**Press Release**

**Minister Creed Lunched MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project**

Minister Michael Creed today (Monday 9th December, 2019) officially launched the MacGillycuddy Reeks European Innovation Partnership Project at an event held in Cronin’s Yard. The project, which is managed by South Kerry Development Partnership CLG, aims to improve the sustainability and economic viability of farming in the MacGillycuddy Reeks. This will be done through the development of practical, achievable actions and innovative solutions in order to improve the condition of the habitats of this unique Natura 2000 area, in close conjunction with the landowners/farmers in the area.

In his address to the large attendance, Minister Creed noted that the Reeks area was one of the most beautiful places in the country and it is only when one understands the visual element of this that one realises how important a project such as this is, particularly since it is locally owned and developed. He noted that the great thing with it is that it is playing to the strengths of the area and that the solutions being developed were locally engineered. He described the Reeks project as a good example of where he would like to see more policy initiative development and noted that the knowledge gained is transferrable to other regions in the country and indeed across borders given the links this project has with similar initiatives in other EU countries. The Minister noted that the project supports and promotes the sustainable development of farming and the rural economies into the future. Minister Creed gave a special thanks to the landowners involved for their participation and providing access and co-operation with the project.

This point was echoed by both Project Manager Patricia Deane and SKDP CEO Noel Spillane who added that without farmers, we will not have vibrant rural communities and economies and we will not be able to deliver on the environmental outputs required to support and enhance biodiversity in our uplands.

Noel Spillane also noted that this four year project offers a fresh innovative landscape based approach to tackle its aims rooted in the power of the collective so as to achieve economies of scale but also making use of traditional farm practices. “Among the main achievements of the project to date include the signing of contracts with a total of twenty three farmers, undertaking habitat condition assessments of ten land parcels, establishing a collective group to support landowners in undertaking works on their land including the treatment of rhododendron and bracken as well as facilitating several study visits by various groups to the reeks to discuss the EIP project objectives and its development” Noel added. He also praised Project Manager Patricia Deane and Ecologist Mary Twomey for their work to date as well as thanking the staff in the Department and the Operational Group for their efforts and commitment in delivering the project.

In her address to the gathering, Kerry County Council Chief Executive Moira Morrell said the Reeks EIP Project is an example of what can be achieved by all working together, the farmers linking with the agencies to deliver this project. She also paid tribute to the farmers involved and said they should be very proud of themselves on what they are achieving and added that it was very important that they are allowed to farm in a balanced and sustainable way. Ms. Morrell noted that the Reeks area had almost every designation possible but when people understand the implications of these designations, it is possible to work within them to achieve real outcomes. She described the model developed through the EIP Project as a really good one, a model for the future that involved doing things together in a sustainable way.

The MacGillycuddy Reeks Project is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) co-funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

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