

Development through effective co-operation, the Irish Islands Federation - IE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

How national islands can co-operate together to improve their development. A number of initiatives have been implemented that can be transferred to other islands around the European mainland and its overseas territories.

4. Overview of the case

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann/Irish Islands Federation is the representative body for all the inhabited offshore islands of Ireland. The greatest concern expressed by communities is halting, or indeed reversing, the decline in their populations which requires work on a number of fronts.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

In 1984, sixteen islands founded Comhdháil na nOileán/Irish Islands Federation. At that time, there were serious shortcomings with access to the islands and health and other essential services were completely inadequate. Due to lack of funds and the difficulties inherent in running a voluntary organisation of islanders without administrative support, Comhdháil stopped functioning after a few years. In 1993, it was re-established and became a co-operative in 1994. Comhdháil then succeeded in getting recognition as a Leader II company, was granted £1.3m initially and was able to open an office (on Inis Oírr, the smallest of the Aran islands) and employ full-time staff. In 1998, it succeeded in getting funding under the European New Opportunities for Women programme. For the period 2002-2006, Comhdháil administered the National Rural Development Programme (NDRP) for the islands and was allocated €1,845,000. It succeeded in getting funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs to employ a Manager who would work independently of the NDRP and other programmes and develop Comhdháil's policy nationally. This post was funded until the end of 2008. Government funding has now ended and Comhdháil have launched a fundraising campaign to ensure that the islanders' views and interests can continue to be represented. Comhdháil is a founder member of the European Small Islands Network (ESIN) set up in 2001 which promotes co-operation between European small islands seeking to sustain permanent communities. The current members of this network are Ireland, Scotland, France, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Greece and Italy. It was lead partner in an interregional project, funded by Interreg IIIC, from 2004-2007. There are currently 33 member islands, with a total population of ca. 3000.

b) Objectives

The original aim was to draw attention to the difficulties facing islanders in terms of socio-economic development. The aim now is to support sustainable, permanent communities on the islands.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

Comhdháil's affairs are managed by an Executive Committee. It consists of one representative from each member island with a permanent population of at least 50; one representative from any group of small islands with a combined permanent population of at least 50; one other representative from the small islands not otherwise represented; one Island Women's representative. A representative from each of the following statutory organisations also sits on the Executive Committee: FÁS (Irish Employment Authority), Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and a representative from the County Development Boards.

b) ICZM tools

Comhdháil has produced policy documents for the islands on a number of important issues. The Environmental policy recognises that fisheries and aquaculture should be carried out to an extent which the local marine ecosystem can carry and support and in a manner which ensures the greatest biodiversity. Tourism should be developed in a sustainable manner, with the natural and cultural environment being promoted and support being provided for the development of products and services which allow for sustainable use of natural marine and land resources. A separate marine policy recognises that ICZM involves the whole territory of the island. It focuses on fishing. The provision of renewable energy is an issue of increasing importance and urgency, particularly for islands. Comhdháil, in partnership with the government Department and Sustainable Energy, is committed to encouraging and supporting the development of renewable energy projects on the islands. The Islands are recognised as ideal locations for piloting renewable and sustainable energy projects and support must be given to individuals, community groups and businesses seeking to reduce their energy consumption and to use renewable energy sources. There are several initiatives that have been implemented of which two are detailed here.

It was the shortage of fresh water during one summer in the later 1990s, when there was water for two hours on Tuesday and two hours on Thursday only, that drove the people of Inis Meáin (west Ireland) to look for alternative methods of generating energy. With little fresh water of its own and a doubling of the population during the summer, the islanders decided to desalinate sea-water. Hence the decision to introduce wind power to the island which would not only power the desalination plant but would also generate extra energy which could be sold via the national grid, thus generating income to repay the capital costs of the system and to cover its maintenance.

On Bere island (south west Ireland), seaweed is collected at spring tides once every two weeks to feed abalone in an aquaculture initiative. There is concern, however, of the danger in trying to harvest the seaweed in bad weather conditions. The solution is to dry it when it is available in abundance and to store it for later use. Therefore, the farm owners are now investigating the possibility of growing, harvesting and burning a type of elephant grass (native to Asia) known as *Micantus* as fuel. The high cost of drying the seaweed could be covered by generating heat and hot water through the burning of the grass. This hybrid grass grows, without fertiliser, for twenty three years without needing to be re-seeded. Growing to a height of between ten and twelve feet, it is harvested once a year in the Spring and yields up to eight tons per acre. Farmers would be paid €300 per acre and would also qualify for organic subsidies. The energy generated by the burning of the grass would yield sufficient hot water to heat homes nearby and the electricity generated could be fed back into the national grid at a guaranteed price of 7.2c per KWh. Electricity could then be bought back at about 6 cent per KWh, under a scheme aimed at encouraging the generation of green energy. Not only would the system save money for the fish farmers and residents alike, it would also provide income for farmers in the production of a sustainable crop and would contribute to the production of greenhouse gas neutral energy.

7. Cost and resources

The operational budget for Comhdháil in 2007 was €647,000. Details are available in the Annual Report.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

Comhdháil has been very effective as an organisation that has been able to actively support a number of small islands that do not have the capacity to do so alone. The inter-island network has been able to exchange ideas between the islands and attract national and European funding to implement policies that have been drawn up with participation from all the islands.

9. Success and Fail factors

Comhdháil has been able to secure funding to administer and manage the implementation of the policy issues drawn up through consultation with the islands e.g. by supporting tourism or alternative energy projects.

Local initiatives are largely dependent for external funding to start projects. However, they are also in need of commitment from national entities. The community of Cape Clear (south west Ireland), began to use windmills to generate energy in 1986. For ten years the system provided up to 70% of the island's electricity needs. It had been hoped that the national Electricity Supply Board would take over the running of the system but it was too small to be commercially viable. The, then, rather unsophisticated turbines wore out after a decade and with the connection of the island to the national electricity grid in 1997, the sense of urgency around alternative, locally generated power faded. There has now been interest again shown, in partnership with Cork County Council (the regional Authority): solar panels have been installed in the local school and on the slipway for public lighting.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

11. Prepared by

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12. Verified by

It has not been possible to verify this case.

13. Sources

- Annual Report 2007-08 (2008) Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann/Irish Islands Federation
- Island Policies: Supporting sustainable, permanent communities on Ireland's islands (undated) Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann/Irish Islands Federation
- www.oileain.ie



Annual report 2007-08 (1.93 MB) 



Policies Brochure (838.45 KB) 