



Amendment Overview for the ACRES Scorecard Guidance Document Version 2.1 (June 2024)

The ACRES Scorecard Guidance document provides details on how to survey fields in ACRES and use the scorecards. As the scorecards themselves cannot be changed throughout the duration of the scheme, it is important that the scorecard guidance be referred to as the standard approach in any given year.

The scorecard guidance applies to the vast majority of situations, however it is not an exhaustive account of how to deal with every individual situation. It covers the usual way to do things and covers 99% of fields. Of course, there are always exceptions (particularly when there are >1m scorecards assigned), but most of these are catered for in the CP teams protocol agreed with DAFM.

The following amendments have been made since Version 1.0 for Version 2.1 (June 2024) of the ACRES Scorecard Guidance Document. Only one minor update was made between Version 2.0 to 2.1 whereby reference to non-native conifers has been removed from Table 11 i.e. the Version 2.0 amendment was reverted back to the original Version 1.0 text.

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



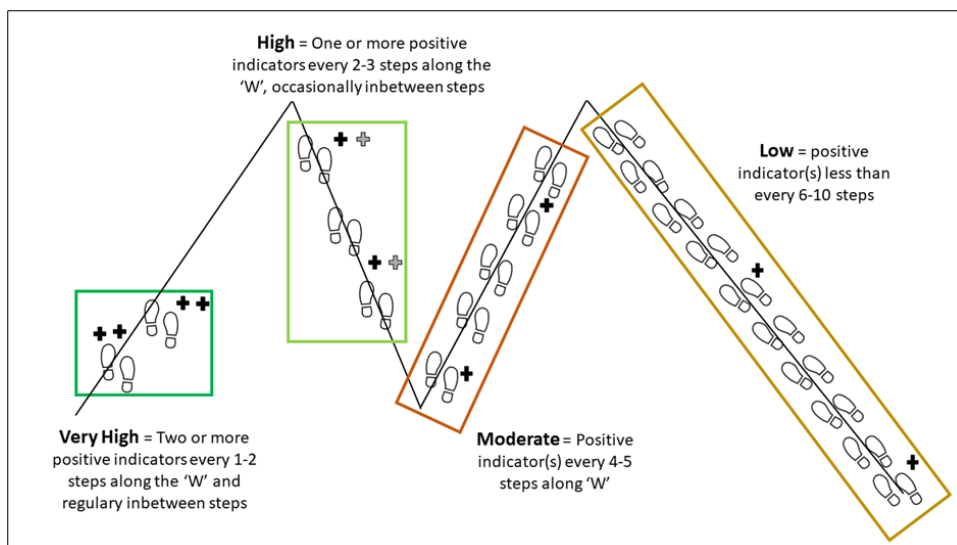
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Grassland Scorecard Guidance

Section A2.

Table 2 text amended for clarification.

Infographic below added for further understanding.



Section A3.

Additional text provided: 'If obvious appropriate management of negative indicators has occurred prior to field being scored, tick box for presence but do not include in your overall assessment of cover of negative indicators.'

Additional text provided: 'Note: If an area of Corncrake Early Late Cover (ELC) occurs in the field as part of an agri-environment scheme, do not consider this when assessing A3. Such areas should be clearly defined within a field, fenced off, and have appropriate signage.'

Section A4.

Additional text provided: 'If two (or more) fields have been merged and are of different management regimes (grazing/silage), then select the dominant management type of the area for scoring. Then select the most appropriate structure for that management type.'

Additional text provided: 'If an area of Corncrake Early Late Cover (ELC) occurs in the field as part of an agri-environment scheme, do not consider this when assessing A4. Such areas should be clearly defined within a field, fenced off, and have appropriate signage.'

Table 4 text amended (in bold): 'Good - Field sward medium height throughout with **plants in flower.**'

Section A6.

Additional text provided: 'Where non-native invasives are restricted to the field boundary(ies) they should not be considered in A6, and instead be assessed under B4: What is the cover of non-native invasive species?'

Additional text provided (in bold): ii. For large unenclosed upland fields, unenclosed fields with breeding wader potential (but not assigned the breeding wader scorecard), **and naturally exposed coastal habitat areas**, good can be selected for the field boundary assessment. Note if this is the case in the notes section.

