

Case Study

Mulranny Towards 2030

Exploring UNESCO Biosphere Designation

A community-led
approach to transform
Mulranny into a UNESCO
Biosphere.



Explore More



Status

In motion. Scoping study complete, stakeholder consultations ongoing, support submissions to funders and policy in preparation.

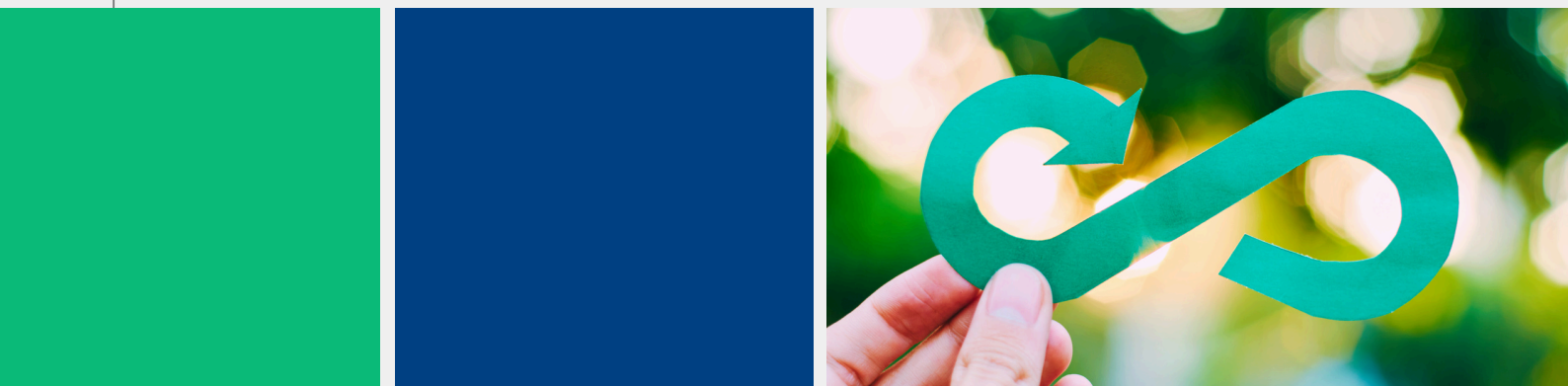


Overview (Key Info)

- **Aim.** Explore a UNESCO *Man and the Biosphere* (MAB) designation as a county-scale framework, with Mulranny's Decarbonising Zone as an early driver.
- **Partners:** Mulranny Community Futures; Mayo County Council; South West Mayo Development Company (SWMDC); National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), including Mayo Dark Sky Park; Fáilte Ireland and the Clew Bay Tourism Network; Climate Action Regional Office (CARO); Western Development Commission (WDC); and university partners.
- **Global frame.** A Mayo Biosphere would connect to UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR), now in 134 countries (748 sites), emphasising conservation, sustainable development, and logistic support (research/education).

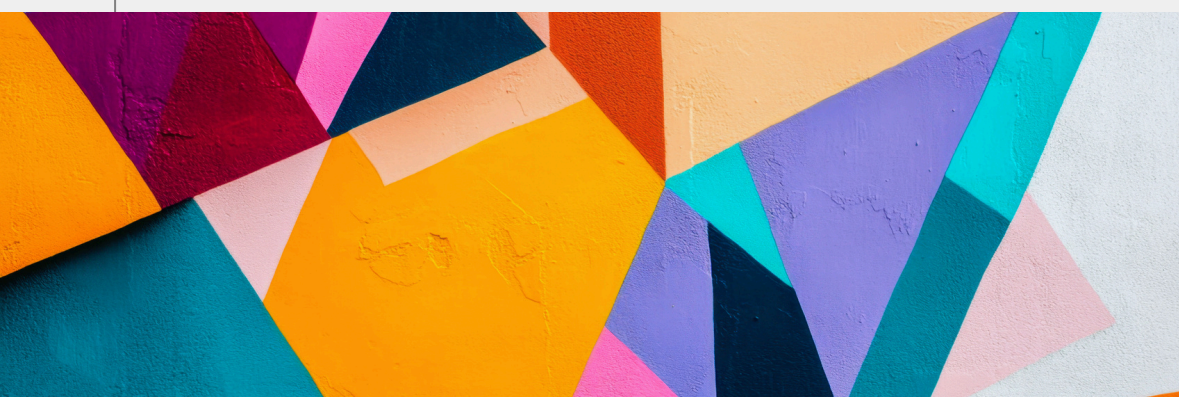
Origins & Context

- **Local governance capacity.** Mulranny has used Community Futures since 2008 (whole-household surveys, published plans, steering function), evolving into a coordinating "backbone" while respecting the autonomy of local groups (e.g., Tidy Towns).
- **Track record across themes.** Public realm (Promenade), energy/climate (GreenPlan, SEC actions), mobility (e-bikes), biodiversity/culture (Dark Sky Park interface; Old Irish Goat conservation/grazing use).
- **Policy alignment.** Mulranny's Decarbonising Zone is built into the Mayo Climate Action Plan, which also calls for exploring a UNESCO Biosphere. The 2024 feasibility study explains how a Mayo Biosphere Reserve could be a practical vehicle for delivering the Sustainable Development Goals and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including work in buffer and transition areas.



