



Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019

August 2015





Wild Atlantic Way¹ Operational Programme 2015-2019

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¹ Cover photo courtesy of Irish Air Corps

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 The Operational Programme 2015-2019

The Operational Programme for the Wild Atlantic Way sets out a strategy and an implementation framework and programme for the sustainable implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way over the period 2015-2019.

This Operational Programme is the first in a series of strategies which will set out a vision for the continued evolution of the Wild Atlantic Way over the decades to come. While the Wild Atlantic Way brand has just been launched, Fáilte Ireland intends that it will mature over time to become synonymous with great experiences of our Atlantic heritage, culture, landscapes and seascapes in a high quality environment.

This Operational Programme, together with future Programmes, will constitute an iterative process which will continually adapt to meet the needs of our visitors, the local community and culture, the environment² and the tourism industry and trade, while striving all the time to strike a balance between them.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment has informed each stage of the evolution of this Operational Programme and has resulted in a series of evidence-based measures – from conception to mitigation – that will ensure that the implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way will lead to better protection during increased use of these sensitive environments. The proposed environmental management of the Wild Atlantic Way will help it to:

- become an international brand of quality;
- provide our visitors with unforgettable experiences;
- deliver real benefits for local communities and businesses in the west of Ireland;
- and
- provide a focus for the protection of the environment.

Together with a range of other partners and stakeholders, Fáilte Ireland looks forward to facilitating local communities and local businesses in achieving these goals.

1.2 Background and Context

Tourism is a critical component of the economic health of the West of Ireland with the accommodation and hospitality sectors a key driver of employment. Indirectly, tourism supports key service sectors including retail, transport and food producers. It is also a sector that delivers substantial social and community benefits, particularly given the fact that most tourism businesses are micro-enterprises that are embedded in local communities. International tourism to the West of Ireland declined significantly in both

² The environment here encompasses (amongst other things): achieving conservation objectives in European Sites; avoiding deterioration of habitats or species and avoiding disturbance of species, for which the sites have been designated in accordance with Regulation 27 of the European Communities (birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, or Section 177S of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.

visitor numbers and share of holiday visits to Ireland in the period 2007 -2010. This was further compounded by the challenging economic climate in Ireland since 2008.

In order to arrest and reverse this decline, overseas growth in tourism is required. In an attempt to achieve this, Fáilte Ireland has developed the Wild Atlantic Way as a tourism initiative of scale and singularity which will play a pivotal role in the delivery of Fáilte Ireland's overall strategic objectives of generating incremental international tourist revenues and job creation.

This Operational Programme sets out the goals and objectives for the Wild Atlantic Way for the period 2015-2019 and the actions that will be taken in order to deliver on them.

International Context

Estimates indicate that world tourism grew by around 4% in 2014 and that arrivals into Europe increased by the same factor. Ireland, with an estimated increase of 8% in arrivals, has out-performed other countries in Northern Europe which grew by an average of 6%.

Positive economic indicators from the US economy have stimulated outbound travel from this market and this is set to continue in the short term with anticipated growth of 3% in GDP in 2015, increasing employment, low inflation and favourable exchange rates. A similar outlook for the British economy bodes well for outbound tourism from the UK. That said, recent measures announced by the ECB regarding quantitative easing may impact dollar and sterling exchange rates in the short term.

Ireland's other principal market, Mainland Europe, has remained stagnant and early forecasts for 2015 have no indication of much improvement in the Eurozone economy. However, current forecasts do not take into account the recent announcement of quantitative easing measures by the ECB which are aimed at kick-starting the Eurozone economy.

Outbound travel from long haul markets is expected to be strong, with Asia expected to increase by 6.7% and USA by 5.4% in 2016. Forecasts for global arrivals to Europe in 2016 anticipate growth of 3.7% with Northern European tourism increasing slightly ahead at 3.9%.

In the longer term, world tourism is anticipated to grow by 4.1% per annum up to 2020 with arrivals to Europe lagging behind at 3.1% per annum resulting in a continuing loss of share of world tourism in the next five years.

1.3 Consideration of Alternatives

As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland needed to respond to the significant decline in international bednights and revenue in the west of Ireland that had occurred between 2007 and 2010, with a marketing initiative that would help to arrest and eventually begin to reverse this decline.

There were a number of options open to the Authority, all of which were considered. **Option 1** was to continue with a regional approach to tourism development in the west, with each of four regions competing with one another for market share, but all contributing to a large mix of experience brands which struggled for attention in the

international marketplace. In terms of touring routes, over 35 were identified which touched upon the west coast, but only three of which crossed a county boundary. Any of the existing brands in the west of Ireland lacked the scale and singularity required to be noticed in overseas markets. This option could be classed as a 'do nothing' or a 'status quo' scenario. It was considered that pursuing this option would not result in a sufficient disruption of the downward trend in overseas bednights and revenue that was the case at the time. It was this 'status quo' option that had been in force when the decline occurred so there is no evidence to suggest that it would have the ability to arrest or reverse the decline.

Option 2 was to focus future growth on those centres that are currently popular with visitors and try to grow them further. This option would involve the development of a single attraction of sufficient scale to focus attention on the west coast. Such an attraction would be of a scale similar to that of the recently developed Titanic Visitor Centre in Belfast. It was considered that such an approach would not provide a solution for the entire western seaboard and would not have the ability to sufficiently disrupt the geographical seasonal inequities that currently exist along the west coast. It was also considered that it would be more appropriate as part of a tourism development strategy for a large urban centre, as the Titanic Visitor Centre was for Belfast.

Option 3 was to consider to have a single, overarching brand for the west of Ireland which would equip it with a greater potential to achieve 'cut-through' in target overseas markets by developing the concept of the Wild Atlantic Way as both a brand and a touring route. Comparator experiences such as the Great Ocean Road (Australia), the Garden Route (South Africa) and the Big Sur (North America) were all examined. The brand was tested and consumer groups responded very positively to it. In order to deliver on the brand proposition, the route identified had to be a coastal route. As part of this Option, two further options were considered.

As part of this option, the development of a single walking route or Greenway (including cycling) was considered instead of a branded touring route. The model for this was the Wales Coast Path which was in development at the time. This constituted **Option 3a**. However, this option would constitute a significant level of new development in terms of cycleways and, therefore, presented barriers to the launch of the brand in 2014, as on-road cycling routes would not satisfy the needs or expectations of our core overseas markets. Other issues included land ownership and the possible requirement to seek planning permission, neither of which were insurmountable in principal, but not within the timescale allowed.

However, this Option 3a, in whole or in part, will still be considered as part of an objective of this Operational Programme. Building on the existing and planned network of coastal Greenways, walking routes and Blueways, Fáilte Ireland will co-ordinate the Local Authorities in their efforts to provide enhanced facilities for walking, cycling and kayaking, so that they tie in with the Wild Atlantic Way. In time, therefore, it is hoped that Option 3a will become a reality. In particular, Fáilte Ireland is exploring options with the National Trails Office and other partners, associated with the realisation of the Eurovelo 1 European Cycle route. In order to allow for this option to be part of the future implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way, the original name of 'Wild Atlantic Drive' was deliberately changed to 'Wild Atlantic Way' so that it would not imply to the visitor that the Wild Atlantic Way is just about driving and that there are also options to explore the Wild Atlantic Way based on public transport, cycling, walking, and on the water.

Once it was decided that the first manifestation of the Wild Atlantic Way brand would be a branding of the existing roads along the west coast from County Donegal to County Cork, a further two sub-options were considered. **Option 3b** was considered as part of the route identification process and involved only including those roads that were most scenic or which had largely unbroken views of the coast. This was the approach taken in identifying the 16 National Touring Routes in Norway. It was decided, however, that this might only serve to intensify visitors in already popular areas and might not achieve one of the goals of the initiative, namely to spread visitor bednights and revenue into areas where there is under-utilised capacity.

Option 3c was to identify a single, contiguous route along the entire west coast, from Co. Donegal to Co. Cork. It was deemed that this would create the necessary scale and singularity required for a brand that was to be visible in our key overseas markets. It was decided as part of this option to eventually identify and include a number of loops inland off the main spine within the first five years of operation. The reason why it was decided not to identify the loops immediately was because it was considered that it would result in a dilution of the brand during the formative years if a large portion of the route was in-land as opposed to predominately coastal and, thereby, not directly 'on-brand'.

The key environmental consideration in the route identification process, which included collective stakeholder decision-making and public consultation, was to ensure that the route to be chosen had to have the capacity to take two-way car, camper van and minibus traffic, while separate sections of the route were identified for coaches as appropriate. This was to avoid the selection of routes in sensitive areas that would require expansion or renewal works. Where roads along the coast with continuous sea-views were deemed to be too narrow, spurs from a wider road which ended in an existing beach car park or viewing point ('Discovery Point') were identified. This meant that even if the chosen route did not closely follow the coast due to capacity issues, the visitor was never very far at any one time from a view of the Atlantic.

Option 3c is the one that is currently being pursued, with the intention that the objectives at the core of Option 3a will also be implemented over time.

1.4 Response: The Wild Atlantic Way

Tourism is an important industry in the west of Ireland, and has been for a long time. International visitors have been exploring the West Coast of Ireland as holiday makers for at least the last century and a half, as is evidenced from guide books from the period. In fact, in suggesting touring itineraries in Ireland, the 1914 edition of the *Michelin Guide of the British Isles*, focuses almost exclusively on the western counties and these itineraries follow many of the roads that have been identified as being part of the route of the Wild Atlantic Way. However, its fortunes can ebb and flow and those destinations in the west that are deemed popular can also change over time depending on visitor trends and destination life cycle.

The west coast has long held an appeal for both international and domestic holiday makers. Its rugged landscape, traditional culture and heritage, characterful towns and villages and friendly people are at the core of this appeal. However, as a destination, the

west of Ireland is quite fragmented. Furthermore, the current level of co-operation between west coast destinations, for marketing purposes in particular, does not tend to extend beyond county boundaries. However, Fáilte Ireland's research indicates that overseas visitors have, in the main, no knowledge whatsoever of Ireland's local administrative arrangements and boundaries, nor do they care, so these industry groupings from an international marketing perspective are limited in their ability to gain traction in a crowded international tourism marketing landscape.

In an attempt to counter this trend, the Wild Atlantic Way was devised as a new 'experience' and 'destination' by Fáilte Ireland to present the West Coast of Ireland as a compelling international tourism product of scale and singularity. It is an over-arching brand which individual destinations and businesses can trade collectively with much greater potential visibility and clarity of message in the international marketplace.

The Wild Atlantic Way brand is manifest, in the first instance, through the identification of a coastal touring route which joins up a number of pre-existing routes as well as a large number of towns and villages, attractions and experiences along the west coast of Ireland. However, this branded touring route is only intended as the 'magnet' to which visitors will be drawn, but once in the west, their behaviour is likely to reflect that of the majority of visitors that currently visit the west of Ireland. That is, they will base themselves in one or two centres (but usually not more than two, which could be urban or rural) throughout the duration of their stay and will take time to explore the surrounding destination by car, bicycle or walking. It is unlikely that visitors will 'do' the entire Wild Atlantic Way by driving from one end to the other. While there will undoubtedly be a very small number that would wish to explore the Wild Atlantic Way in this manner, the need for the scale of the Way is (a) for it to be 'visible' in overseas markets and (b) for it to function as a device which has the ability to draw people back to the west of Ireland for a repeat visit (the 'Camino' effect). At present, repeat visits to the Wild Atlantic Way Programme Area and to Ireland in general are relatively low. 36% of holidaymakers on the Wild Atlantic Way had been to Ireland before, and this is slightly higher than the national average of 34% so it is an objective of the Wild Atlantic Way to increase the proportion of repeat visits to the Programme Area.

It is a clear objective of this Operational Programme to work with the Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders to further improve the infrastructure and facilities for walking, cycling and water-based trails over the terms of this and subsequent Operational Programmes. In the meantime, and through the wide range of existing walking, cycling and water-based trails, in addition to the roads, the Wild Atlantic Way will be promoted as a way that visitors can see, explore, experience, participate and immerse themselves in the landscape, culture and communities of the west coast of Ireland.

1.5 Programme Area

The Wild Atlantic Way encompasses the coastline and hinterland of the nine coastal counties of the West of Ireland – Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Kerry and Cork. The route itself stretches for almost 2,500km from the village of Muff on the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal to Kinsale in West Cork.

The immediate catchment of the Wild Atlantic Way is the area surrounding the spine of the route itself, the landmass to the west of the route as far as the coast and the immediate landmass to the east of the route.

While the immediate catchment of the WAW is the coastal zone, the Programme Area for the purpose of the Operational Programme is the totality of the nine coastal counties. This aids with monitoring and measuring given that most data, including tourism and environmental data sets, are most readily available at the level of the county.

In addition, a number of urban centres have been identified as gateways to the Wild Atlantic Way, namely; Cork, Killarney, Limerick, Ennis, Galway, Westport, Sligo, Donegal and Letterkenny, which, even though some are not located directly on the route, have an important role to play as key accommodation hubs which service the wider area in addition to having an appeal in their own right.

The route itself is the magnet or calling card to gain the attention of the international visitor, and acts as a device to entice people to the west of Ireland. Once there, visitors are encouraged to further explore and engage with tourism experiences and communities in a wider geographical area in the west of Ireland. In addition, a key objective of this Operational Programme is to identify a series of loops off the main route to further encourage visitors to explore the wider region and to increase the dwell time of international visitors.

At almost 2,500 km, the Wild Atlantic Way covers an extensive geographical area which can prove difficult for visitors to understand and consume in its entirety. For this reason six geographic zones have been identified to amplify different sections of the Wild Atlantic Way and to make it easy for consumers to orientate themselves based on their motivations. The presentation of the Wild Atlantic Way through six geographic zones allows the travel trade to present the brand through a series of distinct geographies and itineraries. (See Appendix 1 for a description of the zones).

1.5.1 The Route of the Wild Atlantic Way

In mid-2012, Fáilte Ireland initiated a collaborative and consultative process to identify the route of the Wild Atlantic Way. In May 2013, the **Route Identification Report** was published, which documents the process followed in identifying the route. The report can be found at the following location: (www.failteireland.ie/Wild-Atlantic-Way/Route-Identification-report-pdf)

To assist with the identification of the route, four Regional Steering Groups were established which comprised representatives from Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities, the Leader Companies, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission. Four meetings of each group were held to advise on the route options, following which an extensive public consultation process was undertaken.

The route was identified by primarily 'stitching' together a number of pre-existing touring routes, where appropriate, and providing linkages between them to form a contiguous touring route from Donegal to West Cork. While it was considered that this entire route had the capacity to accommodate two-way car and camper van traffic, it was not considered wide enough to accommodate larger coaches. In particular, 31% of the route was identified as not being able to accommodate coach traffic. For this reason, a separate coach route was identified, which diverts from the main 'independent travellers' route', taking coaches onto roads that have the capacity to accommodate them. The route identification process also identified 161 candidate Discovery Points (viewing points and lay-bys), all of which are existing and in use, in addition to 28 Embarkation Points to the 26 off-shore islands.

It is the intention of Fáilte Ireland that over the coming years, a number of loops off the main route of the Wild Atlantic Way will be identified and established, which will be designed to encourage visitors to dwell longer in a particular destination.