Additional text provided (in bold): 'iii. Where the worst 30m occurs on the boundary with a private dwelling fence (e.g. a wooden or wire fence or a garden hedge), **third party infrastructure (e.g. a graveyard wall), or farmyard sheds**, the score should relate to the condition of the worst 30m excluding **these boundaries**.

Section B1.

Additional text provided: 'Note: Only the most recent season should be considered when assessing burning.'

Section B2.

Additional text provided (in bold): 'This model involves identifying the source of a potential threat (i.e. sediment, nutrients, herbicide, etc), determining the pathway in which the threat may reach the receptor (mode of transport such as a stream, spring, **boundary drain** etc), and identifying the receptor which may be impacted (water quality of stream, river, another watercourse, etc).'

Significant additional text provided: 'Note: The assessment of risk to water quality is carried out independently of B3 Bare soil and erosion. Should bare soil be identified...cont'd.'

Section B3.

Additional text provided: 'This includes bare soil fire breaks that can occur on peatlands adjacent to forestry in particular.'

Section B4.

Additional text provided (in bold): '**Non-native invasive species within field boundaries should also be assessed here in B4.** You must record all invasive plant species present, **however marks should only be deducted for high risk species including: rhododendron, cotoneaster, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam, Himalayan honeysuckle, & gunnera (giant rhubarb).**'

Section B6.

Additional text provided: 'Note: The threshold for the 'High' category of bracken coverage is incorrect on the scorecard. Use the threshold indicated in Table 13 above (25%).'

Peatland Scorecard Guidance

Section B1.

Significant additional text provided: 'Hydrological integrity refers to the water regime within an area of land. As peatlands are wetland habitats, water is the main factor influencing...cont'd.'

Table 16 text amended for clarification in all categories except for 'Intact'.

Section C2.

Significant additional text provided: 'The most common water quality pressures arising from agricultural use of peatlands...cont'd.'

Section C3.

Significant additional text provided: 'Peat soils are especially vulnerable to damage caused by...cont'd.'

Section C4.

Additional text provided: 'Where invasives are restricted to the field boundary(ies) alone and do not extend into the field then they should be recorded as being present in C4a but in Question C4b "None" can be selected as they do not cover any part of the main field.'

Section C5.

Additional text provided: 'It is important to note that this question only relates to whether turbary activity is occurring on site and its extent. The effects of the activity are assessed separately elsewhere on the scorecard (species occurrence, vegetation structure, hydrological integrity, extent of bare soil etc).'

Rough Grazing Scorecard Guidance

Section A4.

Table 25 text amended (in bold): 'Good - Field sward medium height throughout **with plants in flower.**'

Section A7.

Additional text provided: 'Established scrub are those that livestock graze around and/or farmers top or mow around.'

Low Input Grassland on Peat (LIPG) Scorecard Guidance

Significant additional text provided: 'The amount or proportion of a field covered by a plant(s) is the cover. Cover of a plant is based on...cont'd.'

Additional Table provided (below) for clarification.

Assessment	Description
Low	0-9% cover. These species occur in small isolated wet patches or are scattered throughout field. Not highly visible in the sward (i.e you must look to find them). The overall appearance of the sward can be described as generally grassy.
Moderate	10-19% cover. The wetland indicator species that are present are found scattered in patches over the entire field. The majority of the sward appears grassy.
High	>20% cover. Good cover of wetland indicator species when looking down on or across the sward. May still be missing from large patches of the field. Only parts of the sward appear grassy with a good diversity of flowering species/broadleaved herbs and leaf shapes present throughout the rest of the sward.

Coastal Grassland Scorecard Guidance

Section A1.

Additional text provided: 'Note that any lichen species found on coastal sites is considered positive, including but not restricted to non-crustose bushy lichens.'

Section A2.

Significant additional text provided: 'Appropriate animal dosing: Avermectin residue persists in cow dung and...cont'd.'

Section A4.

Significant section of text amended for clarification: 'Where marram grass is present in fixed dunes it should be...cont'd.'

Additional text provided: 'Note: When assessing A4, do not consider areas with predator fencing in place. Such areas will have appropriate signage.'