Participatory Process (Design-WITH)

- **2019–2024 groundwork.** Clew Bay Destination and Experience Plan and subsequent multi-agency conversations surfaced a Mayo Biosphere Reserve as an aspirational but practical framework; feasibility commissioned via LEADER. Stakeholder presentation to 33 organisations in March 2024; 14 survey responses; 93% expressed high interest in continuing the discussion.
- **May 2024 meeting.** Working session hosted by Fáilte Ireland confirmed core principles: participatory governance; community stewardship; farmer engagement as central; rotation/neutral hosting while a stable governance pathway forms. Concrete actions included circulating the draft, setting a meeting schedule, and mapping governance options.
- **Feb 2025 Decarbonising Zone Huddle (Mulranny).** 28 attendees (local, regional, national agencies and universities). Agreed actions include advancing the next UNESCO study phase, farmer engagement on priority topics, and aligning Decarbonising Zone actions with SDGs and conservation objectives.
- **Jun 2025 The People's Transition: Mulranny Decarbonising Zone.** Highlights a Circular Economy Repair programme and the UNESCO Mayo Biosphere Reserve.

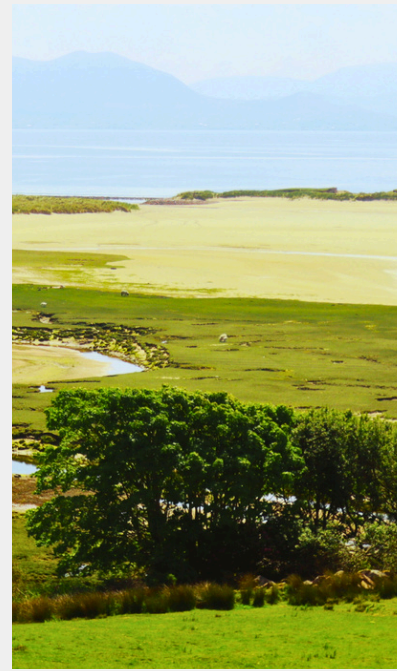


What's been done so far

- **Feasibility & scoping (May 2024):** set out the case, looked at comparators (Sweden, Scotland, Canada, Isle of Man), listed benefits and challenges, and suggested a nomination date with a management plan to follow.
- **Governance direction (2024–2025):** “Participatory governance is the hallmark of UNESCO *Man and the Biosphere Programme*”. Draft thinking points to an inclusive partnership/roundtable with a neutral or rotating host in the interim.
- **Regional framing:** the Western Development Commission “Regenerative Region” submission positions MAB as a ready platform to connect nature, economy and learning (Inclusive Wealth; Atlantic Ecological Corridor).

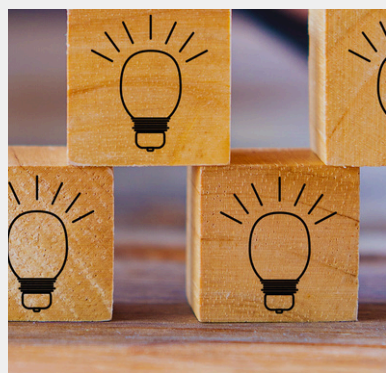
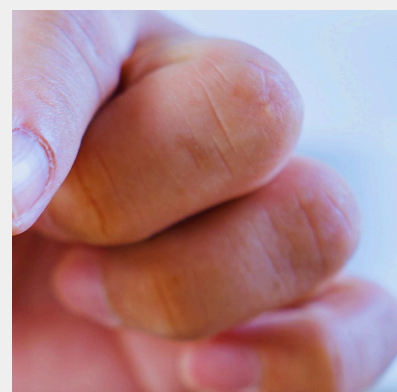
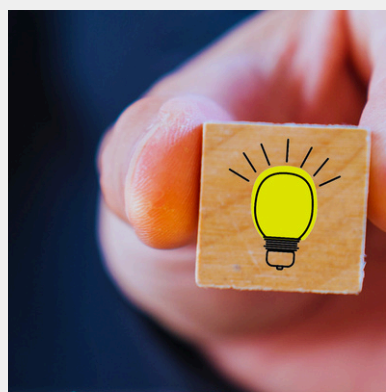
Early results (signals to date)