There are approximately 200 towns and villages located along and close to the Wild Atlantic Way. These communities and the culture in these towns and villages are at the heart of the Wild Atlantic Way proposition and are, therefore, central to the delivery of a Wild Atlantic Way experience for visitors. Fáilte Ireland will work closely with each of the Local Authorities to ensure that, over the course of this Operational Programme, a programme is put in place to co-ordinate improvements to be made to the public realm and streetscapes of a number of priority towns and villages.



Figure 1: Route of the Wild Atlantic Way

1.6 Situational Analysis

1.6.1 Supply and Demand

Supply

The Wild Atlantic Way programme area accounts for 72% of registered tourist accommodation providers in Ireland, however, it accounts for just over half of available beds in the country. Small and micro businesses - guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, individual self-catering properties - dominate the accommodation sector along the Wild Atlantic Way – a reflection of the primarily rural nature of the route.

Premises/ Units	Donegal	Leitrim	Sligo	Mayo	Galway	Clare	Limerick	Kerry	Cork	WAW	% of national stock
Hotel	54	7	15	45	80	39	28	75	76	419	52%
Guesthouse	10	7	3	12	22	17	2	47	26	146	62%
B&B	61	11	41	94	177	107	39	233	166	929	67%
Self-catering group	123	33	41	69	92	70	23	168	102	721	67%
Self-catering individual	190	29	22	81	99	425	94	931	607	2,478	83%
Hostels	14	-	1	6	15	11	1	19	10	77	68%
Caravan/camping	5	1	4	9	4	6	1	15	16	61	66%
Total	457	88	127	316	489	675	188	1,488	1,003	4,831	72%
% of WAW stock	9%	2%	3%	7%	10%	14%	4%	31%	21%		
% of national stock	7%	1%	2%	5%	7%	10%	3%	22%	15%	72%	

Table 1 : Source: Accommodation capacity 2014 from Register of Accommodation (May 2014)

Accommodation stock is concentrated in Cork and Kerry, which account for over half of properties and 44% of beds along the Wild Atlantic Way. Galway has the most hotels in the region but has relatively few individual self-catering properties compared to Cork and Kerry. Leitrim, Sligo and Limerick have the lowest proportion of available beds.

Beds	Donegal	Leitrim	Sligo	Mayo	Galway	Clare	Limerick	Kerry	Cork	WAW	% of national stock
Hotel	6,813	641	2,719	5,681	10,640	5,287	4,949	12,312	9,686	58,728	45%
Guesthouse	212	154	99	261	524	346	69	1,268	770	3,703	58%
B&B	601	99	382	930	1,806	1,116	397	2,427	1,643	9,401	67%
Self-catering group	510	167	153	315	390	287	128	871	463	3,284	66%
Self-catering individual	1,102	168	128	470	574	2,465	545	5,400	3,521	14,372	83%
Hostels	486	-	28	269	1,123	594	96	903	744	4,243	52%
Caravan/camping	960	100	890	2,524	740	1,385	140	4,315	4,169	15,223	61%
Total	10,684	1,329	4,399	10,450	15,798	11,480	6,324	27,496	20,996	108,955	53%
% of WAW stock	10%	1%	4%	10%	14%	11%	6%	25%	19%		
% of national stock	5%	1%	2%	5%	8%	6%	3%	13%	10%	53%	

Table 2 : Source: Accommodation capacity 2014 from Register of Accommodation (May 2014)

	Donegal	Leitrim	Sligo	Mayo	Galway	Clare	Limerick	Kerry	Cork	WAW
Activities	340	82	127	246	331	250	185	437	564	2562
Attractions	95	16	63	66	90	82	64	145	196	817
TOTAL	435	98	190	312	421	332	249	582	760	3379
% of WAW	13%	3%	5%	10%	13%	10%	7%	17%	22%	
% of WAW	12%	2%	8%	8%	11%	10%	8%	18%	24%	

Table 3 : Source: Tourism Eye (Wild Atlantic Way Folder)

Cork and Kerry host the highest proportion of activities and attractions with 39% of activities and 42% of attractions. There is a relatively even spread of activities across four other counties: Donegal, Galway, Mayo and Clare. Attractions are well dispersed across the rest of the counties with the exception of Leitrim.

Demand

It is estimated that 12 million bednights were spent in paid serviced accommodation along the Wild Atlantic Way in 2013. Of these, almost eight million (64%) were spent by Irish residents, the balance of 4 million nights were spent by overseas tourists (36%).

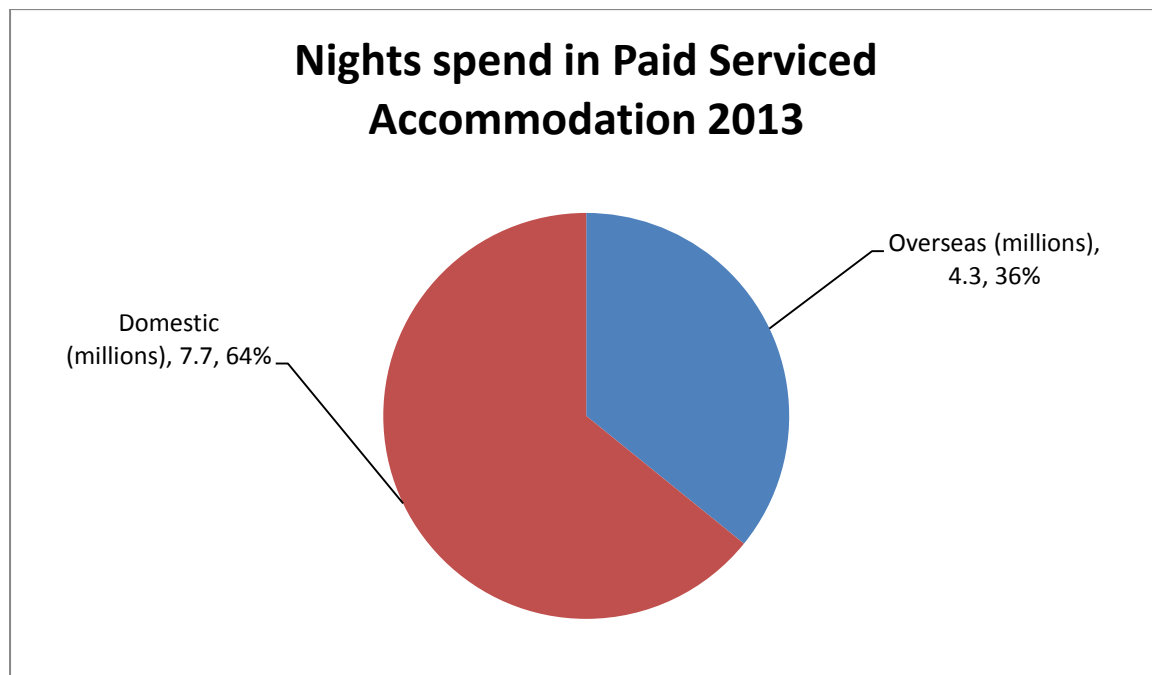


Table 4 : Source: Fáilte Ireland Tourism Accommodation Surveys

Seasonality of overseas tourism in counties along the Wild Atlantic Way

Demand within the Wild Atlantic Way programme area is highly seasonal, the April-September period accounts for seven in ten overseas nights in paid accommodation and six in ten domestic nights. July-September alone accounts for four in ten overseas nights and more than a third of domestic nights.

However, seasonality is not homogenous throughout the Wild Atlantic Way Programme Area. While some destinations benefit from a strong six month high season, other more

remote destinations can experience a high season as short as two months as illustrated in the seasonality of overseas visitors to counties below.

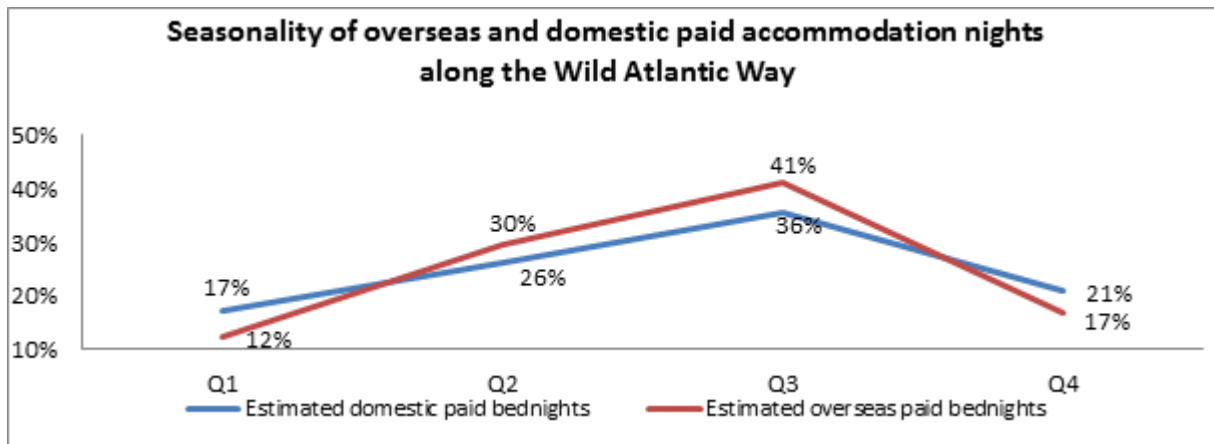


Table 5 : Source: Fáilte Ireland Tourism Accommodation Surveys

As discussed above, tourism to the west coast is highly seasonal; all counties receive at least a quarter of their overseas visitors in just two months, July and August. Cork and Limerick have the best seasonal spread of overseas visitors – just under half of their overseas visitors stay during the June-September period. This may be related to the fact that these counties have major urban centres with a strong industry base and direct air access.

Donegal, Kerry, and Mayo are particularly affected by a very short season, 60% and more of overseas tourists visit these counties between June and September, mainly concentrated in the months of July and August.

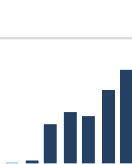
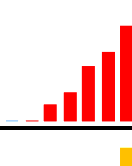
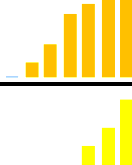
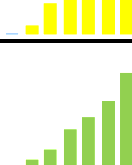
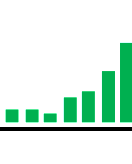


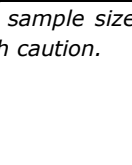
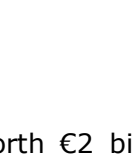
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Cork	4%	4%	8%	9%	8%	11%	12%	14%	11%	8%	6%	6%	
Kerry	2%	2%	5%	6%	10%	12%	16%	19%	13%	8%	4%	2%	
Limerick	4%	5%	7%	9%	10%	11%	13%	14%	9%	7%	6%	6%	
Clare	2%	3%	6%	7%	10%	12%	16%	17%	11%	8%	4%	4%	
Galway	3%	4%	5%	8%	9%	12%	15%	18%	12%	7%	4%	4%	
Mayo	4%	4%	3%	6%	7%	11%	16%	22%	13%	9%	3%	2%	
Sligo	2%	3%	4%	7%	11%	11%	14%	18%	11%	12%	4%	3%	
Leitrim	3%	6%	5%	8%	4%	4%	20%	22%	13%	8%	3%	7%	
Donegal	2%	2%	5%	6%	8%	13%	17%	20%	14%	8%	3%	1%	

Table 6: Data is derived from the Survey of Overseas Travellers, 2010-2013, the sample size for Leitrim is particularly small and therefore data is subject to volatility and should be treated with caution.

1.6.2 Economic Impact

Tourism Spend

Tourism revenue in the Wild Atlantic Way programme area is worth €2 billion to the economy. While revenue has fallen by €100 million since 2010, however, there is evidence of a slight recovery in 2013. Six in every ten euro spent in the region in 2013 was generated by overseas tourists.

ESTIMATED SPEND BY TOURISTS (€MN) ON WILD ATLANTIC WAY

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Domestic visitors	952	797	735	784
Overseas visitors	1,248	1,310	1,154	1,321
Total	2,200	2,107	1,889	2,105

	2010	2011	2012	2013
% Domestic	43%	38%	39%	37%
% Overseas	57%	62%	61%	63%

Table 7 : Source: Fáilte Ireland Survey of Overseas Travellers, Fáilte Ireland estimates based Central Statistics Office Passenger Card Inquiry and Household Travel Surveys.

Estimate excludes Leitrim as it is combined with Cavan in the Central Statistics Office Household Travel Survey which measures domestic tourism.

Employment

Tourism employment in the region experienced a decline in recent years, however, there are signs of recovery in 2013.

ESTIMATED JOBS SUPPORTED BY TOURISM ON WILD ATLANTIC WAY

	2010	2011	2012	2013
(000s)	75,000	72,000	64,000	72,000
% of national tourism employment	48%	49%	44%	45%

Estimate excludes Leitrim as it is combined with Cavan in the Central Statistics Office Household Travel Survey which measures domestic tourism

Table 8 : Source: Fáilte Ireland Survey of Overseas Travellers, Fáilte Ireland estimates based Central Statistics Office Passenger Card Inquiry and Household Travel Surveys

1.7 Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken alongside the preparation of this Operational Programme and it has informed much of its content. The SEA has resulted in an Environmental Report which accompanies this Operational Programme.

The following chart illustrates the stage at which the Strategic Environmental Assessment is being undertaken as part of the over Wild Atlantic Way initiative.

An Environmental Monitoring Strategy (Appendix 4) has been devised which will be implemented each year and which seeks to monitor the impacts of the implementation of this Operational Programme over its five-year term. The findings of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will form a central part of the assessment and review of the Operational Programme, particularly at the mid-term review stage, and it will inform any

changes to the Operational Programme that are necessary. In addition to this a review of the the Wild Atlantic Way will be undertaken every five years and this will take account of the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directive.

Projects will generally be undertaken by local authorities. Occasionally projects will be undertaken by others e.g. local development groups, community groups etc. When discussing the undertaking etc. of projects, the Operational Programme and associated documents generally refer to local authorities. Such references should be taken as being applicable to others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) where relevant.

Projects undertaken by others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) will be required to comply with relevant Planning and Development Regulations etc.

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) has also been undertaken alongside the preparation of this Operational Programme and it has informed much of its content. The SEA has resulted in a Natura Impact Report which accompanies this Operational Programme.

Proposals for development must be screened for the need to undertake appropriate assessment as per the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (Part 5, Section 42).

A local authority is unlikely to carry out an appropriate assessment of their own development as the competent authority in such instances is likely to be An Bord Pleanála. A local authority must screen proposed developments for appropriate assessment to determine whether a Section 177AE application to An Bord Pleanála is required.

If proposals are screened out then planning exemptions are not lost. If a Stage 2 AA is required then planning exemptions are lost and planning permission must be sought . If a local authority is applying for the permission and Stage 2 AA is required, then the application must go to An Bord Pleanála.

Developments or works by other groups or individuals may require planning permission or, if not, may require Ministerial consent in European sites. Local authorities are likely to be responsible for deciding whether there are restrictions on exemptions in the case of exempted development by a group or individual.

