of 2 023 vessels registered in 5 segments (polyvalent, beam trawl, pelagic, specific, and aquaculture). In less than a decade the whitefish fleet has undergone unprecedented restructuring funded by private investment of €91 million and supported by State/EU grant-aid of €58.5 million. Two successive renewal programmes, the Whitefish Renewal Scheme and the Fleet Development Measure, have resulted in the introduction of 79 new and modern

second-hand vessels into the fleet over the past 8 years and the withdrawal of an estimated 300 older and generally smaller vessels. Additionally 130 vessels have been modernised and more than 820 have undergone safety upgrades. Since 2005 a fleet decommissioning programme (FIFG) has seen the removal of 36 vessels from the polyvalent and specific segments amounting to 4 901 GT and 15 392 kW. The current decommissioning scheme under the EFF OP and the National Development Programme (NDP) foresees the removal of a further 11 140 GT from the whitefish fleet

Consisting of 198 companies, the Irish seafood processing sector is dominated by Fresh/Live Seafood Processors (111). There are a significant number of Companies engaged in seafood preparation (71) and finally firms trading in Bulk Seafood (16). Over 50% of these companies have a turnover of less than €1m per year and would be described as SMEs mostly supplying local markets or selling to niche outlets. Only 10% of processors have a turnover in excess of €10m per annum employing in excess of 50 full time staff each. The processing sector is concentrated in the coastal regions of Donegal, Galway, Cork, Kerry and the South East.

In respect to external trade, in 2006 total value for exports was €359 million with a related volume of 171 743 tonnes, while the total value for imports was €169million with 56 318 tonnes in volume. Approximately 85% of seafood exports are directed to EU markets with the balance going mainly to Far Eastern and African markets. As these figures quoted show, Ireland is increasingly reliant on imports to satisfy the domestic market. Fisheries imports (predominantly from the UK) account for 58% of the domestic market and have been growing at a rate of 3-7% per year since 1996.

2. The national response in terms of Axis 4

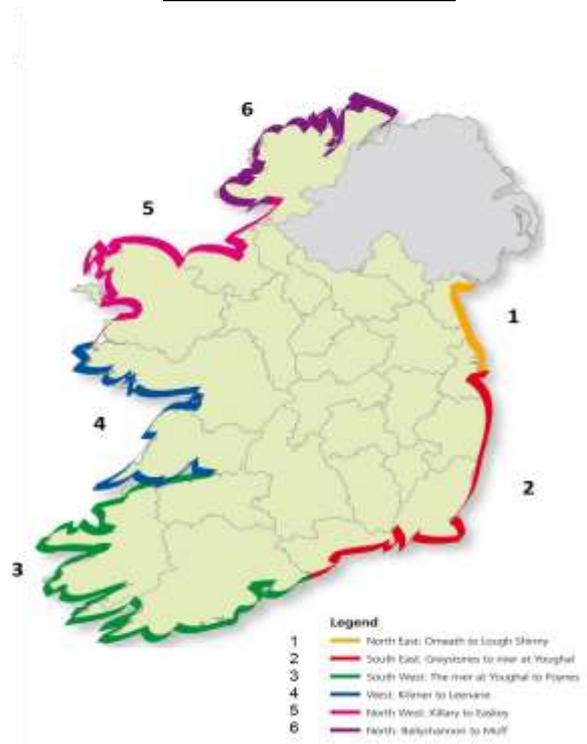
In Ireland the responsibility for the EFF and Axis 4 rests with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who has been designated to act as the Managing Authority. Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) have worked very closely with the Department throughout the development process and has been designated the Implementing Body within Ireland for EFF Axis 4. To support the effective operation of FLAGs, a National Implementation Board (NIB) has been created. It is responsible for the co-ordination of FLAGs at national level, networking at European level as well as maintaining oversight of the Axis 4 process.

3. The areas and their key characteristics

Ireland has chosen to create 6 FLAGs covering the entire coast line - from Omeath in the North East FLAG area all the way around the coast to Muff in the North. There is no intention to support any inland fisheries. The criteria for inclusion in the Irish programme are based upon their ability to target either areas of low population density, areas where fishing is in decline or small fisheries communities.

There are five main fishing ports in Ireland which are Killybegs, Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East and Kilmore Quay but these are outnumbered by the numerous small ports and fishing villages dotted all around the coast. The coast is generally characterised by its isolation, combining a mixture of rocky inlets with plenty of sandy beaches. Although Ireland boasts a number of blue flag beaches there is little tourism development built around them.

FLAG Areas in Ireland



Original map courtesy of Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

4. The selection process

Ireland is keen to ensure that the benefits of Axis 4 are available to all fisheries communities that meet the eligibility criteria of the EFF, which means that the vast majority of its coast line is included in FLAG areas. This has resulted in a number of pre-determined areas where local stakeholders have been encouraged to join together and develop a FLAG strategy. FLAGs have needed to be able to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria including geography, population density, the state of the fisheries industry and level of fisheries dependency. BIM will act as the administrative body of the FLAG's.

All six FLAG areas have been identified and have established FLAG partnerships in order to develop strategies. BIM has been playing a very active role in bringing stakeholders together and facilitating the development of FLAG strategies. The West and South-East strategies has been published and a call for projects has since taken place with a number of projects approved by the FLAGs. The remaining FLAG strategies will be published by end of July 2013.

5. The groups

The composition of the FLAGs will vary across Ireland to reflect the local issues; however from the two strategies approved to date there is good engagement across the board including representatives from the fisheries sector, aquaculture, business, community, tourism, environment, Local Authorities and LEADER. Although it is envisaged that there will be LEADER representatives in the FLAGs, all FLAGs in Ireland are set up independently of LEADER groups.

BIM are the Implementing Board for EFF in Ireland and as such it retains responsibility for the overall administration of the Axis 4 programme. BIM manage the overall budget for the programme, ensure strategic fit of projects, process grant claims and will carry out audit. BIM are also developing capacity in the FLAGs and helping them develop processes and procedures required for project delivery.

6. The strategies

To date, just two groups in Ireland have prepared their strategies and had them approved. The remaining FLAG strategies are in the process of being finalised

7. Key features of administrative and financial systems

EFF budget 2007-2013 and funding from National level

% of EFF Budget on Axis 4	EFF Budget on Axis 4 / €	National Funding /€	Total Budget / €	Average Budget per group / €	Number of groups
2.4	788 000	788 000	1 576 000	260 000	6

The figures above are based on the modified Operational Programme (OP) which is currently being approved by the Commission.

Administrative procedures are described below:

- Potential beneficiaries present project to FLAG
- FLAG submits list of applications to BIM for eligibility checks
- BIM checks eligibility and refers potential project to FLAG for approval
- FLAG selects projects and provides BIM with a list of approved projects
- BIM issues offer letter
- Beneficiary submits claim for payment to FLAG
- FLAG submits payment list to BIM who check claim and issue payment to final beneficiary

8. **Networking and capacity building**

At present no official networks have been formed in Ireland. BIM is taking a direct role in developing capacity within the FLAGs

9. **Any resource or idea that may be of interest to other countries**

Ireland is at a very early stage in its development and has had to reduce its budget from that intended in its original OP. However they are working hard to develop the partnerships into strong groups that will be able to deliver benefits for fisheries communities throughout Ireland.

10. **Contacts and links**

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