

Application Entry for 2019 PAKMAN Awards – Community Recycling Initiative of the Year

Aran Islands Recycling Centre – Twenty Years a-Growing (Fiche Bliain ag Fás)

1. Short Summary of the Community Group

Comharchumann Forbartha Árann (Inis mór Co-Operative) is the largest of three community organisations on the Aran Islands located in Galway Bay.

The Co-Operative is owned and run solely by its members – the people of the Aran Islands Gaeltacht community. The islands have a winter population of approx. 1,300 people together some 250,000 tourists each year. The islands are designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive. The geology and ecology of the islands can be described as a fragile Burren limestone environment with poorly productive lands and shallow soil cover which supports a rich variety of flora including orchid rich and carcareous grasslands, lowland hay meadows and Machair grassland.

Traditionally the waste management system was landfill which, no matter how well it was managed, it was an environmental threat to groundwater which is the islands' sole source of potable water supply for the local population. Therefore the three island communities came together in a community owned group called Timpeallacht na hOileán (The Island Environment) in the late 1990s to investigate a more environmentally sound waste management approach .

The option which we chose in consultation with Galway County Council was to permanently close the Council run landfills on the three islands and instead to create a community run kerbside recycling project on each island for both dry packaging and wet organics into compost (as topsoil replacement on the shallow limestone rock) followed by transportation of residual waste to the mainland by boat. After five years of very hard work on planning and design by Athchúrsáil Árann (Aran Islands Recycling Project) a new waste management approach has now been in operation since 1999 when the Kilronan and other island landfills were closed.

The strategic objective of our entry for the PAKMAN Awards is to celebrate this year in 2019 - the continuous successful 20 year operation of this unique circular economy community project – well illustrated by attached Entry text, photographs and diagrams. We note that this highly ambitious recycling project based on kerbside operation predates any other urban or rural kerbside recycling project in operation in Ireland.

We have sought the professional opinion of P J Rudden CEng FIWM Waste Consultant (attached) who certifies the uniqueness, sustainability and ongoing success of this Irish community based recycling project. We have also been encouraged this year by Galway County Council to make application for the PAKMAN Awards in our 20th year of operation.

2. Description of the Project

Waste is collected from each island house in three separate bins – green bin for packaging bottles, drink and metal cans; brown bin for food and organic waste; and black bins for residual landfill waste. The dry recyclables are baled and sent to Galway, the food and organics incl. paper are

composted in high quality composting operation (incl. pasteurisation after the introduction of the Food and Animal By-products Regulations post 2008).

The residual waste is then examined for glass, metals, timber, clothes and bulky items and these are segregated for reuse and recycling on the islands. For instance, the glass is crushed for reuse as aggregates for concrete on the island, the timber is shredded to go into compost and the bulky items like old windows etc. are stored for reuse on agricultural and garden sheds on the island. Metals are separated for recycling to Galway to Walsh Waste with the residual waste for landfill.

The attached graphics and tables show the overall reuse/recycling performance from 2001 (when consistent record keeping to the required regulatory standards began) up to last year 2018, year on year. Referring to Table 1 attached, the overall reuse/recycling rate on Inis Mór increased from 32.6% in 2001 to 58.4% in 2018, an increase of 59% over the 17 year period of records. This municipal recycling rate of 58.4% in 2018 compares to the current national rate of 41% mostly driven by the cities and towns.

3. Project Implementation

The key to project implementation was acceptance by us islanders that we no longer wished to consign our household and commercial waste to landfill thus compromising the quality of our public water supply sources. A more sustainable approach was therefore needed based on maximum recycling and minimum landfill. It was also realised that 100% recycling was physically impossible so the objective became to maximise recycling and minimise or eliminate landfill. This was in accordance with what we now call the 'circular economy' approach which became the Government and EU waste policy in 2012, some 13 years after the Aran Islands community project was launched with the same objectives.

Implementation was enabled by grant support from Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, Roinn Na Gaeltachta, Urara's Na Gaeltachta and Galway County Council in terms of capital costs. The running costs of the project are now met by a combination of householder charges (c€300 annually from each householder) and support from Pobal which is a Government support initiative for local and community involvement from Galway County Council. The project has a high standard of governance administered by the recycling plant manager Gerry Mullin under the overall direction of the Inis mór Co-Op Manager Cathy Ni Ghoill Dip Rural Development (NUIG), community leader and Director of Timpeallacht na nOileán and former Board Member of Údarás na Gaeltachta.

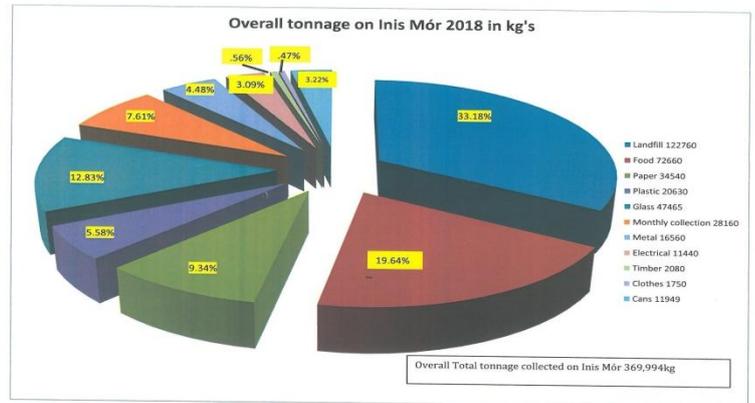
4. Effects on Community

The effects have been extremely positive in that the Aran Islands householders through our Co-op membership are taking responsibility for the protection of our own natural environment and complying with both the 'polluter pays principle' in terms of householder charges and the 'proximity principle' to treat waste as close as possible to its point of generation.