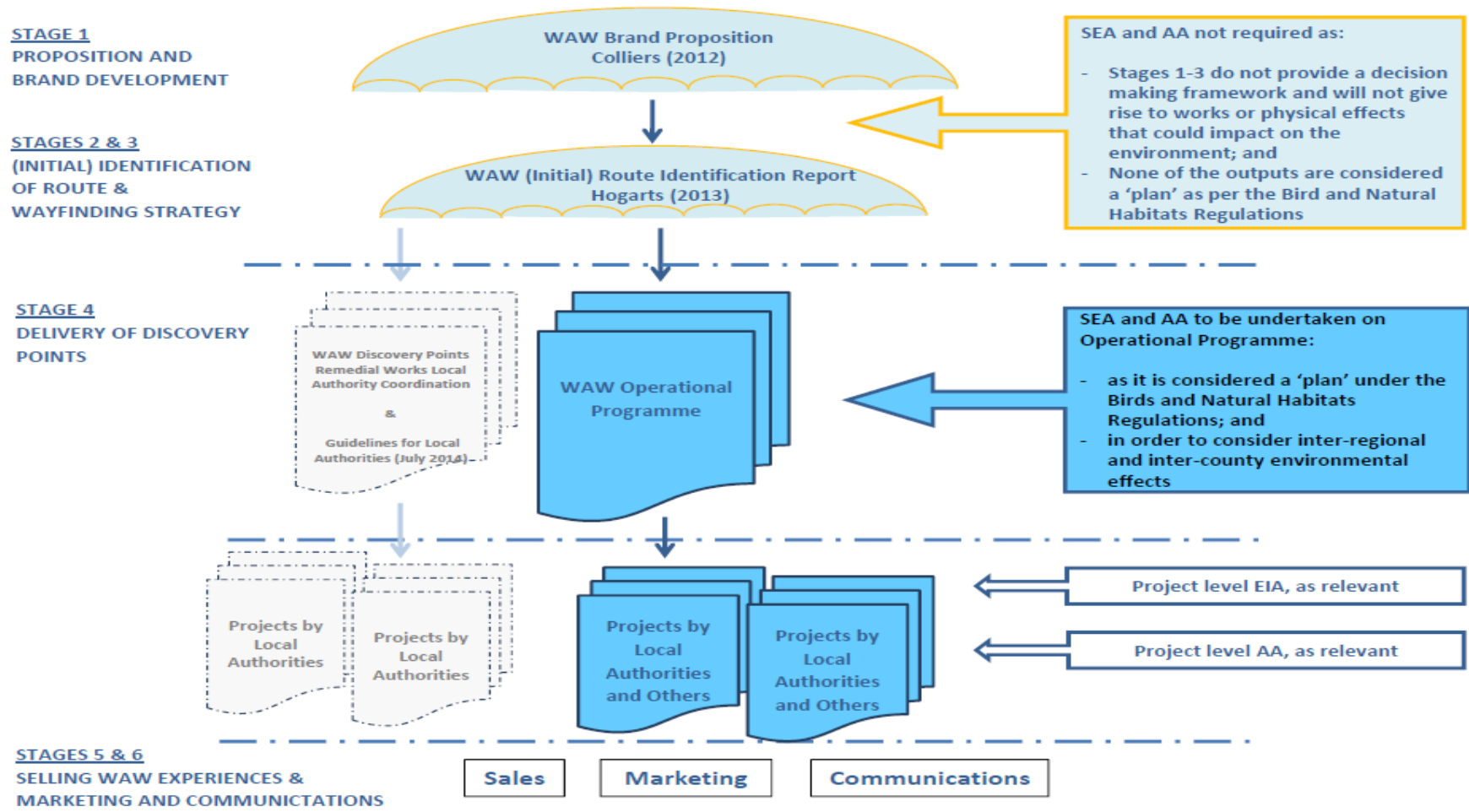


Figure 2: SEA and AA Requirements³

³ In order to contribute towards the coordination of any ongoing or future local authority remedial work projects at or in the vicinity of Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Points, Fáilte Ireland have circulated guidelines to local authorities. These guidelines do not fall within the scope of SEA/AA legislation but will contribute towards environmental management and will help local authorities meet their requirements under the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations in the carrying out of their operations and works.

Section 2: Strategy

This section of the Operational Programme sets out the goals that are being set for the implementation stage of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative and the strategy that will be put in place to achieve these goals. In order to ensure that the principles of sustainable tourism development will be followed, the goals and the strategy will be organised and presented under the headings of the VICE model, which is an acronym for Visitor, Industry, Community and Environment.

2.1 Brand Strategy

During 2012, Fáilte Ireland prepared a Brand Proposition for the Wild Atlantic Way, which was subsequently published in early 2013. This experience brand was developed with the specific objective to be a unifying proposition for the West Coast of Ireland.

"The Wild Atlantic Way on Ireland's Western Coast off the Western Edge of Europe, captivates you with its wild landscape that continuously shapes its living history; and engages you with its vibrant & creative communities, whose stories and culture stimulates you , so you are freed up to relax, enjoy and leave feeling refreshed, renewed and uplifted."

People want to experience an off the beaten track experience that genuinely immerses them in multiple ways so that they feel stimulated, energised & uplifted.

Branding is not just all about marketing, nor should it be of interest to just marketers. Simply put, a brand is a promise to a visitor and having a consistent, credible brand for the Wild Atlantic Way is vital because it differentiates the offering from competing destinations. It also serves as a guide to developing experiences which will bring the brand to life. The Brand Pyramid in Figure 3 summarises the elements of the brand for the Wild Atlantic Way.



Figure 3: Brand Pyramid for the Wild Atlantic Way⁴.

Brand Architecture

The Wild Atlantic Way experience brand has been developed to sit within the overall framework of a Tourism Brand Ireland architecture. The Wild Atlantic Way brand brings to life four of the five Experience Pillars of Tourism Brand Ireland – (i) Awakening the Senses, (ii) Connecting with the People of Ireland, (iii) Active in Nature & (iv) Living Historical Stories. The fifth pillar Vibe of the City does not resonate with the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand.

⁴ Brand Essence:	The 'DNA' of the destination; its essential nature and character. It is usually expressed by a single word or a few word descriptions, in this case 'Wild'.
Brand Values:	What the brand stands for; values that will be enduring over time.
Brand Personality:	The traits that represent a succinct summation of the Wild Atlantic Way's defining characteristics and reflect how we want the target market to think about it.
Emotional Benefits:	The psychological rewards of emotional benefits that travellers receive from driving the routes and exploring the places where the land and coast meets the wild Atlantic Ocean.
Rational Benefits:	The benefits that travellers through the area gain from the features of the Wild Atlantic Way.
Brand Attributes:	The principal assets of the Wild Atlantic Way – the things that experience seeking travellers can see and do.

Wild Atlantic Way Brand Vision

The vision for the Wild Atlantic Way brand is as follows:

To create a world class, sustainable and un-missable experience brand that engages and energises the visitor so that they become powerful advocates and leaves them wanting to return for more.

A core objective of the Wild Atlantic Way brand is to help move Ireland and in particular the West of Ireland from a place to come “some day” to a “must visit now” destination.

While the route of the Wild Atlantic Way is the first manifestation of the brand, it is not envisaged that the route will be all that the Wild Atlantic Way is about. As mentioned in section 1.4, the route is only intended as the ‘magnet’ to which visitors will be drawn in the first instance, but once in the west of Ireland, they are more likely to take an ‘a-la-carte’ approach to the experiences they choose to engage with, spending only some of their time in a car on the route, but most of their time out of the car and engaging with the heritage, culture, landscape and people of the Wild Atlantic Way. Enabling the visitor to explore the area on bicycle, on foot or on the water are key objectives of the Wild Atlantic Way. As stated in the brand vision above, this is a ‘destination’ brand which includes all the destinations and communities in the west of Ireland.

Inherent in the brand vision is a call for the continual improvement of experiences for visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way. The businesses and providers that create these experiences for visitors must continually look to how they can improve on what they offer, ensuring that they meet the needs and expectations of their visitors, that they minimise their impact on the environment, that they benefit the local community and that they provide more commercial opportunities for themselves and their partners. Those businesses and providers that carry the Wild Atlantic Way brand have a responsibility to live up to the values of the brand and seek to continually improve on how it delivers memorable Wild Atlantic Way experiences for their visitors.

Over the course of this Operational Programme, Fáilte Ireland, in association with other stakeholders, will provide the industry with a range of research-based insights that will help them to improve on and better position their own offering in order to generate more revenue and create more positive visitor experiences.

As with any new tourism initiative it is of critical importance to deliver on the brand promise made to customers and this is no different with the Wild Atlantic Way. In order to succeed in a competitive and busy tourism marketplace, a single minded focus is required in the articulation and promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way destination in the early years of the brand’s evolution.

Also required is the delivery of a sustainable form of tourism which seeks to minimise adverse impacts on the environment, maximise benefits for local communities and businesses, and shares an awareness of and respect for the distinctive Irish or Gaelic Atlantic culture and heritage in this part of Ireland. There are many different terms that are used to describe this form of tourism, including ‘sustainable’, ‘responsible’, ‘eco’, ‘green’, etc. – all of which mean more or less the same thing. For the purpose of this document, the terms sustainable or responsible tourism will be used in the main. However, it is intended that the entire approach to the future evolution of the Wild Atlantic Way will be underpinned by the principles of sustainable tourism.

Brand Management

The strength of the Wild Atlantic Way brand lies in its singularity, simplicity and clarity. It communicates a very clear message to the visitor and the brand essence, values and attributes are all clearly articulated to the industry through a set of brand guidelines. The brand 'logo' is also distinguished by its clarity and simplicity.

In order to preserve the attributes and qualities of the brand for the benefit of all, particularly, those who trade under it, Fáilte Ireland has trademarked the Wild Atlantic Way brand and logo which is now a registered trade mark.

For the purpose of presenting the Wild Atlantic Way offering in a more 'consumable' way for the visitor and to facilitate ease of reference, Fáilte Ireland has amplified the Wild Atlantic Way into six zones. The core objective of this exercise is to assist the travel trade in developing itineraries and product offerings/experiences for their clients and to provide a reference for international visitors in terms of orientation. This, however, is not a segmentation of the brand, nor will these zones possess a sub-brand of their own. While there are a number of pre-existing destinations brands in existence along the west coast, such as The Burren, the Ring of Kerry, or the West Cork Fuschia brand, these all sit comfortably alongside the Wild Atlantic Way and can provide local flavour. However, for the purpose of protecting the integrity of the Wild Atlantic Way brand, Fáilte Ireland will resist the development of branded sections of the route explicitly using the Wild Atlantic Way brand, particularly at a county level.

In addition, during the course of this Operational Programme, Fáilte Ireland will devise and introduce a Brand Charter for businesses and providers that wish to carry the Wild Atlantic Way brand. The purpose of such a Charter is (a) to demonstrate continual improvement towards excellence in terms of sustainability and experience development, and (b) to validate and enhance the reputation of the Wild Atlantic Way brand in terms of its stated values.

2.2 Target Markets and Consumer Segments

2.2.1 Target Markets

Over the lifetime of this Operational Programme, Fáilte Ireland in partnership with Tourism Ireland will focus on targeting the key overseas markets with the best potential to deliver incremental international bednights and revenue for the Wild Atlantic Way.

The primary markets are as follows:

- North America
- Germany
- France
- Great Britain.

2.2.2 International Consumer Segments

International tourism is undergoing a transformation and visitors are no longer fulfilled by simply visiting a place or moving from one disconnected attraction to another.

Instead, they want to connect, to engage, to really immerse themselves in something special, something unique – in short, they are looking for memorable experiences. This shift towards experiential tourism is not a fad, but a definable trend and in response most destinations worldwide are changing how they develop, manage, and market their tourism offerings.

In order to address this significant shift in consumer behaviour, Fáilte Ireland in partnership with Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has developed a Global Segmentation Model which targets international consumers based on their motivations for travel as distinct from their demographic profile.

In general, the three segments identified with the best potential to deliver incremental international business are:

1. Culturally Curious
2. Great Escapers
3. Social Energisers

Of these the **Culturally Curious** and **Great Escaper** segments offer the best potential for the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand.

Further details on the Global Segmentation Model can be found at the following location: (<http://www.failteireland.ie/International-sales/International-sales.aspx>)

Culturally Curious

Who are they? The Culturally Curious are older – most are over 45 and more than a quarter are over 65. They travel as couples or on their own. If they had children, they have grown up or left home. Typical Culturally Curious travellers would be 55 years old, taking a holiday with their partner. They are out to broaden their minds and expand their experience by exploring new landscapes, history and culture. They are curious about everything and are delighted to discover the world for themselves once again.

What they want from a holiday: They're interested in all that a place has to offer and they want it to be authentic. They won't choose a brand or visit a place just to follow the herd. This is their own exploration and they really want to cover everything to 'do' in a place. The Culturally Curious love to discover history and always find ways of getting real insight. Independent, 'active' sightseers, they are looking to encounter new places and experiences that are out of the ordinary. The Culturally Curious like to feel that they have not only broadened their mind but also immersed themselves in a place, giving their senses a holiday too – the sights, the sounds, the smells, the tastes. They enjoy connecting with nature and getting off the beaten track. They like people to show an interest and educate them – to feel they've connected. They really appreciate personal guides.

Great Escapers

Who are they? Great Escapers tend to be younger, around thirty. They are often couples, some with babies or quite young children. Most are in serious need of time out from busy lives and careers. So they are specifically interested in rural holidays, and travel very much as a couple or family. Great Escapers are on holiday for a break, to get physical with nature, and to reconnect with their partner.

What they want from a holiday: To connect with the landscape, to feel the earth beneath their feet, to soak up the beauty of it all. A sense of history, of their place in the vastness of nature – they want to feel part of it. Against this kind of backdrop Great Escapers can spend real quality time bonding with those closest to them. They appreciate peace and quiet between activities The point is the trip itself. It's `down time`, it's being off the beaten track, it's a Great Escape. But it's important that getting away from it all is easy enough – they want to get the `wow` moment without too much effort. Most importantly, Great Escapers want to come home refreshed and revitalised, their batteries recharged.

What they don't want: To make connections with others on the holiday – locals or other tourists. They don't need to, they're there to be with each other.

2.3 From Branding to Implementation

The branding of the Wild Atlantic Way was undertaken in 2013 and 2014, with a launch of the branded route in February 2014. The route itself and 161 candidate⁵ Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points have been branded through the provision of directional signage and the production of accompanying maps, a website and an app. These feature existing roads, viewing points, towns and villages, and businesses, all of which can provide a Wild Atlantic Way experience for visitors. However, this does not mean that either the route or the candidate Discovery Points cannot change if the environmental monitoring strategy in particular produces results that show that visitor activity and/or visitor intensification is predicted or observed to result in a negative impact on the environment. For this reason, a mid-term review of the route and the candidate Discovery Points has been built into this Operational Programme.

While the route has been branded for almost a year, this Operational Programme now sets out the strategy that will guide the future sustainable implementation of the initiative as it enters the operational stage.

2.4 Goals and Outcomes

The goals and outcomes of the Wild Atlantic Way are presented here under the headings of the 'VICE' model, a recognised tourism model for sustainable development and which considers the four key and interdependent elements of **V**isitor, **I**ndustry, **C**ommunity and **E**nvironment.

- To ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way brand is compelling to our target market segments and that the Wild Atlantic Way itself becomes a world-class visitor experience. .
- To ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way delivers balanced and sustainable revenue and jobs growth with greater geographic and seasonal spread.