- **People and agencies are coordinating.** The Decarbonising Zone Huddle format is being used to turn the idea into tasks (e.g., events, clinics, dashboard, conference).
- **Farmer engagement is live.** Forums and project strands are focusing on uplands/commonage, peatlands, and salt marsh in ways that align with the ACRES scheme, EU LIFE programme, and Wild Atlantic Nature approaches.
- **A practical policy space.** A Biosphere Reserve would give Mayo a recognised arena to apply SDGs and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework locally (spatial planning, restoration, and “30 by 30”). The **30 by 30** initiative—also known as **30x30**—is a global commitment to **protect 30% of the planet’s land, freshwater, and ocean areas by the year 2030**. It was formally adopted in **December 2022** as part of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, and to count work in buffer/transition zones through OECM pathways. **OECMs**—short for **Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures**.
- **Coasts and blue carbon.** Saltmarsh and seagrass along Mayo’s coast are significant carbon sinks; a Biosphere structure would help baseline and monitor them and connect to the Marine Protection Area policy



Insights & Lessons (from feasibility + practice)

- **Start from what exists** — for example, Community Futures and Clew Bay Aquaculture Management (CLAMS); publish plain-language outputs for accountability.
- **Keep governance neutral and inclusive.** Avoid capture by a single institution; use shared/rotating hosting during set-up; document terms of reference and culture of engagement (cf. international biosphere models).
- **Keep ambition grounded.** A Biosphere Reserve must serve the community first, not just policy frameworks.
- **Prioritise farmer buy-in and practical pilots.** Focus topics where co-benefits are clear (commonage management, peatland rewetting, saltmarsh signage/awareness, blue carbon baselining, sustainable development investment).
- **Umbrella effect.** The Biosphere concept offers a way to connect initiatives that were once siloed.
- **Plan for monitoring and periodic review.** Data, indicators, and interim reviews (5-year pulse checks inside UNESCO's 10-year cycle) are essential to avoid “branding without delivery.”



Link to Climate Action & SDGs

UNESCO's MAB framework pairs conservation with community-led development and learning—regenerative development in practice. In this context, the following SDGs are most relevant:

SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure): applied research/monitoring; nature-based innovation in coastal/upland systems.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production): circular practices; low-impact visitation; heritage repair.

SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities): participatory planning, safe and attractive public realm.

SDG 13 (Climate Action): living lab for decarbonisation, resilience and adaptation.

SDG 15 (Life on Land): peatlands, goats, biodiversity corridors.

SDG 14 (Life Below Water): saltmarsh restoration, seagrass, blue carbon potential.

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): multi-actor governance (community, MCC, NPWS, SWMDC/LEADER, CARO, WDC, HEIs).



Legacy & Next Steps

- Nomination file: scheduled for end of 2027, to be followed by a management plan.
- Governance: interim stewardship by Clew Bay Tourism Network until the end of 2025, with a likely new cross-sectoral body to ensure neutrality and inclusivity.
- Community engagement: workshops, youth programmes, creative partnerships (arts, culture, education).
- Scaling the story: From Mulranny's seafront to Mayo's uplands and coastlines, the Biosphere would provide the umbrella for a regenerative region.



Replication Notes (for other places)

1. Run a short **whole-household survey** and publish the plan; form a cross-sector steering group.
2. **Commission feasibility** with comparator case studies and policy mapping.
3. **Design neutral governance** (shared/rotating host; ToR; non-advocacy ground rules).
4. **Align to existing plans** (climate, biodiversity, tourism); pick 2–3 pilots with quick feedback loops.
5. **Build the data spine** early (baselines, indicators, periodic review).

Endnotes / Source Pointers

- *Feasibility Study (May 2024)*
- *Western Development Commission Regenerative Region Submission (Sept 2024)*
- *Mulranny Decarbonising Zone Huddle Report (Feb, 2025)*
- *Climate Connected Podcast (2025)*

Photo credits: Ruth Merkli and Buddila Wijeyesekera.



Get Involved. Take action.

If you're inspired to contribute to this initiative—or to start something similar—use the contacts below to get started:



Mulranny Community Futures - Mulranny, Co. Mayo



mulrannycommunityfutures@gmail.com



mulrannycommunityfutures.com

This case study, highlighting Irish community-driven solutions to environmental challenges, was developed through Connected—a project funded by the **Community Climate Action Programme: Climate Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing** (CCAP – Strand 2), supported by the Government of Ireland through the **Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications**, and coordinated by the **University of Galway**.

For more details, visit climateconnected.ie or contact a.alexandrov1@universityofgalway.ie