Section B2.

Additional text provided: 'Note: Some trampling and bare soil is allowable in known breeding wader sites only and should not be scored negatively in B2. This includes minor isolated areas of bare soil in marsh areas, flood plains, and along edges of wet features such as lakes. The local Co-Operation Team will notify advisors if this is the case, and it must be noted in the notes section.'

Section B5.

Significant additional text provided: 'Creeping Willow is treated differently on the coastal scorecard. See below for details.....Do not consider areas of Creeping Willow with <40% cover under this heading.'

Significant additional text provided: 'Appropriate animal dosing: Avermectin residue persists in cow dung and...cont'd.'

Chough Scorecard Guidance

Section A4.

Additional text provided: 'Note: Since chough fields are often large and very steep, areas of longer, wet grassland often occur at the base of the slopes. Where they are present, provided they are a small component of the field, they should not be considered a negative for the vegetation structure assessment.'

Section A5.

Additional text provided (in bold): 'Landscape elements include features or micro-habitats such as earth mounds or banks, stone ruins, stone walls, exposed rock, cliffs, scree, and **small patches of bare soil** and established scrub. These are beneficial for invertebrate populations, which are a very important food source for chough. Chough forage in these areas which provide diverse prey species and may also nest in large rocky features such as cliffs or stone buildings.'

Table 55 text amended (below, in bold):

Assessment	Description
Good	Frequent occurrence of small patches of bare soils and at least one other landscape element as listed above.
Moderate	Occasional occurrence of small patches of bare soil and at least one other landscape element as listed above.
Low	No landscape elements present as listed above.

Breeding Wader Scorecard Guidance

Section A4.

Additional text provided: 'A4 relates to the general sward structure/height of vegetation excluding rushes; rushes are assessed separately in A6.'

Additional text provided: 'Note: When assessing A4, do not consider areas with predator fencing in place. Such areas will have appropriate signage.'

Section C2.

Additional text provided: 'This includes minor isolated areas of bare soil in marsh areas, flood plains, and along edges of wet features such as lakes.'

Section C7.

Additional text provided: 'Evidence may include grass flattened by vehicles, the presence of fresh wheel tracks, or topped or mowed fields.'

Corncrake Scorecard Guidance

Section A3.

Additional text provided: 'Note: When assessing the field for A3 on the Corncrake scorecard, do not consider areas of Early Late Cover (ELC). ELC areas may be 0.05ha or 1/8th of the field, with a minimum width of 10m. They should be clearly defined within a field and fenced off.'

Section A5.

Additional text provided: Note: There are mistakes in the categories for A5 on AgriSnap. Table 66 below should be used instead.

Table 66 text amended (in bold, below).

Assessment	Description
High	Grass cover will be noticeable via the sense of uniformity of the field. There will be a distinct lack of a herb layer within the field, with each step across the transect often dominated by one or two grass species (typically Rye grass, but also other improved grasses such as Timothy or Cocksfoot). Often or not the field will feel difficult to negotiate as the grasses are strongly interwoven (>75% of the field).
Moderate	The cover of grass is often characterised by a suite of 3-4 grass species whose structure allows for a herb layer to form in sporadic areas throughout the field (50-75% of the field).
Low	The cover of grass means that herbs are as frequent as the grass within the field; this is often characterised by an open sward which is easily traversable for corncrake at ground-level (>50 of the field).

Section B5.

Additional text provided: 'If ELC is under establishment 'moderate' should be selected.'

Section B6.

Additional text provided (in bold): 'Additional features within a plot can be beneficial for Corncrakes. These features can assist in providing additional cover during the breeding season and act as gateways to other suitable adjacent areas in the vicinity for birds to forage. The key features are (i) Rocky outcrop, (ii) unmown headland, covering >5% of the field and (iii) 5-20% common reed cover **(iv) yellow flag iris or other** within the plot.'

Section C4.

Additional text provided: 'Evidence of machinery operations may include grass flattened by vehicles, the presence of fresh wheel tracks, or topped or mowed fields. Evidence of grazing may include the presence of livestock, cow pats/flattened grass, or areas with grazed vegetation.'

Appendix II.

Two images removed.