⁵ 'Candidate' refers to the need for all Discovery Points to demonstrably comply with all relevant planning and environmental regulatory requirements prior to any modification or alteration.

- To ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way delivers benefits to local communities in the west of Ireland and contributes to a better place to live for everyone.
- To ensure that the implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme facilitates the protection and enhancement of the environment of the west of Ireland – as the fundamental asset that is the basis of the Wild Atlantic Way – in association with other key stakeholders.

For each of these four goals, the following are the outcomes that are expected of each and the related key performance indicators.

Goals	Outcomes	Key Performance Indicators
1. To ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way becomes a world-class visitor experience and that the brand is compelling to our target market segments.	1.1 An increase in the number of paid bed-nights in the programme area.	Accommodation Occupancy Survey
	1.2 An increase in the satisfaction ratings among visitors to the Wild Atlantic Way.	Visitor Attitudes Survey in Destination
	1.3 Growth in the number of overseas visitors engaging with the Wild Atlantic Way on social media platforms.	Web listening survey (new)
	1.4 An increase in the levels of awareness of the Wild Atlantic Way among overseas visitors.	Programme area specific brand tracker (new)
2. To deliver balanced and sustainable revenue and jobs growth with greater geographic and seasonal spread.	2.1 An increase in the average length of stay of visitors to the programme area.	Survey of Overseas Travellers
	2.2 An increase in revenue from overseas visitors.	Survey of Overseas Travellers
	2.3 Greater spread / dispersal of visitors throughout the programme area.	Various trade surveys
	2.4 Season extension into the shoulder and off-peak months.	Accommodation occupancy survey
	2.5 An increase in the number of repeat visits by overseas holidaymakers.	Survey of Overseas Travellers / Visitor Attitudes Survey in Destination
	2.6 Growing employment levels within tourism.	Various surveys including CSO data
	2.7 Growing commercial opportunities as a result of the Wild Atlantic Way.	Tracking of businesses following Trade Engagement Workshops
	2.8 Increase in the number of tourism businesses working collaboratively and developing tourism experiences.	Tracking of businesses following Trade Engagement Workshops
3. To ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way delivers benefits to local communities in the west of Ireland and contributes to a better place to live for everyone.	3.1 High levels of positive engagement and sense of ownership by local communities with the Wild Atlantic Way.	Community survey
	3.2 Awareness is raised among communities and visitors of the unique Irish Atlantic heritage, culture and wildlife.	Community survey/brand tracker
4. To ensure that the implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme facilitates the protection, enhancement of the environment of the west of Ireland – as the fundamental asset that is the basis of the Wild Atlantic Way – in association with other key stakeholders.	4.1 The Operational Programme demonstrates full compliance with all relevant requirements arising from EU and Irish planning and environmental legislation.	Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Monitoring Programme
	4.2 The Wild Atlantic Way facilitates the protection and enhancement of the environment of the West of Ireland, in association with other key stakeholders.	Environmental Monitoring Programme

Table 9

2.5 Sustainable growth forecast

Measuring the Tourism Performance of the Wild Atlantic Way

There are two suggested ways to track performance:

- Volume of overseas tourist arrivals. This is based on annual CSO data and Fáilte Ireland's Survey of Overseas Travellers.
- Volume of paid bed-nights. This is based on Fáilte Ireland data and can be estimated quarterly.

Paid bed-nights is a more suitable way to track an area's tourism performance for a number of reasons:

- Better data frequency.
- More clearly linked to the economic gain.
- More sustainable in that it does not necessarily require greater numbers of visitors.

Background / Context:

- The consensus growth forecasts for advanced economies in Western Europe suggest baseline growth of circa 2.5% annual up to 2020 in the volume of tourist arrivals.
- Tourism Ireland forecasts target growth of 4% p.a. in tourist arrivals for Ireland up to 2016. Tourism Ireland have not published projections beyond that period.
- Tourism Ireland's 4% scenario can be seen as a stretch target for Ireland. However, given how much of Ireland's growth is concentrated in Dublin a slight downward adjustment is required when considering the Wild Atlantic Way.
- The forecasts are based on the premise that no additional infrastructure would be required to accommodate the additional business.

Focussing on paid bednights rather than visitors has a number of benefits, with particular regard to the environmental impact of the programme:

- The objective of growing length of stay rather than number of visitors has a softer impact in environmental terms.
- Increased length of stay in the context of a touring route will lead to a better geographic distribution of visitors.
- A better seasonal spread of bednights can mitigate congestion of key locations during peak months.

Furthermore, growth in paid bed-nights demonstrates a direct economic impact on tourism businesses.

Wild Atlantic Way – Growth Forecast 2014-2020

(000s)	Proxy 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2013 -2020 %
Domestic Paid Bednights	7,970	8,170	8,290	8,420	8,580	8,760	8,930	16%
Overseas Paid Bednights	4,510	4,690	4,850	5,000	5,150	5,300	5,460	26%

	Assumed Annual % Change						Cumulative
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Domestic Paid Bednights	2.5%	1.5%	1.5%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	16.3%
Overseas Paid Bednights	4.0%	3.4%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	25.6%

Table 10

In general, it is not envisaged that any new conventional accommodation stock will be required to meet these growth targets. However, there is an opportunity to address the demand for alternative accommodation in general, such as glamping and yurts, and accommodation in some areas which are currently very poorly served, as well as improved services for motorhomes. Earlier this year Fáilte Ireland introduced a new approach to approved/listed accommodation through a set of new standards known as The Welcome Standard, and there is an opportunity through this to encourage existing non approved accommodation providers into the approval system.

It is a primary aim of this Operational Programme to accommodate as much of the projected growth as possible in the shoulder season across the entire programme area and also within those areas that are not currently reaching their full capacity of bed stock in the high season. Achieving a longer length of stay from visitors would promote a better dispersal across the route, in turn pushing up occupancy rates for those sections of the route which are particularly under-utilised, i.e. in areas where accommodation capacity might be low but where utilisation is even lower. The sales and marketing strategy will work to deliver on this aim.

Section 3: Implementation Framework

This section sets out the key actions that will be taken over the next five years in order to achieve the goals and outcomes set out in section 2. As stated in section 1, this Operational Programme is intended to be a high level strategy and part of an iterative process, incorporating a mid-term review in 2017, so a number of the actions contained below may be amended and refined as a result of the review and as a result of the findings from the Environmental Monitoring Strategy. As with the goals and outcomes, the objectives and actions comprising this Implementation Framework are set out under the VICE model.

3.1 Visitor

3.1.1 Wild Atlantic Way Route and candidate Discovery Points

Description

During the identification of the Wild Atlantic Way route, a number of existing viewing points and lay-bys were identified and branded as Wild Atlantic Way candidate Discovery Points. In all, 161 candidate Discovery Points have been identified, of which 26 are island sites. In addition, 28 Embarkation Points have been identified from which regular, scheduled ferry services depart to service these islands. 15 of the candidate Discovery Points have been identified as candidate 'Signature' Discovery Points because they offer an opportunity for an extended dwell time for visitors and possibly more extensive visitor management requirements.

The candidate Discovery Points are generally located in remote coastal areas outside of the main towns and villages. As such, they are intended to simply provide visitors with a viewing opportunity as they travel along the route, and also as a device to entice visitors to the more remote and peripheral areas of the coast, thus potentially increasing dwell time.

For the purpose of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme, it is deemed appropriate to consider the Discovery Points that have been identified for branding as part of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative as 'candidate' Discovery Points, because a number may have to change or be substituted by alternative sites, in the event of adverse findings of Environmental Assessment, undertaken in advance of any intensification of use or works. They may also need to be omitted on account of findings arising from the environmental monitoring programme thereafter.

As stated previously, all candidate Discovery Points are existing car parks or laybys – which are located on long-established touring routes. These locations have been subjected to long-term use, management, maintenance and development, both historically, recently and some is ongoing. Such activity is envisaged as continuing onto the future.

New intensities, uses or works will continue to be carried out by the relevant local authorities, local development groups and communities groups etc – operating within the

framework of Fáilte Ireland guidelines- to ensure a consistent approach and standards – as well as compliance with all relevant planning and environmental legislation.

Recent and Ongoing management, maintenance and development activities at candidate Discovery Points

A. Connemara Interpretation and Infrastructure Plan

In 2011, Fáilte Ireland, in association with Galway Council and in advance of the Wild Atlantic Way concept being developed, prepared an Interpretation and Infrastructure Plan for a candidate Discovery Point sites in Connemara.

B. Improvement works at candidate Signature Discovery Points

Over the past four years, funding has been provided by Fáilte Ireland for improvement works to four candidate Signature Discovery Points.

1. Sliabh Liag, Co. Donegal; Consisting of improvement works to access road. Development of a visitor hub at Teelin. Development and Implementation of Slieve League Integrated Interpretative Strategy for entire hinterland. Introduction of a Slieve League transport–orientated tour experience from visitor hub to upper car park to allow for the flow of visitors to be controlled during peak periods. Provision of mountain path.
2. Old Head of Kinsale Signal Tower, Co. Cork; Consisting of the restoration of the Signal Tower at the Old Head of Kinsale, including provision of a viewing platform on the roof.
3. Downpatrick Head, Co. Mayo; Consisting of the development of a viewing platform and protective fencing around a blow hole at Downpatrick Head.
4. Marconi / Alcock & Browne Site, Derrygimlagh, Co. Galway; Consisting of the provision of a car park. Improvement of access path. Provision of interpretative pods which provide shelter and tell the story of both the Marconi radio station and the landing of the Alcock and Browne transatlantic flight.

The provision of the grant for Sliabh Liag pre-dated the selection of the site as a candidate Signature Discovery Point on the Wild Atlantic Way. In the other three cases, the projects themselves were conceived prior to their selection as candidate Signature Discovery Points, while the grants were made following their selection as candidate Signature Discovery Points. With the exception of Sliabh Liag, none of these works were undertaken on lands which contained a Natura 2000 site. In all cases consent was obtained using planning permission or part 8 provisions – as appropriate.

C. Remedial Works

During 2014, the Local Authorities identified a scope of remedial works for each of the Discovery Points which aimed to ensure that the sites were presentable for the 2015 tourist season. These works were confined to the existing car park area of each site. The works also included the provision of a single interpretative sign and a single branded 'site marker', both within the existing car park. As part of its role as a co-ordinator of these remedial works, Fáilte Ireland set out minimum

quality standards for the preparation of the remedial works and set out the legal requirements in respect of Appropriate Assessment. These Site Maintenance Guidelines are included at Appendix 5. The Local Authorities undertook Appropriate Assessment in respect of each site and proceeded with works in accordance with the findings of the assessments.

Future works to candidate Discovery Points

Over the term of this Operational Programme, it is intended that Fáilte Ireland will liaise with each of the Local Authorities and local development groups and community groups as appropriate, in setting out a programme of work which aims to improve visitor management at a number of the candidate Discovery Points. It is likely that a number of the candidate Discovery Points will require no additional works at all. These Local Authorities, local development and community groups will be the developer of such works as they arise, while Fáilte Ireland will adopt the role of co-ordinator of such works, ensuring that any works will be subject to:

- (a) adherence to a comprehensive set of guidelines that will be issued in advance by Fáilte Ireland to ensure a consistent approach and standards;
- (b) provision of an Appropriate Assessment, where required under the requirements of the Habitats Regulations; and
- (c) adherence to the provisions of the Planning Regulations and any other relevant environmental regulations.

If, during the course of these assessments, the continued use of any existing candidate Discovery Points or new works proposed any candidate Discovery Points are found to result in unacceptable environmental impacts, then those sites will be discontinued as branded candidate Discovery Points.

The identification of candidate Discovery Points was done over various iterations and took into account a variety of considerations including those relating to the environment. A number of prospective sites were removed from the candidate list for a variety of reasons including: not being existing laybys or viewing points; they were not compatible with environmental sensitivities present; and land ownership issues.

Other Recent, Ongoing or Future works

Fáilte Ireland is aware of a number of other projects which have recently taken place, are currently being planned, or are currently underway at other sites which are either candidate Discovery Points, candidate Signature Discovery Points or are adjacent to these locations, or are accessible from the route of the Wild Atlantic Way⁶. These projects are set out in Appendix 3.

Objective

Ensure that the visitor management at each of the candidate Discovery Points, candidate Signature Discovery Points and Embarkation Points is contributing to the protection and enhancement of the environment, and based on this, that the visitor experience is

⁶ These projects do not include any of the repair work that Local Authorities undertook or are undertaking following the winter storms of 2013/2014.

optimised through improved interpretation. Ensure that all proposed works are assessed in accordance with the relevant environmental regulations to the satisfaction of the competent authorities/agencies.

Strategy

Use findings from the Environmental Monitoring to inform Local Authorities, local development groups and community groups through the publication of a set of guidelines, on the nature and extent of any proposed interventions at candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points in order to improve visitor management at these sites, where appropriate. The guidelines will be prepared in consultation with the Environmental Authorities. Each Local Authority will be encouraged to adopt appropriate policies and objectives in their Development Plans relating to the goals and objectives contained in this Operational Programme.

Action 1: By the end of 2017, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant partners, will have undertaken a review of the route of the Wild Atlantic Way in order to establish whether any stretches of the existing route are causing difficulties for visitors due to the width of the road or other factors and, therefore, whether any changes to the route need to be made. Any proposed change to the route will be subject to public consultation, which will begin to take place during the second half of 2017. The results of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will also inform this process. The original route selection criteria will also apply to the identification of any amended sections of route.

Action 2: During the latter half of 2016, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant partners, will initiate a process to identify suitable loops⁷ off the Wild Atlantic Way, which are intended to become part of the overall Wild Atlantic Way experience. There are a number of good examples of these that have already been in existence for a number of years which are being promoted locally. This process will be informed, *inter alia*, by an analysis of visitor movement patterns throughout the Wild Atlantic Way Programme area. The identification and establishment of loops off the main spine will also encourage the dispersal of visitors throughout the wider destinations. These new loops will be informed by consideration of, among other things, their likely significant effects, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on European sites, and will be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment.

Action 3: Prepare and publish guidelines on good practice for any future visitor management works to the candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points.

Action 4: Work with the Local Authorities, the National Trails Office, Coillte, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and other relevant stakeholders, to improve

⁷ Loop refers to either a) those that become part of/ complement the Wild Atlantic Way and b) those that are visitor experiences worthy of engaging with and located in close proximity to the the Wild Atlantic Way.

on the existing level of infrastructure and facilities for walking, cycling and water-based activities along the Wild Atlantic Way, with a view to having strong offerings for Wild Atlantic Way experiences by bike, on foot and on the water.

Action 5: Promote the existing opportunities for visitors to experience the Wild Atlantic Way by bike, on foot and on the water in an integrated manner.

Action 6: Undertake an interpretative programme for candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points to build on the work that is underway as part of the remedial works programme.

Action 7: Work with the ESB in delivering sufficient E-Car charging points to ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way can be experienced by electric car by 2020, with sections 'electrified' by the end of 2016. Charging points would be delivered in built up areas including hotels, towns and villages and are not planned for Discovery Points.

