

## Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árainn (CFOAT) Retrofitting in the Better Energy Communities Grant (now the Community Energy Grant) programme.

### Action Areas

Community Energy Retrofitting, Fuel Poverty Alleviation, Carbon Emissions Reduction, Employment, Co-operatives.

### Headline Achievements

**50% of the houses and most community buildings on the islands have had some energy related retrofitting done since 2012.**  
**A number of buildings now operating fossil-fuel-free.**  
**There are now more than 15 electric cars in use on Árainn.**  
**Up to 100 buildings now have heat pumps and photovoltaic panels.**

## Context

The three Aran Islands off the coast of Galway (Árainn, Inis Meáin, Inis Oírr) have a population of approximately 1300. Fuel costs are high as all fuels have to be transported to the island by boat.

Parts of the island are categorised as -13.97 on the [Pobal Deprivation Index](#)



Kilronan, Árainn by Sakari Mäkelä [Pixabay](#)

## Case Study

Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árainn Teo (CFOAT) is a community owned energy cooperative representing the 3 Aran Islands: Árainn, Inis Mheáin and Inis Oírr. Life membership is open to all residents for €100. The cooperative is **non-profit with all of the benefits going back into the community**.

CFOAT's aim is to make the 3 islands fossil-fuel-free using green energy generated on the islands and owned by the cooperative. Their project involves upgrading and retrofitting homes and buildings; introducing electric cars and buses; encouraging households to install heat pumps, photovoltaic and battery storage; generating electricity locally; being partners on numerous EU funded research projects; making the Aran Islands an Energy Research Hub; creating new employment opportunities in the energy field; running Energy Tours on the islands.

Establishing as a co-operative in 2012, CFOAT commenced its work by engaging in the SEAI's then Better Energy Community Grant schemes (now the [Community Energy Grant Programme](#)).

Since 2012, 50% of the houses and many of the community buildings on the islands have had some energy related retrofitting done.

A number of buildings on the island are now operating completely fossil-fuel-free.

Starting with a group purchase scheme in 2027 with just three electric cars, there are now more than 15 electric cars on Árainn alone. Many of these are second hand vehicles with reduced range. This is not an issue



PV panels producing electricity for the homes of the Aran Islands

on the island where travel distances are quite short in comparison to the mainland: Árainn, the largest island is only 17km long in total.

Up to 100 buildings on the islands now have heat pumps and photovoltaic panels which means that they use much less fossil fuel for space and hot water heating.

Heat pumps use electricity which can be more expensive. However, the PV panels cut down on the need to buy electricity from the grid.

At present, CFOAT is involved in three EU funded projects (H2020 and InterReg): for example [SEAFUEL](#) and [HUGE](#). This means that it is now able to employ 3 local people (not on a government scheme), one full-time, in high skilled sustainability jobs. This is a huge achievement in an area where much employment is seasonal and tourism related.

An initial challenge was finding access to early finance to help with set up and administration costs. Our co-op structure enabled members to contribute a small fee (€100 for life-time co-op membership) to fund our setting up. It meant that there was money in the co-op bank account which helped establish a finance record that allowed us to look for bridging loans when they were needed. We benefited from the services of Clann Credo in our retrofitting programmes because the SEAI grants were retrospectively paid and so we needed finance.

## Takeaway Advice



“A committee will only work well if the aims and objectives are clear and unanimously agreed from the beginning.

A committee works best if it has one or more people who are champions and who will do whatever it takes.

Networking with outside agencies, businesses, third level colleges, and other SECs is essential for gaining support.”

## Resources

PV panels Payback Calculator: <https://www.seai.ie/tools/solar-electricity-calculator/>

PV Panels Grant Information: <https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/solar-electricity-grant/>

Heat Pumps: <https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/heat-pump-systems/>

Retrofitting Supports—community level: <https://www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants/>

Setting Up an Energy Sustainability Co-operative in Ireland: <https://www.energyco-ops.ie/setting-up-a-co-op/>

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