

FIELD VISIT – SMART DEVELOPMENT IN BANTRY BAY

4 April, 13.30-18.00



Bantry Bay is part of the FLAG South area which covers the whole coast of County Cork including seven West Cork Islands. The Bay has a significant small-scale fishing and aquaculture industry. The challenge is to stimulate and support both conventional and innovative projects.

Whiddy Island: Schoolhouse Renovation and Bantry Blue Way

North west of Bantry town is Whiddy Island, which is accessible by a short ferry trip. Nowadays, the island has a full-time population of only 27. The main economic activities come from an oil storage depot, farming and tourism.

The **schoolhouse** was built in 1887. The renovation was supported by FLAG South, which sees any planned activities as an important contribution to boosting the existing walking business and eventually increasing employment.

There is already a link with the “**Bantry Blue Way**” project, supported by the previous FLAG (2007-13 funding period). It is a kayaking and self-drive boat hiring facility based in Bantry Port. It was the first project of its kind in Ireland, mapping out kayaking trails around the inlets and Islands of inner Bantry Bay.

Rope Mussel Farming in Bantry Bay

Rope mussel farming using rafts and longlines started in Bantry in 1982 and is now an important aquaculture activity out across three other bays. Mussel production is approximately 7000 tonnes/per annum, sustaining around 80 direct jobs.

Bantry Harbour Mussels Ltd switched from the usual plastic mussel mesh to a reusable “hairy rope” system which, combined with a purposely made biodegradable “cotton sock”, is particularly eco-friendly. BIM, through the EFF OP, supported the company to undertake this change and the earlier standardisation of the floats to one colour. The new floats are made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE), so they can be plastic welded, repaired and re-deployed if they get damaged.

Gearhies “cluster”

In Gearhies, the Irish Marine Institute laboratory and a Marine Research Station are working side by side.

The **Marine Institute Phytoplankton Monitoring Laboratory** investigates the presence of toxic and harmful species of phytoplankton in shellfish production waters in the south of Ireland. It also studies the importance of other phytoplankton as an indicator of water quality. A laboratory that is producing this data is a useful local resource for mussel farmers to use in a smart way. They can use this information to gain extra time to effectively close the bay, prior to the official closure by the state agencies. Due/Thanks to this resource, the local mussel farmers have been able to close the bay up to three days early, which is important in helping to avoid a number of potential regulatory issues.

Bantry Marine Research Station Ltd is researching into areas that could interest local fisheries and aquaculture producers, and partnerships could be beneficial. The studies include micro and macroalgal cultivation; improving products and services such as forecasting and aquaculture site selection; and conducting fish disease challenges. One project is a BIM EMFF-funded research and development on the chemical constituents in seaweed. There is an on-site hatchery for the production of finfish (lumpfish) and shellfish (sea urchins) and the on-growing of sea urchins.

Techniques to reduce sea lice in salmon farming: The use of wild wrasse is an alternative to lump sucker fish depending on the season. The manager of a salmon farm located west of the bay is building a network of fishermen along the coast who fish the wrasse to supply the fish farms. As the Bantry Marine Research Station works with fish species used for de-licing, the network could explore working together in some way.

Bantry Bay Premium Seafood processes the mussels from Bantry Bay. In their factory, the mussels are purified, vacuum-packed and frozen, with all the natural juices retained inside the shell. As shellfish producers, the company could also take advantage of the research taking place in such close proximity.

Aquaculture Remote Classroom

As part of the #farmedintheEU campaign to promote European aquaculture, the Irish Seafood Development Agency BIM financed and conceptualised a truck which has been touring schools all around Ireland since last summer. By using virtual reality headsets, the school children can experience the depths of the ocean and learn about the environment in which salmon and mussels are farmed in Ireland.

Bantry Harbour community vision (optional – from 18.00-18.45 in the Maritime Hotel)

“Bantry Slob” (the inner harbour area) is the focus on a community-led development process aimed at making it an area that delivers real benefits and enhances tourism. Thanks to sponsoring from a number of sources, a facilitator was hired to take the lead on 2 000 hours of voluntary work from the community. This produced a consensus document indicating how the community would like to see the Slob developed. The document is an important guidance note for the port authorities, planners, the local authority and other agencies in their future dealings with Bantry inner harbour.