3.1.2 Visitor Management

Description

The Wild Atlantic Way will most likely lead to an increase in visitor numbers travelling along the route, visiting the attractions, partaking in the activities, stopping at the candidate Discovery Points and staying in the towns and villages along the way. It is important, therefore, that the quality, character and distinctiveness of the assets upon which the Wild Atlantic Way is based, are protected and conserved, and can continue to yield a return far into the future without comprising their condition and to ensure that visitor activities are managed to avoid and reduce additional pressures at sensitive sites.

Along the Wild Atlantic Way there is emerging evidence, from Fáilte Ireland research and monitoring, to show that site management appears to mitigate any residual effects of visitors on sensitive sites. These findings suggest that active visitor management is critical to achieving the conservation outcomes of sensitive sites in areas of established patterns of use.

The principles of responsible or sustainable tourism must, therefore, underpin this Operational Programme, and all development that is encouraged by this Operational Programme must be guided by these principles.

Objective

To use seasonal and site-specific visitor management measures to anticipate and avoid increases in environmental loadings due to changing visitor numbers.

To influence Local Authorities to take steps to avoid unwanted traffic congestion in local areas.

Strategy

To target areas where there is under-utilised capacity and encourage greater levels of travel during the shoulder season by using sales and marketing initiatives.

To work with Local Authorities to ensure that unsustainable environmental loading (such as traffic congestion, water loading or habitat pressure) are identified in advance and action taken to avoid the issue or reduce its impact locally.

To ensure that visitor activities are managed to avoid and reduce additional pressures at sensitive sites.

Action 8: Undertake visitor observation surveys at each of the 15 candidate Signature Discovery Points in 2015, and a selection of other candidate Discovery Points in subsequent years for the period of the Operational Programme, for the purpose of improving visitor management at these sites and to identify any likely environmental impact issues early. Details are set out in Section 4 and in the Environmental Monitoring Strategy which is attached at Appendix 4.

Action 9: Undertake regular reviews of car and coach parking requirements, in consultation with the Local Authorities, to ensure the provision of well-managed parking facilities.

Action 10: Undertake a review of the current provision of motorhome parking and overnighting facilities along the Wild Atlantic Way and identify priorities for the future improvement of such facilities, informed by good practice internationally, and in association with the Local Authorities. This review will, amongst other things, consider potential effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives.

Action 11: Work with Local Authorities and relevant agencies and organisations to ensure that unsustainable environmental loading [such as traffic congestion, water loading or habitat pressure potential] are identified in advance and action taken to avoid these issues or reduce their impacts locally.

3.2 Industry

3.2.1 Trade Engagement

Description

The key strengths of the Wild Atlantic Way and the basis for the visitor experience, are the stunning coastal landscape, the rich and distinctive Irish Atlantic culture, the vast array of archaeological and historical remains, a necklace of colourful and vibrant towns and villages, the wealth of wildlife sites and species, and the endless opportunities to explore it all by car, bicycle, boat or on foot, very often in the presence of excellent local guides.

The many tourism businesses and providers located along the Wild Atlantic Way provide a wide range of experiences for visitors. The attractions, activity providers, guides, craft providers, accommodation providers, restaurants and pubs, etc. all create memorable experiences for visitors. However, the quality and geographical spread of the visitor experience all along the Wild Atlantic Way is not uniform and there is plenty of room for improvement. The key challenge will be to identify those aspects of the visitor experience that need most attention and where the greatest return can be had for the effort made. Many of these providers are now actively trading under the Wild Atlantic Way brand and, therefore, have a responsibility to deliver on the brand promise.

Innovation in terms of new and improved tourism experiences will come from the tourism businesses and the communities along the Wild Atlantic Way. Fáilte Ireland, in association with its partners, will provide the market insights and networking opportunities which tourism businesses along the Wild Atlantic Way can use to continually improve their offer for their visitors. Fáilte Ireland will also offer advice and training in the areas of digital and sales capability to help businesses to leverage the competitive advantage provided by the Wild Atlantic Way in order to increase revenue and create jobs within their communities.

Objective

To help all tourism providers along the Wild Atlantic Way with the insights, information and opportunities they need to continually improve the experiences for visitors in accordance with the brand promise of the Wild Atlantic Way, and to facilitate the creation of those new experiences. Also to build digital and sales capability amongst the industry to help maximise the opportunity presented by the Wild Atlantic Way.

Strategy

To equip the industry with market insights and competitor set analysis, and to facilitate networking between businesses to work together to develop, improve and protect 'Wild Atlantic' tourism experiences.

Action 12: Organise a series of business networking and innovation events over the period of this Operational Programme to:

- Share trends, market insights and digital assets;
- Facilitate businesses in sharing knowledge and expertise, and identifying possible collaboration;
- Increase the level of peer-to-peer learning;
- Identify opportunities to create new and improved Wild Atlantic Way experiences for visitors.

Action 13: To provide a co-ordinated range of business supports (on and off line) for tourism businesses, in association with other business support providers to facilitate innovation and improvement in terms of the visitors' experience.

Action 14: To establish an insights and innovation supports programme for experience providers along the Wild Atlantic Way and capture innovations at a range of levels to share with other providers.

Action 15: To help businesses to improve the packaging of experiences and services to contribute to a more seamless visitor journey particularly those which bring the landscape, culture and activities on the Wild Atlantic Way to life.

Action 16: To introduce a Brand Charter as part of the Wild Atlantic Way brand. From 2016, businesses and providers wishing to use the Wild Atlantic Way brand must sign up to this charter which will demonstrate a commitment by the businesses to make continual improvements year on year in their business with regard to sustainability and experience development. Used in this way the Wild Atlantic Way brand will, therefore, become more than just a logo and more of a commitment to continually deliver the brand values.

3.2.2 Sales & Marketing

Description

Fáilte Ireland's strategy is to support Irish tourism with a clear strategic focus on driving international bednights and revenue. This will be achieved by increasing the overall average length of stay and value, thereby contributing to sustaining tourism employment and providing new commercial opportunities within the Programme area.

In order to deliver on these strategic objectives it is imperative to increase the awareness of the Wild Atlantic Way as an experience brand internationally. Fáilte Ireland will work with Tourism Ireland to ensure the Wild Atlantic Way is a key component of all international marketing communications.

The concentration and development of opportunities during the off-peak season will assist in reducing the seasonality along the west coast. The development of a unique range of saleable visitor experiences will underpin the Wild Atlantic Way's aspiration to be a world leading experience brand through a growth in the level of awareness and understanding about the Wild Atlantic Way across key markets. The distribution of overseas business is paramount to the strategy and a focus on orienteering international visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way will be key to its success.

At present, room occupancy in the Programme area is 60% which comprises 70% domestic and 30% international. A priority for Fáilte Ireland is to engage with businesses who have been identified as active in the international markets and who have the potential to grow their international leisure business bed nights by 2% over and above market performance.

Objective

To add incremental value and increase international revenue for businesses along the Wild Atlantic Way through the identification of new sales opportunities within the key market of North America/Canada, Germany, Great Britain and France.

To increase brand awareness amongst identified target segments in these markets (Great Escapers and Culturally Curious).

To increase bednights and revenue from overseas visitors; to sustain and grow employment in the tourism sector, and provide new commercial opportunities for tourism businesses. In particular, to achieve a greater distribution of visitors along the west coast in areas where there is currently under-utilised accommodation stock.

Strategy

To equip the domestic industry (Sellers) to effectively up sell, and sell more bednights to the source international markets.

To proactively engage with distribution channels (Buyers) by generating new leads and new niche markets.

To create new sales platforms that are focussed on Business to Business sales opportunities.

Action 17: Work with Tourism Ireland to ensure the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand is a key component of all international marketing communications activity.

Action 18: Create and curate digital content that activates the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand across a range of digital platforms and which will be compelling to the key target consumer segments.

Action 19: Develop a one stop web platform (www.wildatlanticway.com) for the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand to encourage engagement and interaction with the brand from consumer, trade and communities.

Action 20: Ensure Wild Atlantic Way social channels are optimised to encourage engagement with target consumers (with a specific focus on key international markets).

Action 21: Equip the domestic industry (Sellers) to effectively up-sell, and sell more Wild Atlantic Way product and offerings to the source international markets through but not limited to a Sales Account Management process.

Action 22: Engage with distribution channels (Buyers) and partners to generate new leads and new niche markets (e.g. Luxury, Adventure, Youth, Culture) to work with them to feature the Wild Atlantic Way in their programming or to increase their distribution share of programming. Identify the best prospects from these.

Action 23: Establish new sales platforms that are focused on business to business sales opportunities (involving pre-qualified participants) and deliver effective sales opportunities.

Action 24: Target new leads in key markets to increase programming.

Action 25: Present new saleable visitor experiences to new and existing intermediaries.

- Action 26:** Develop the capability of the trade to design, deliver and cross-sell Wild Atlantic Way visitor experiences through insights identified through the Path to Purchase research.
- Action 27:** Develop a strategy for regional dispersion along the Wild Atlantic Way to drive additional sales where there is under-utilised capacity whilst extending the season through the identification of new buyers.
- Action 28:** In association with Tourism Ireland, to support media and trade activities from secondary markets including Southern Europe, The Nordics and Australia and Developing Markets.

3.3 Community

3.3.1 Community Engagement, Culture and Heritage

Description

The landscape, people and communities that live along the west coast of Ireland, together with their culture and heritage, are key assets of the Wild Atlantic Way. This is what our visitors come to see and it is manifest in the scenic views, the cliffs, beaches, and rocky shores, castles and monastic ruins, traditional settlement patterns and house styles, towns and villages, traditional music and dance, the Irish language, craft, the wide range of wildlife and habitats and of course the stories about it all, which are everywhere. Walking, cycling, angling and golf are also great activities which bring the visitor closer to the landscape and the people of this place, as well as being significant attractors in their own right.

It is important, however, that planning for the future of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative is based on a clear understanding of the nature of this heritage and culture. Given the fact that many of these assets are non-renewable and fragile, they can also be vulnerable to some of the pressures that can be exerted by the activity of tourism.

So while tourism depends on the presence and quality of these heritage and cultural assets, tourism should not contribute to their decay or decline. Achieving the appropriate balance is of course the key to achieving sustainable tourism, which is the core aim of this Operational Programme. Tourism also presents an opportunity to raise awareness of these important assets among visitors and locals alike through tourism initiatives, which can serve to modify behaviour towards these assets and in some cases, raise money to assist with their protection.

There is a need to better understand the particular Irish Atlantic culture that exists on the west coast of Ireland. The Atlantic coast has a specific physical and cultural identity that is evident in both ancient remains and everyday life all along the Wild Atlantic Way. There is a fundamental character and coherence to the Irish Atlantic seaboard as a unified cultural entity and it is an objective of this Operational Programme to raise awareness of it and help to conserve it. It is a specific bio-geographical region where common cultural responses have created a distinct Atlantic heritage. People have responded to the ocean, and its wildness, over several millennia to create a unique cultural heritage area that is Atlantic Ireland.

A lot of work has already been done with communities, particularly by the Local Authorities and the Heritage Council, to identify, record and explore this heritage. Fáilte Ireland, in collaboration with the Local Authorities, the Heritage Council, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), among other agencies and organisations, intends to build on and continue this work through a series of community based projects, to explore a new understanding of these indicators of place, for example local building styles, farming systems and food culture. This will involve highlighting and celebrating the variations in cultural life along the Wild Atlantic Way, including such practices as building traditions (types of houses or drystone field walls, for example), Irish language (dialects, songs, placenames, literature in Irish), mythology (such as that connecting Mount Brandon, Mount Callan and Croagh Patrick), fishing practices (traditional boat types, seafood culture), music (those characteristics that distinguish Clare music from Sligo or Kerry traditional music), etc.

The aim of this approach is to create a new consciousness of Irish Atlantic culture both in Ireland and internationally through the Wild Atlantic Way. Accounts that provide insight into everyday expressions of Atlantic material culture will connect the visitor to the history and people of the Wild Atlantic Way. These initiatives will highlight the culture and everyday way of life of the people who inhabit the coasts. Increased awareness of the character of Irish Atlantic culture will heighten visitors' desire to return and explore other parts of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Objective

To ensure that local communities feel a sense of ownership of the Wild Atlantic Way, that they engage with it, that it benefits them, that they become custodians/advocates for the brand and that it does not result in any negative impacts for them.

To facilitate local communities in raising awareness about their unique Irish Atlantic culture with visitors, in association with the Local Authorities and the Heritage Council.

To ensure that there is a high level of awareness both internationally and domestically about the rich heritage and cultural of the Atlantic coast of Ireland.

Strategy

To engage local communities directly and regularly throughout the period of the Operational Programme to:

- involve them in decision-making on initiatives related to the Wild Atlantic Way;
- ensure that any concerns about the impact of the Wild Atlantic Way on local communities are highlighted at an early stage;
- gather ideas about improving the experience for visitors; and
- keep local communities informed about any Wild Atlantic Way initiatives that may be of benefit to them.

To create and curate content across a range of platforms relating to the heritage and culture of the Atlantic coastal zone, in association with key stakeholders, such as the Local Authorities, the Heritage Council, the Department of Art, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, other relevant agencies and local communities and businesses.

- Action 29:** Host a series of events for local communities at which they can share their ideas about the Wild Atlantic Way and at which issues can be identified and resolved as they arise.
- Action 30:** Engage local communities in a series of local interpretation projects, in association with, *inter alia*, the Heritage Council, the Local Authorities, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the OPW and the NPWS, building on previous work undertaken by these stakeholders, which explore and highlight the distinctive Irish Atlantic culture in destinations and communities all along the Wild Atlantic Way. These are opportunities for local communities to present and share their own culture, traditions and the Irish language with visitors to their area. These initiatives also encourage further dispersal of visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Action 31:** To create, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and local communities, a stream of digital and traditional form content that explores Ireland’s Atlantic culture, in terms of its influences and all its various manifestations.
- Action 32:** To work with local communities and local tourism providers to further explore opportunities to introduce elements of the Irish Atlantic heritage and culture to existing and new tourism offerings in a way that creates richer and more authentic cultural experiences for visitors.
- Action 33:** To undertake a series of initiatives with a range of stakeholders, such as the NPWS and Birdwatch Ireland, to raise awareness of the wealth of wildlife along the Wild Atlantic Way and to identify the best sites at which to view wildlife, in accordance with good environmental practice.
- Action 34:** To undertake a series of initiatives with the National Monuments Service and the Historic Properties Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to identify archaeological and historic sites that are accessible to the public which are not currently well known, in accordance with good environmental and conservation practice.
- Action 35:** To implement the Wild Atlantic Way Environmental Monitoring Strategy to ensure that the effects of tourism on environmental, heritage and cultural assets is monitored to allow for early detection of any possible issues.

3.4 Environment

3.4.1 Environmental Management and Sustainability

Description

The Wild Atlantic Way passes through some of Ireland’s most valued wild places – many of which are highly sensitive to environmental impact arising from unmanaged

development. Strict environmental protection is in place for many of these areas and there are legal requirements to assess new developments to ensure that no harm arises.

However, it is important to understand that the Wild Atlantic Way routes comprise for the most part, existing and long-established touring routes, that have been subject both to recent and long-established promotional activities.

The future implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way will require all emerging developments and activities to continue to comply with all relevant environmental and planning requirements – as well as with Fáilte Ireland’s forthcoming guidelines on the consideration, design, management and monitoring of new and existing visitor initiatives. In addition, Appendix 6 includes guidelines entitled ‘Environmental Management for Local Authorities’ which comprises various provisions which must be complied with by local authorities at lower levels of decision making in order to access funding from Fáilte Ireland.