This is a very positive 'win-win' situation for the island community in that we can now manage our own waste sustainably and at the same time protect our own living environment. We can also now protect and enhance our principal economic base in terms of needed revenue from sustainable tourism from 250,000 visitors per annum into the future.

5. Marketing and Communications

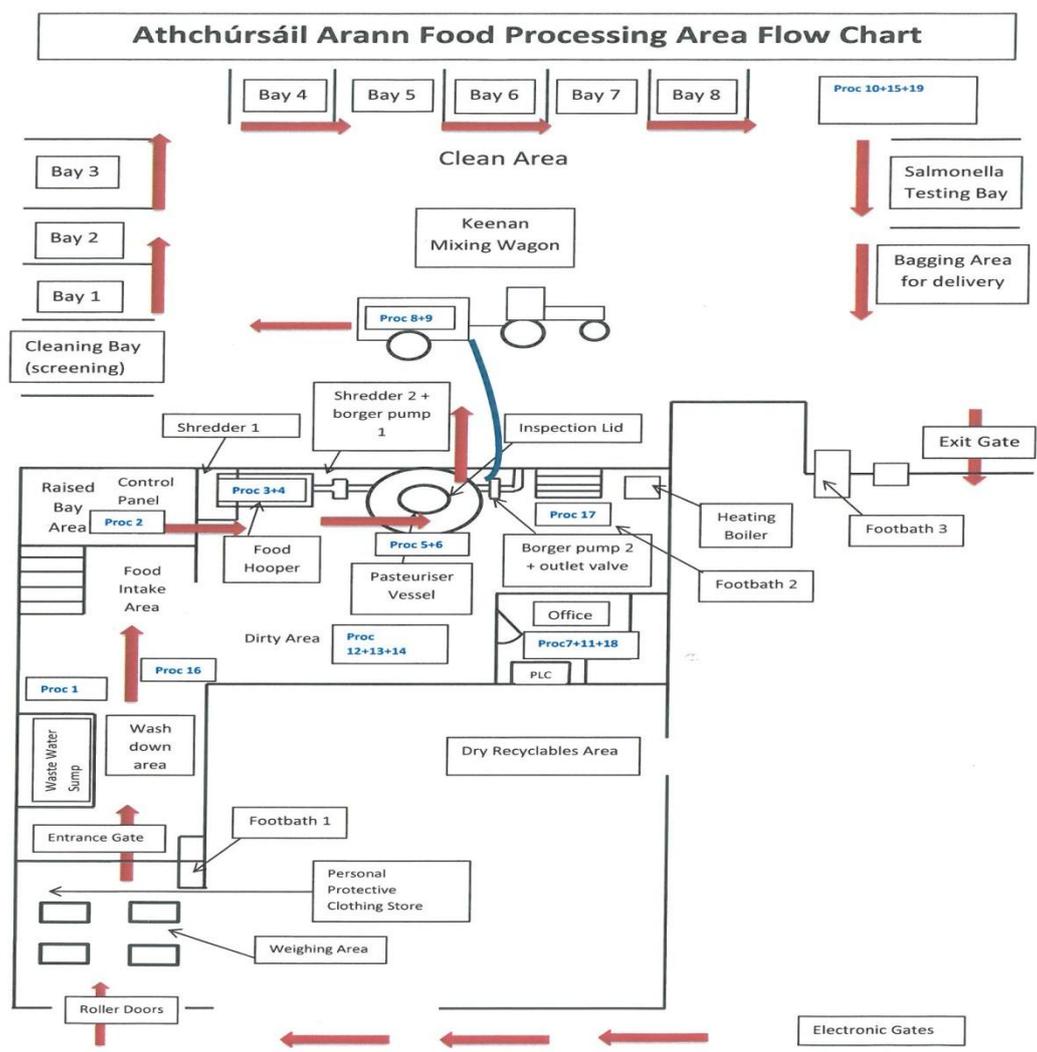
The achievements outlined above would not have been possible without the proactive islander and public engagement through community meetings and Radio na Gaeltachta and TG4. This was spearheaded by the Inis mór Co-Op Manager and with regular Nuachtlitir to all islanders on the need for sustainable tourism to ensure a sustainable living environment on the three Aran Islands.



Athchúrsáil Gloine / Recycling Glass used for footpaths and decorations



Compost / Múirín recycling at its best, from the kitchen to the benefit of the community



Compost made from food and paper packaging waste



Educating the students from the island and an exchange group of students from Holland on how to re-use and recycle your waste packaging

Overall tonnage percentages for Athchursail Arann							
Year	Landfill	%	Recycling Plastic / Drink Cans / Metal	%	Recovered & Reused	%	Total
2001	97,000	67.36	20,000	13.89	27,000	18.75	144,000
2003	99,654	66.37	22,321	14.87	28,180	18.77	150,155
2005	94,962	63.45	24,789	16.56	29,905	19.98	149,656
2007	98,425	60.42	31,695	19.46	32,781	20.12	162,901
2009	99,400	60.39	31,595	19.19	33,611	20.42	164,606
2011	103,400	59.24	35,620	20.41	35,520	20.35	174,540
2013	104,920	57.54	38,695	21.22	38,720	21.24	182,335
2015	97,400	54.92	39,333	22.18	40,625	22.91	177,358
2017	97,840	47.14	43,781	21.1	65,921	31.76	207,542
2018	92,640	41.56	46,891	21.04	83,350	37.4	222,881