Objective: To make sure that 100% of the direct and indirect environmental effects of Wild Atlantic Way initiatives and actions are fully assessed to the satisfaction of competent authorities/agencies, the public and visitors.

Strategy

Use best practice and compliance with all relevant environmental regulations to:

- Demonstrate that environmental protection and enhancement has been fully integrated with the Operational Programme.
- Ensure that environmental considerations form a fundamental consideration when selecting sites and designs of actions.
- Avoid potential for delays or reputational effects arising from any adverse environmental effects.

Action 36: Use the Strategic Environmental Assessment process to:

- Anticipate and avoid potential adverse environmental effects.
- Provide guidance and standards to guide and measure future actions and projects.
- Provide a systematic demonstration of legal compliance and environmental protection.
- Provide the indicators and targets to be used for environmental monitoring programme.

Action 37: To promote the Leave No Trace principles to both visitors and tourism providers.

Action 38: To promote responsible tourism practices among tourism providers and to encourage them to pursue green certification as appropriate.

Action 39: To encourage the retention of all existing Blue Flag beaches and the designation of further Blue Flag awards along the Wild Atlantic Way.

Action 40: To support and promote An Taisce’s Clean Coast initiative at beaches along the Wild Atlantic Way.

- Action 41:** Fáilte Ireland will continue to contribute to the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark LIFE Project and to the Aran LIFE Project and draw best practice from them. In association with the other LIFE Project partners, Fáilte Ireland will look to apply the lessons learned from these LIFE projects to other parts of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Action 42:** To support responsible development practices by stakeholders through the preparation of guidelines for Local Authorities and other stakeholders on the consideration, design and management of new and existing visitor initiatives.
- Action 43:** Undertake regular monitoring of key indicators at settlements and key environmental sensitivities to provide timely and prior notification of emerging adverse effects [if any] so that these can be addressed to avoid deterioration of environmental assets.
- Action 44:** Implement the Environmental Monitoring Programme, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 4.
- Action 45:** To proactively promote and increase awareness and understanding of evidence based best practice approaches to the management of tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way, and the wider regional catchments along the route.
- Action 46:** Establish a Monitoring Group to ensure that robust systems are in place, in appropriate existing authorities, to ensure that all key commitments made at the programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time), and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of the environment will result.

3.5 Building Effective Partnerships

The development of a sustainable tourism sector in Ireland has long depended on multi-faceted collaboration between stakeholders in the private and public sectors. Such collaboration produces its best results when there is a shared goal among the stakeholders and when the partnership is strategic and formal, with clear roles and responsibilities agreed for the respective partners.

For the objectives of this Operational Programme to be achieved, collaboration between stakeholders is necessary at all levels: national, regional and local. Stakeholders which have been identified include:

- National and local tourism development organisations and marketing bodies.
- National developmental, cultural and environmental agencies and organisations
- Local Authorities.
- Local tourism operators and/or tourism representative associations.
- Regional development organisations, Leader Companies and Local Enterprise Offices.
- Culture and heritage organisations.
- Non-tourism organisations, farming bodies and Chambers of Commerce.

- Education and training institutions.
- Local community groups.

Some constructive partnerships have already been established at national, regional and local levels, which have delivered results during the early stages of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative, including the development and launch of the brand proposition, the identification and branding of the route, and the identification of existing experiences and offers which are 'on-brand'. There is already a strongly committed group of Local Authorities, state agencies and destination and trade groups within the western counties and this needs to be built upon and strengthened in order to make the Wild Atlantic Way a success for all.

At its heart, the Wild Atlantic Way is a rich collection of destinations, each sharing and trading under the Wild Atlantic Way brand, while taking pride in the quality, character and distinctiveness of their own local area. These destinations are at various stages of their life cycle; some are mature and well-established with an excellent range of visitor experiences on offer, while others are at an earlier life-cycle stage with poor basic tourism infrastructure and services. In addition to working to enhance constructive collaboration between these destinations, this Operational Programme will also seek to identify an appropriate response to the tourism development needs of each of these destinations, depending on their life-cycle stage, to ensure the responsible development of tourism within the communities all along the Wild Atlantic Way.

Within destinations, collaboration between businesses and with the wider community through the establishment of strong destination networks will be very important. Clear communication is of course an essential condition of any well-functioning partnership in order to engage stakeholders, operators, trade and communities.

More effective business networking at a destination level can serve to increase capacity and capability at the local level to sustainably grow tourism for the benefit of all in the destination. The key to unlocking this potential is often the appointment of a part-time or full-time professional co-ordinator who can work from within the community to deliver a high-performing and efficient network.

Collaboration among tourism businesses and relevant state agencies is also the key to unlocking the sales potential of the Wild Atlantic Way. Businesses that are able to quickly adapt and respond to market insights, coupled with improved business management systems, will be at the leading edge of creating great tourism experiences for our visitors. Ongoing investment in both market research and the improvement of business management systems are therefore crucial for the sustainable growth of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Given the environmental sensitivity of parts of the Atlantic coast, the establishment of partnerships with environmental agencies and stakeholders such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and An Taisce, are crucial to ensure the responsible and sustainable development and promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way. In addition to ensuring the protection of important non-renewable resources, this will also facilitate the responsible promotion of environmental assets as key attractors to the area, and the improvement of visitor experiences therein, such as the five National Parks that are located along the Wild Atlantic Way.

Local Authorities are also key partners in the delivery and management of the Wild Atlantic Way on the ground, and in particular for the management, maintenance and delivery of critical infrastructure and projects where gaps occur.

In order to achieve the objectives set out in this Operational Programme, a range of partnerships and alliances will be required at national, regional and local levels with stakeholders drawn from the groups listed previously.

Objective

To implement the Operational Programme through a range of effective partnerships at community, county, regional and national level. Ensure that there is a clear and co-ordinated vision for the Wild Atlantic Way, as outlined in this Operational Programme, and that it is understood by all stakeholders at community, county, regional and national levels.

Strategy

To devise a Partnership Strategy with stakeholders and partners identified as being central to the implementation of the Operational Programme and critical to ensuring an integrated national co-ordinated approach to implementation of the programme and protection of the environmental resources along the route.

Action 47: Establish a Wild Atlantic Way stakeholder group/ partnership comprising a number of key national agencies, Departments and Local Authorities to advise on the sustainable development of the Wild Atlantic Way. This group will be led and managed by Fáilte Ireland as brand managers of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Action 48: Establish partnerships at national and regional levels with the relevant environmental and heritage bodies to ensure the protection and responsible promotion of the core environmental and heritage assets upon which the Wild Atlantic Way is based.

Action 49: Establish zones/ cluster networks comprising key stakeholders, trade partners and community interests to develop a range of signature and supporting visitor experiences.

Action 50: Explore opportunities for collaboration both nationally and with other EU states on research and funding projects at an inter-regional level.

Summary of Actions and Timelines

The following outlines indicative timelines for the fifty actions which will be initiated and implemented by Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with a number of partners and stakeholders over the duration of this Operational Programme.

	Description	Timelines
Action 1:	By the end of 2017, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant partners, will have undertaken a review of the route of the Wild Atlantic Way in order to establish whether any stretches of the existing route are causing difficulties for	End of 2017

	visitors due to the width of the road or other factors and, therefore, whether any changes to the route need to be made. Any proposed change to the route will be subject to public consultation, which will begin take place during the second half of 2017. The results of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will also inform this process. The original route selection criteria will also apply to the identification of any amended sections of route.	
Action 2:	During the latter half of 2016, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant partners, will initiate a process to identify suitable loops off the Wild Atlantic Way, which are intended to become part of the overall Wild Atlantic Way experience. There are a number of good examples of these that have already been in existence for a number of years which are being promoted locally. This process will be informed, <i>inter alia</i> , by an analysis of visitor movement patterns throughout the Wild Atlantic Way Programme area. The identification and establishment of loops ⁸ off the main spine will also encourage the dispersal of visitors throughout the wider destinations. These new loops will be informed by consideration of, among other things, their likely significant effects, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on European sites, and will be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment.	Latter half of 2016
Action 3:	Prepare and publish guidelines on good practice for any future visitor management works to the candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points.	2015
Action 4:	Work with the Local Authorities, the National Trails Office, Coillte, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and other relevant stakeholders, to improve on the existing level of infrastructure and facilities for walking, cycling and water-based activities along the Wild Atlantic Way, with a view to having strong offerings for Wild Atlantic Way experiences by bike, on foot and on the water.	Ongoing
Action 5:	Promote the existing opportunities for visitors to experience the Wild Atlantic Way by bike, on foot and on the water in an integrated manner.	Ongoing
Action 6:	Undertake an interpretative programme for candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points to build on the work that is underway as part of the remedial works programme.	To be completed end of 2015
Action 7:	Work with the ESB in delivering sufficient E-Car charging points to ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way can be experienced by electric car by 2020, with sections 'electrified' by the end of 2016. Charging points would be delivered in built up areas including hotels, towns and villages and are not planned for Discovery Points.	Phase 1 to be completed by end of 2016, Phase 2 by end of 2020.
Action 8:	Undertake visitor observation surveys at each of the 15 candidate Signature Discovery Points in 2015, and a selection of other candidate Discovery Points in subsequent years for the period of the Operational Programme, for the	Commence 2015 and undertaken each year of the Operational

⁸ Loop refers to either a) those that become part of/ complement the Wild Atlantic Way and b) those that are visitor experiences worthy of engaging with and located in close proximity to the the Wild Atlantic Way.

	purpose of improving visitor management at these sites and to identify any likely environmental impact issues early. Details are set out in Section 4 and the Environmental Monitoring Strategy which is attached at Appendix 4.	Programme
Action 9:	Undertake regular reviews of car and coach parking requirements, in consultation with the Local Authorities, to ensure the provision of well-managed parking facilities.	Annually
Action 10:	Undertake a review of the current provision of motorhome parking and overnighting facilities along the Wild Atlantic Way and identify priorities for the future improvement of such facilities, informed by good practice internationally, and in association with the Local Authorities. This review will, amongst other things, consider potential effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives.	End of 2015
Action 11:	Work with Local Authorities and relevant agencies and organisations to ensure that unsustainable environmental loading [such as traffic congestion, water loading or habitat pressure potential] are identified in advance and action taken to avoid these issues or reduce their impacts locally.	Annually as part of the Environmental Monitoring Programme
Action 12:	Organise a series of business networking and innovation events over the period of this Operational Programme to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share trends, market insights and digital assets; - Facilitate businesses in sharing knowledge and expertise, and identifying possible collaboration; - Increase the level of peer-to-peer learning; - Identify opportunities to create new and improved Wild Atlantic Way experiences for visitors. 	On-going
Action 13:	To provide a co-ordinated range of business supports (on and off line) for tourism businesses, in association with other business support providers to facilitate innovation and improvement in terms of the visitors' experience.	On-going
Action 14:	To establish an insights and innovation supports programme for experience providers along the Wild Atlantic Way and capture innovations at a range of levels to share with other providers.	On-going
Action 15:	To help businesses to improve the packaging of experiences and services to contribute to a more seamless visitor journey, particularly those which bring the landscape, culture and activities on the Wild Atlantic Way to life.	On-going
Action 16:	To introduce a Brand Charter as part of the Wild Atlantic Way brand. From 2016, businesses and providers wishing to use the Wild Atlantic Way brand must sign up to this charter which will demonstrate a commitment by the businesses to make continual improvements year on year in their business with regard to Sustainability and Experience Development. Used in this way the Wild Atlantic Way brand will, therefore, become more than just a logo and more of a commitment to continually deliver the brand values.	Early 2016 with a review/ refresh every two years
Action 17:	Work with Tourism Ireland to ensure the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand is a key component of all international marketing communications activity.	Ongoing-quarterly meetings on an annual basis
Action 18:	Create and curate digital content that activates the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand across a range of digital platforms and which will be compelling to the key target	Ongoing

	consumer segments.	
Action 19:	Develop a one stop web platform (www.wildatlanticway.com) for the Wild Atlantic Way experience brand to encourage engagement and interaction with the brand from consumer, trade and communities.	Developed as of Q2 2015. Requires constant and ongoing content development.
Action 20:	Ensure Wild Atlantic Way social channels are optimised to encourage engagement with target consumers (with a specific focus on key international markets)	Ongoing
Action 21:	Equip the domestic industry (Sellers) to effectively up-sell, and sell more Wild Atlantic Way product and offerings to the source international markets through but not limited to a Sales Account Management process.	Ongoing
Action 22:	Engage with distribution channels (Buyers) and partners to generate new leads and new niche markets (e.g. Luxury, Adventure, Youth, Culture) to work with them to feature the Wild Atlantic Way in their programming or to increase their distribution share of programming. Identify the best prospects from these.	Ongoing
Action 23:	Establish new sales platforms that are focused on business to business sales opportunities (involving pre-qualified participants) and deliver effective sales opportunities.	Ongoing
Action 24:	Target new leads in key markets to increase programming.	Ongoing
Action 25:	Present new saleable visitor experiences to new and existing intermediaries.	Ongoing
Action 26:	Develop the capability of the trade to design, deliver and cross-sell Wild Atlantic Way visitor experiences through insights identified through the Path to Purchase research.	Ongoing
Action 27:	Develop a strategy for regional dispersion along the Wild Atlantic Way to drive additional sales where there is under-utilised capacity whilst extending the season through the identification of new buyers.	Ongoing
Action 28:	In association with Tourism Ireland, to support media and trade activities from secondary markets including Southern Europe, The Nordics and Australia and Developing Markets.	Ongoing
Action 29:	Host a series of events for local communities at which they can share their ideas about the Wild Atlantic Way and at which issues can be identified and resolved as they arise.	Ongoing
Action 30:	Engage local communities in a series of local interpretation projects, in association with, <i>inter alia</i> , the Heritage Council, the Local Authorities, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the OPW and the NPWS, building on previous work undertaken by these stakeholders, which explore and highlight the distinctive Irish Atlantic culture in destinations and communities all along the Wild Atlantic Way. These are opportunities for local communities to present and share their own culture, traditions and the Irish language with visitors to their area. These initiatives also encourage further dispersal of visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way.	Ongoing
Action 31:	To create, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and local communities, a stream of digital and traditional form content that explores Ireland's Atlantic culture, in terms of its influences and all its various manifestations.	2015
Action	To work with local communities and local tourism providers	2015

32:	to further explore opportunities to introduce elements of the Irish Atlantic heritage and culture to existing and new tourism offerings in a way that creates richer and more authentic cultural experiences for visitors.	
Action 33:	To undertake a series of initiatives with a range of stakeholders, such as the NPWS and Birdwatch Ireland, to raise awareness of the wealth of wildlife along the Wild Atlantic Way and to identify the best sites at which to view wildlife, in accordance with good environmental practice.	Ongoing
Action 34:	To undertake a series of initiatives with the National Monuments Service and the Historic Properties Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to identify archaeological and historic sites that are accessible to the public which are not currently well known, in accordance with good environmental and conservation practice.	Ongoing
Action 35:	To implement the Wild Atlantic Way Environmental Monitoring Strategy to ensure that the effects of tourism on environmental, heritage and cultural assets is monitored to allow for early detection of any possible issues.	Commenced in 2015 and to continue for the lifetime of the programme
Action 36:	Use the Strategic Environmental Assessment process to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate and avoid potential adverse environmental effects. • Provide guidance and standards to guide and measure future actions and projects. • Provide a systematic demonstration of legal compliance and environmental protection. • Provide the indicators and targets to be used for environmental monitoring programme. 	Ongoing and to be continued for the lifetime of the programme
Action 37:	To promote the Leave No Trace principles to both visitors and tourism providers.	Ongoing
Action 38:	To promote responsible tourism practices among tourism providers and to encourage them to pursue green certification as appropriate.	Ongoing
Action 39:	To encourage the retention of all existing Blue Flag beaches and the designation of further Blue Flag awards along the Wild Atlantic Way.	Ongoing
Action 40:	To support and promote An Taisce's Clean Coast initiative at beaches along the Wild Atlantic Way.	Ongoing
Action 41:	Fáilte Ireland will continue to contribute to the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark LIFE Project and to the Aran LIFE Project and draw best practice from them. In association with the other LIFE Project partners, Fáilte Ireland will look to apply the lessons learned from these LIFE projects to other parts of the Wild Atlantic Way.	Ongoing
Action 42:	To support responsible development practices by stakeholders through the preparation of guidelines for Local Authorities and other stakeholders on the consideration, design and management of new and existing visitor initiatives.	2015
Action 43:	Undertake regular monitoring of key indicators at settlements and key environmental sensitivities to provide timely and prior notification of emerging adverse effects [if any] so that these can be addressed to avoid deterioration of environmental assets.	Commenced and to be continued for the lifetime of the programme

Action 44:	Implement the Environmental Monitoring Programme, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 4.	Commenced and to be continued for the lifetime of the programme
Action 45:	To proactively promote and increase awareness and understanding of evidence based best practice approaches to the management of tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way, and the wider regional catchments along the route.	Commenced through the monitoring programme and to be continued for the lifetime of the programme
Action 46:	Establish a Monitoring Group to ensure that robust systems are in place, in appropriate existing authorities, to ensure that all key commitments made at the programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time), and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of the environment will result.	2015
Action 47:	Establish a Wild Atlantic Way stakeholder group/ partnership comprising a number of key national agencies, Departments and Local Authorities to advise on the sustainable development of the Wild Atlantic Way. This group will be led and managed by Fáilte Ireland as brand managers of the Wild Atlantic Way.	2015/16
Action 48:	Establish partnerships at national and regional levels with the relevant environmental and heritage bodies to ensure the protection and responsible promotion of the core environmental and heritage assets upon which the Wild Atlantic Way is based.	Part of Environmental Monitoring Group (refer to Action 46).
Action 49:	Establish zones/ cluster networks comprising key stakeholders, trade partners and community interests to develop a range of signature and supporting visitor experiences.	Commence Q4 2015
Action 50:	Explore opportunities for collaboration both nationally and with other EU states on research and funding projects at an inter-regional level.	2016 and onwards

Section 4: Monitoring

WAW Performance Monitoring

The VICE model has been developed to monitor the impact of tourism initiatives taking the broader impact of tourism performance into account. It recognises that tourism has a wider effect than the consumer (visitor) and the supplier (industry) alone. It also has social and environmental impacts which can be either beneficial or negative to the wider community.

The table below summarises the high level objectives of the programme and the proposed channels for measuring performance across the four pillars of the model.

VOICE Model	High Level Goals	Measure & Target	Info Source	
			Primary	Secondary
Visitor	Satisfy and engage visitors	Keep the satisfied/very satisfied percentage at or above 90% for the key factors.	Visitor Attitudes Survey	Project specific surveying
	Grow paid bednights	Increase paid bednights from overseas and domestic markets	Accommodation occupancy survey	Project specific surveying
Industry	Increase industry earnings	Grow tourism earnings from both overseas and domestic markets	Key Account Survey	Client perf baseline & tracker
	Strong stakeholder engagement	Increase meetings and participation of main stakeholders and partners, eg, local authorities, Coillte, OPW, etc	Record of meetings and attendance of key partners	
Community	Satisfy and engage locals	Ensure that locals feel engage and consulted	Community survey	n/a
		Ensure that locals feel that tourism benefits them and their locality	Community survey	n/a
	Increase employment	Grow tourism jobs	Trend estimates derived from CSO/SOT	Client performance baseline & tracker
Environment	Protect and enhance asset base	Monitor the condition of the built and natural environment.	Various [See Actions 8, 44]	Various [See Actions 8, 44]

Table 11

Considerations

- Strong trade engagement on (a) key account survey and (b) performance information sharing is essential to enable programme level tracking.

Environmental Monitoring and Management

Introduction

Failte Ireland recognise that the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way as a brand to unify a number of existing and long-established routes and viewing locations carries with it legal and practical obligations. The legal obligation is to ensure that the programme is framed in a way that no direct or indirect effects will harm the environment. The practical obligation is to ensure that the brand promise is kept of ensuring that the Atlantic Way remains Wild.

The implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way in accordance with the Operational Programme offers an opportunity to improve the management and operation of routes and sites by third parties. The Operational Programme offers opportunities to consistently reduce adverse existing and emerging effects and to improve and accelerate environmental protection and improvement

However it is important to note that Failte Ireland are not a consent authority who can

- Compel or control development actors to carry out, cease or modify activities and developments
- Instruct Local Authorities or other State or Public officials in the exercise of their statutory duties
- Control the activities of individuals – visitor or resident in the public realm

The role of Failte Ireland therefore is to become a persuader and gatekeeper who can influence better environmental outcomes along the Wild Atlantic Way. The principle persuasion mechanisms that will be used will be eligibility criteria for funding and support as well as the provision of monitoring data on the state of the environment in the vicinity of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Environmental Monitoring

As previously mentioned the branding and promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way will be accompanied by environmental monitoring. The purpose of the monitoring will be to ensure that the effects of the implementation of the Operational Programme are understood and acted upon to ensure that there will be no delays in identifying existing or emerging activities that could threaten the environment. The principle concern is the capacity of the receiving environment – and European Sites in particular - to sustainably absorb the impacts of the activities of existing visitors, and new.

The Wild Atlantic Way is a branding exercise that unifies a series of existing and long-established touring routes along existing roads, viewing points and lay-bys. These predominantly seasonal activities have evolved over many years and now co-exist with a wide range of other year-round uses including farming, forestry and uses associated with settlement.

The monitoring examines individual sites as well as larger-scale and regional indicators. It examines the types, spatial patterns and intensity of existing visitor activities at and adjacent to candidate Discovery Points.

This work, in turn, serves to direct monitoring ecologists to areas known to receive maximum, moderate, minimum and no loading. The ecologists survey these and control areas – having particular regard to the specific conservation objectives of relevant European Sites.

Monitoring work is intended to describe the existing conditions of sites with a view to

- Contributing to Visitor Management Strategies
- Contributing to future editions of Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way Guidelines
- Identifying remedial action/works require
- Assessing the capacity for future loadings
- Integrating site management with future European Site Management Plans

Fáilte Ireland is committed to continuous monitoring of the environmental effects of the Wild Atlantic Way. The monitoring is described in separate detail in Appendix 4– it includes both compilation of relevant regional data that is collected by other agencies – as well as site specific data collected on behalf of Failte Ireland.

Future monitoring will expand to include Discovery Points prioritised in order of sensitivity and significance – as directed by a Monitoring Group which will be set up and overseen by Fáilte Ireland.

Monitoring Group

The results of Wild Atlantic Way monitoring activities will be collated and presented to a Monitoring Group twice a year. The Group will consist of relevant actors along the Wild Atlantic Way. It aims to include, but not be limited to,

- Representatives of Environmental Agencies – such as NPWS and EPA;
- Local Authorities;
- Tourism interests – including local development/community groups
- Relevant environmental NGOs – such as An Taisce and Birdwatch Ireland.

The objective of the Monitoring Group will be to ensure that robust systems are in place, in appropriate existing authorities, to ensure that all key commitments made at the programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time), and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of the environment will result.

The first meeting, in Q4 of each year, will be to present and review the results of monitoring during the previous six months. The purpose of the meeting will be to identify areas where monitoring highlights the existence or emergence of excessive loading on the environment. This information can then be used by relevant members of the Working Group to identify protective, remedial or improvement actions within their own areas of responsibility during the following year.

The second meeting, in Q1 of the following year and in advance of the tourist season commencing, will be to approve the proposed next annual monitoring programme. The purpose of the meeting will be to ensure that monitoring is addressing areas of concern using methods and personnel that are appropriate. A secondary purpose would be to review progress made in addressing concerns raised by previous monitoring – in order to amend monitoring accordingly.

An annual summary of the results of monitoring will be publically available on the Fáilte Ireland web-site.

Appendix 1

Zones of the Wild Atlantic Way

NORTHERN HEADLANDS

Untouched and virtually unexplored, this ruggedly beautiful and remote region lies at the far north of the Wild Atlantic Way. Nature is spectacular and bracing here, from the sheer granite walls of some of Europe's highest seacliffs, at Slieve League, to the Northern Lights dancing in clear winter skies, to the millions of seabirds gathering in great estuaries, en route across the globe. There's a strong sense of community in this sparsely populated region: Ireland's wildest shores are home to its largest Gaeltacht – where Irish is still the mother tongue and traditional culture thrives. This is where St Columba set sail for the island of Iona. Out here on Ireland's northernmost headlands, eleven lighthouses shine out across the sea. And journeys – physical and spiritual – begin. The sea air revives, minds and horizons expand, stories are told, adventures are shared, and spirits lift.

ZONE: MALIN HEAD TO DONEGAL TOWN

THE SURF COAST

The Wild Atlantic Way stretches west along the wave-rich coast from Donegal Town to far-flung Erris, voted Ireland's 'Best Place to Go Wild' in 2014. In truth, you can surf almost the entire western seaboard. But this stretch includes Bundoran and nearby Mullaghmore Head, renowned for drawing surfers (and those who simply love to observe the battle between warrior and wave) from across the globe for giant 'prowlers' and international events. The red-gold beach of Strandhill has become a mecca for those who simply want to feel the reinvigoration of the saltwater spray. After immersion in the Atlantic – or a day's foraging for food along the shoreline under huge skies – perhaps it's time for a deep, oily soak in a hot seaweed bath, Ireland's only native spa therapy and a traditional cure in this part of the world. There's a cultural richness along the Surf Coast too, from the mysterious neolithic Ceide Fields – a Stone Age monument of stone-walled fields, houses and tombs – to the Belbulbin landscapes that inspired WB Yeats and his brother Jack.

ZONE: DONEGAL TOWN TO ERRIS

THE BAY COAST

From distant Erris to the "savage beauty" of much-loved Connemara, the Wild Atlantic Way skims south around huge bays. The largest of these – Clew Bay – is said to have 365 islets and islands, one for every day of the year. Connemara means "inlets of the sea" in Irish, and here water and land merge in a lacy shoreline of loughs, coves, islands and sea-swept blanket bogs. The Bay Coast is a salty fresh-air playground, with its dazzling beaches and Blueway trails, where people kayak, kiteboard, paraglide, swim and dive. Riders trek across the sands on sure-footed Connemara ponies. Cyclists follow the Great Western Greenway – one of the world's most scenic cycleways. Walkers climb the sacred Croagh Patrick mountain and Twelve Bens range. There's history and culture too: elegant Georgian Westport ... the stronghold of legendary pirate queen Grace O'Malley on Clare Island ... Connemara's Derrigimlagh Bog – a mosaic of tiny lakes and

peat, where the first trans-Atlantic flight landed. And looking west across the great sweep of Galway Bay, you can watch the sun goes down behind the gaeltacht Aran Islands, before a night in the City of the Tribes itself.

ZONE: ERRIS TO GALWAY BAY

THE CLIFF COAST

"The land is hard, the soul is not" says the Lonely Planet about the Cliff Coast ... where ice-age landscapes meet west-coast warmth, and music is a way of life. It's a place for clifftop walks, island-hopping, traditional pubs ... and soul-stirring views: rainbows in the ocean spray along the Loop Head Drive; colonies of puffins on the sheer Cliffs of Moher; bottlenose dolphins in the mouth of the Shannon; and the view of Clare's mountains from Kerry's Cliffs of Dooneen. Then there's the otherworldly Burren – a vast limestone pavement rich with rare flora, crossed by ancient green roads. And down to the Flaggly Shore, described by Seamus Heaney in his much-loved poem Postscript as a place that can "catch the heart off guard and blow it open". Enough said?

ZONE: GALWAY TO BALLYBUNION

SOUTHERN PENINSULAS

In Ireland's beautiful far south west – where the ancient Kingdom of Kerry meets wild West Cork – five great peninsulas with mountainous spines stretch miles out into the ocean. This is great walking country, with long-distance trails and circular routes across the region. Hugging the coast, or crossing Ireland's highest mountains, breathtaking views unfold at every turn. It's the furthest west in all Ireland: "next parish Manhattan", they say here. And there's a distinctly edge-of-the-world feel to the Southern Peninsulas, as both the mainland and everyday life are left far behind. You could find yourself paddle-boarding with dolphins, landing on a deserted archipelago once home to Ireland's greatest born-storytellers, taking a cable-car with the ocean crashing below, sailing to a World Heritage Site of medieval pilgrimage atop an ocean crag, visiting an abandoned copper mine, or star-gazing under Ireland's darkest skies. Memorable – sometimes life-changing – experiences are ahead.

ZONE: BALLYBUNION TO BALTIMORE

THE HAVEN COAST

The southernmost stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way zigzags gently, from dreamy Bantry Bay through Skibbereen and on to Kinsale. Past gardens lush with sub-tropical plants. Between hedgerows thick with fuschia and monbretia. By hundreds of inlets, tiny coves, safe harbours and blue-flag beaches, just right for long days spent in the salty air ... beachcombing, island-hopping, whale-watching, learning to sail, kayaking on a saltwater lake in the moonlight, or simply enjoying a pint on the quayside while the fishing boats land their catch. There's something restorative about the temperate Gulf Stream climate, the peaceful vibe and creative scene. There's West Cork's wonderful artisan food. Thriving arts and crafts. Scores of festivals – music, film, stories, food. And history, echoing all along this coast: ancient sites, coastal forts, Michael Collins' home town, the wreck of the Lusitania, and – out on the horizon – 'Ireland's tear drop' the Fastnet Rock.

ZONE: BALTIMORE TO KINSALE

Appendix 2

List of candidate Discovery Points, candidate Signature Discovery Points and Embarkation Points

WILD ATLANTIC WAY DISCOVERY AND EMBARKATION POINTS

DONEGAL

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
1	Inishowen Head	55.226881	-6.9291383
2	Magilligan Point View	55.22405	-7.0140302
3	Kinnagoe Bay	55.258608	-7.0128822
4	Culdaff Beach	55.291806	-7.1449971
5	Malin Head	55.381018	-7.3738003
6	Pollan Bay	55.290233	-7.3910308
7	Gap of Mamore	55.243401	-7.5012481
8	Dunree Head	55.196704	-7.5532803
9	Lisfannon Beach	55.098802	-7.4785137
10	Inch Island	55.054828	-7.4599475
11	Manorcunningham View	54.958368	-7.622315
12	Ballymastocker Strand	55.183983	-7.5952649
13	Cionn Fhánada	55.275617	-7.6345941
14	Bá Bhaile Uí Thiarnáin	55.247075	-7.7277017
15	Oileán an Bhráighe	55.187395	-7.794034
16	Ros Goill	55.227669	-7.8449062
17	Doe Castle View	55.128775	-7.8514212
18	Marblehill	55.176389	-7.9019326
19	Horn Head	55.212163	-7.9588786
EP1	Cé Mhachaire Uí Rabhartaigh (Embarkation Point for 20,21)	55.146192	-8.1746006
20	Inis Bó Finne	55.169651	-8.167525
21	Toraigh	55.264715	-8.224581
22	Cnoc Fola	55.137202	-8.2895011
EP2	Cé an Bhuna Bhig (Embarkation Point for 21,23)	55.057756	-8.3093977
23	Gabhla	55.091043	-8.358707
24	Trá na Carraige Finne	55.037866	-8.3468735
EP3	Cé Ailt an Chorráin (Embarkation Point for 25,26)	54.983318	-8.4413892
25	Inis Fraoigh	54.962309	-8.441729
26	Árainn Mhór	54.989513	-8.496915
27	Narin-Portnoo Strand	54.838599	-8.4476388
28	Malaidh Ghleann Gheis	54.720577	-8.4845379
29	Málainn Bhig	54.665303	-8.7776417
30	Sliabh Liag	54.627438	-8.6847138
31	Cionn Mhucrois	54.617378	-8.5899407
32	Bá Fhiontrá	54.635294	-8.4882206

33	Mountcharles Pier	54.630369	-8.2061166
34	Murvagh Beach	54.604361	-8.1612378
35	Rosstown Beach	54.552905	-8.2102311
36	Tullan Strand	54.490265	-8.2671797

SLIGO

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
37	Mullaghmore Head	54.470555	-8.4630775
38	Streedagh Beach	54.40441	-8.5601065
39	Rosses Point Beach	54.308938	-8.570956
40	Strandhill Beach	54.270531	-8.6093894
41	Aughris Head	54.268943	-8.7570235
42	Easky Pier	54.291383	-8.956059
43	Inishcrone Pier	54.220128	-9.096038

MAYO

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
44	Ballina Quay	54.132133	-9.1378596
45	Killala Quay	54.213245	-9.2192835
46	Lackan Strand	54.274154	-9.2574486
47	Downpatrick Head	54.322906	-9.3459186
48	Céide Fields	54.308559	-9.4558463
49	An Bhinn Bhuí	54.32377	-9.8404187
50	Ceann Iorrais	54.288597	-9.9885893
51	Dún na mBó	54.264572	-10.07531
52	Ceann an Eanaigh	54.241494	-10.102216
53	Trá Oilí	54.162316	-10.086517
54	An Fál Mór	54.09554	-10.085653
EP4	An Fód Dubh (Embarkation Point for 55)	54.098875	-10.060762
55	Inis Gé Theas	54.118845	-10.20729
56	Oileán Chloigeann	54.173036	-9.9527711
57	An Ceann Ramhar	54.07159	-9.9620461
EP5	Doran's Point (Embarkation Point for 58)	54.005341	-9.8685068
58	Inis Bigil	54.003497	-9.885677
59	Claggan	53.957327	-9.792957
60	Dumhach Bheag	53.893402	-9.7970796
61	Spanish Armada Viewpoint	53.867062	-9.8686168
EP6	An Chéibh Bheag (Embarkation Point for 69)	53.880075	-9.9472967
62	Cuan na hAisléime	53.898636	-9.9970436
63	Trá Dhumha Goirt	54.012111	-9.9947959
64	Keel Strand	53.974239	-10.077127
65	Keem Bay	53.967177	-10.195409
67	Croagh Patrick View	53.779411	-9.640141
68	Old Head	53.776562	-9.7710353

EP7	Roonagh Pier (Embarkation Point for 69,70)	53.761692	-9.9038798
69	Clare Island	53.799964	-9.950603
70	Inishturk	53.705142	-10.090486
71	Carrownisky Strand	53.735383	-9.893226
72	Silver Strand	53.649997	-9.880859
73	Doolough Valley	53.666223	-9.7813189
74	Aasleagh Falls	53.618081	-9.672464

GALWAY

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
75	Killary Harbour	53.595759	-9.7645229
76	Islands View	53.606991	-9.9892062
EP8	Cleggan Harbour (Embarkation Point for 77)	53.556776	-10.111172
77	Inishbofin	53.613427	-10.212388
78	Omey Island	53.538873	-10.144688
79	Sky Road	53.500734	-10.096875
80	Derrigimlagh	53.467003	-10.03306
81	Bunowen Bay	53.407511	-10.120935
82	Port na Feadóige	53.380887	-9.9544582
83	Glinsk Pier	53.374726	-9.840702
84	Teach an Phiarsaigh	53.386637	-9.619588
85	Droichead Charraig an Logáin	53.288173	-9.6563065
86	Trá an Dóilín	53.248777	-9.629133
EP9	Calafort Ros an Mhíl (Embarkation Point for 98,99,100)	53.266454	-9.559455
98a	Inis Oírr (seaport)	53.067666	-9.523525
98b	Inis Oírr (airport)	53.064202	-9.512606
99a	Inis Meáin (seaport)	53.101544	-9.577701
99b	Inis Meáin (airport)	53.09475	-9.571897
100a	Inis Mór (seaport)	53.119038	-9.669041
100b	Inis Mór (airport)	53.105046	-9.654014
87	Céibh Bhaile na hAbhann	53.22616	-9.500803
EP10	Aerfort Réigiúnach Chonamara (Embarkation Point for 98,99,100)	53.232266	-9.46964
88	Seanchéibh an Spidéil	53.242357	-9.3057445
89	Trá na gCeann	53.250939	-9.1247356
90	Salthill Promenade	53.258237	-9.0785265
91	Rinville Park	53.245582	-8.9620006
92	Traught Beach	53.171653	-8.9856255

CLARE

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
93	Flaggy Shore	53.156954	-9.0880537
94	Ballyvaughan Pier	53.119533	-9.153682
95	Murrooghtoohy	53.140459	-9.2761731
96	Fanore Beach	53.117221	-9.2874759

EP10a	Doolin Pier (Embarkation Point for 98,99,100)	53.015342	-9.4045007
101	Cliffs of Moher	52.971639	-9.4260442
102	Clahane	52.932574	-9.423185
103	Lehinch Beach	52.933547	-9.3479973
104	Spanish Point	52.842867	-9.432739
106	Doughmore Bay	52.745639	-9.504238
107	Kilkee Cliffs	52.655935	-9.7203737
108	Bridges of Ross	52.589981	-9.8680401
109	Loop Head	52.560901	-9.9304605
110	Carrigaholt Bay	52.60016	-9.702029
EP11	Kilrush Marina (Embarkation Point for 111)	52.635041	-9.494621
110a	Cappagh Pier	52.628546	-9.498637
111	Scattery Island	52.614448	-9.514275
112a	Killimer to Tarbert Ferry	N/A	N/A
112b	Killimer Port (Killimer to Tarbert Ferry)	52.614962	-9.381255

LIMERICK

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
113	Foynes Island Viewpoint	52.613836	-9.11306

KERRY

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
112c	Tarbert Port (Killimer to Tarbert Ferry)	52.586975	-9.361657
114	Carrigafoyle Castle	52.569712	-9.4946444
115	Beale Strand	52.573972	-9.6312144
116	Ballybunion Beach	52.511304	-9.6769166
117	Ballyheigue Beach	52.388788	-9.8356122
118	Banna Strand	52.338905	-9.8345768
EP11a	Fenit Beach (Embarkation Point for 119)	52.275502	-9.8650172
119	Samphire Island	52.271155	-9.880631
120	Castlegregory Beach	52.260314	-10.013826
121	Srón Bhroin	52.287794	-10.160739
122	An Chonair	52.181771	-10.207747
123	Ceann Sléibhe	52.099645	-10.438479
124	Radharc na mBlascaodaí	52.104973	-10.455488
EP12	Cé Dhún Chaoin (Embarkation Point for 125)	52.125193	-10.460014
125	An Blascaod Mór	N/A	N/A
125a	Ionad an Bhlascaoid Mhóir	52.133076	-10.461775
EP13	Cuan an Daingin (Embarkation Point for 125)	52.139049	-10.278091
126	Inch Strand	52.141918	-9.9814788
127	Rossbeigh Strand	52.054229	-9.9766052
128	Mountain Stage	52.035924	-10.034603
129	Bray Head	51.891958	-10.396685
130	Geokaun Mountain	51.916203	-10.350173

EP14	Portmagee Harbour (Embarkation Point for 131)	51.886058	-10.365681
131	Sceilg Mhichíl	N/A	N/A
132	Kerry Cliffs	51.869417	-10.380539
133	Coomanaspic	51.856172	-10.367167
EP15	Cé Bhaile an Sceilg (Embarkation Point for 131)	51.810877	-10.274349
134	Bá na Scealg	51.820965	-10.27351
135	Com an Chiste	51.776386	-10.167109
EP15a	Cé Bhun an Bhaile (Embarkation Point for 131)	51.765694	-10.151561
135a	Teach Dhoire Fhíonáin	51.763013	-10.128969
136	Kilmakilloge	51.783048	-9.8209137

CORK

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude
137	Kenmare River View	51.725184	-9.9850622
138	Dooneen	51.648764	-10.055502
EP16	Garnish Point (Embarkation Point for 139)	51.610024	-10.155077
139	Dursey Island	51.607717	-10.158341
140	Gour	51.627791	-9.978472
EP17	Castletownbere Harbour (Embarkation Point for 141)	51.652249	-9.9082625
EP18	Pontoon Pier (Embarkation Point for 141)	51.655246	-9.8557878
141a	Bere Island (west end pier)	51.638969	-9.899583
141b	Bere Island (east end pier)	51.634348	-9.819922
142	Whiddy Island View	51.713113	-9.582194
EP19	Glengarriff Harbour (Embarkation Point for 143)	51.749514	-9.5422482
EP19a	Blue Pool (Embarkation Point for 143)	51.748777	-9.548521
143	Garinish Island	51.73677	-9.545526
EP20	Bantry Harbour (Embarkation Point for 144)	51.679697	-9.4615996
144	Whiddy Island	51.688381	-9.491302
145	Seefin Viewpoint	51.595522	-9.710927
146	Sheep's Head	51.5459	-9.8264712
147	Altar	51.514061	-9.6438852
148	Barley Cove	51.472624	-9.767999
149	Mizen Head	51.451562	-9.8109117
EP21	Schull Harbour (Embarkation Point for 150)	51.524833	-9.5447695
EP21a	Colla Pier (Embarkation Point for 150a)	51.506532	-9.561419
150	Cléire	51.440032	-9.505641
150a	Long Island	51.499062	-9.557034
151	Sherkin Island	51.476831	-9.398895
152	Heir Island	51.500087	-9.423641
EP21b	Cunnamore Pier (Embarkation Point for 152)	51.503928	-9.424822
EP22	Baltimore Harbour (Embarkation Point for 150,151)	51.482555	-9.3745726
153	Inishbeg	51.527279	-9.343121
154	Lough Hyne	51.506063	-9.3035692
155	Toe Head Bay	51.493251	-9.2476666
156	Galley Head	51.534998	-8.9517546

157	Inchydoney Beach	51.596654	-8.862048
158	Timoleague Abbey	51.643558	-8.7633213
159	Old Head of Kinsale	51.619701	-8.542146

Appendix 3

Current or proposed works on and adjacent to the Wild Atlantic Way candidate Discovery Points

County		Location	Proposals	Status
Donegal	1.	Malin Head	A coastal walk at Malin Head by Donegal County Council	Completed in 2014
	2.	Malin Head	Improving the visitor experience and visitor management at Malin Head Walk Donegal.	County Council is currently exploring options
	3.	Inch Island	8km Inch Levels Loop Walk – an 8km loop walk . The lead partner was National Park & Wildlife Service.	Recently completed.
	4.	Fanad Head	Commissioner of Irish Lights are developing a small visitor experience at the Lighthouse and three self-catering units at this site Develop a small visitor centre and car park on a green field site close to the Lighthouse.	Permitted and planned to open at the end of April 2015. Planning permission granted for a visitor centre and car park.
	5.	Tullan Strand	New access under consideration	No information available yet
Sligo	6.	Mullaghmore	Looped Walk under consideration	No information available yet
	7.	Mullaghmore	Development by Sligo County Council of a surfing and mountain bike trail leading to the ocean at Mullaghmore.	Proposal
	8.	Inishcrone	Coastal walk by Sligo County Council.	Feasibility Study completed
	9.	Coolaney	Coolaney National Mountain Bike Park.	Feasibility Study completed
	10.	Grange village	Looped walk	Recently developed.
	11.	Rosses Point	Pontoon at yacht club/pier	Currently at planning stage.
Mayo	12.	Keem Bay, Achill Island	'Spirit of 'Place' installation by Mayo County Council at Keem Bay, Achill Island, Co. Mayo.	Mayo County Council is currently investigating options. No detailed proposals have been devised yet.
	13.	Claggan	Development of boardwalk by National Parks & Wildlife Service.	Recently developed.
	14.	Keem Beach, Achill Island; Old Head;	Blueways at these locations (kayaking and snorkelling trails)	Provision in 2014 by Mayo County Council
	15.	Great Western Greenway	Interpretation Plan for Great Western Greenway.	Interpretation Plan recently completed but not yet implemented.
Galway	16.	Inishbofin; Mannin Bay.	Blueways at these locations (kayaking and snorkelling trails)	Provision in 2014 by Galway Co Co
	17.	Rosmuc	Development of Connemara Cultural Centre at Pearse's Cottage by Údarás na Gaeltachta.	Proposal
	18.	Connemara Greenway	A 50km Greenway from Clifden to Oughterard, proposed by Galway County Council	Granted planning permission in 2013
Clare	19.	Loop Head	Looped walk along Loop Head from the Lighthouse.	Proposal
	20.	Burren Heritage Trails	Development of heritage trails at seven sites in the Burren: Carran, Doolin, Fanore, Flaggy Shore (New Quay), Kilinaboy, Lisdoonvarna and Lough Bunny.	Ongoing by Clare County Council.
Kerry	21.	Signal Tower, Bray Head, Valentia Island	Improvements to the visitor experience and visitor management at the Signal Tower, Bray Head candidate Signature Discovery Point, which will may involve restoring the Signal Tower as a viewing tower.	Kerry County Council is currently investigating options. No detailed proposals have been devised yet.
	22.	Restoration of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's	Restoration and opening to visitors of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's house on the Great Blasket Island by the Office of	Application for planning permission is due to be made during 2015.

		house on the Great Blasket Island	Public Works.	
	23.	Blaskets Centre, Dún Chaoin	Improvements to the visitor experience and visitor management around the Blaskets Centre candidate Signature Discovery Point and surrounding area.	Kerry County Council is currently investigating options. No detailed proposals have been devised yet.

Appendix 4

Environmental Monitoring Strategy

Appendix 5

Site Maintenance Guidelines (remedial works guidelines)

Appendix 6

Environmental Management for Local Authorities and Others