



# Reframe Landscape Character Assessment

Authors: Ruth Minogue, Karen Foley, Craig Bullock, Ronan Hennessy, Eilis Vaughan, Conor Norton, Pat Doherty and Laura Kearney

Lead Organisations: Minogue Environmental Consulting (MEC) Ltd, University College Dublin, Aegis Archaeology Ltd, Geoscene and Doherty Environmental Ltd and Loci Ltd.

## Identifying pressures

Landscape character assessment (LCA) is the process of describing variation in the character of the landscape and elements and identifying the features that make landscapes unique. LCA offers a means to integrate ecosystems services at scale while including character, place and cultural heritage considerations. These factors are frequently separated in assessments, resulting in a loss of opportunity for multiple benefits. The Reframe LCA project identified the absence of a coherent policy approach when it comes to LCA in Ireland. There is also a deficiency in the baseline information at national and regional scales, which makes it difficult to describe and assess landscape character and creates an inconsistent approach to landscape planning and management across scales and between authorities.

To address this challenge, Reframe LCA developed a comprehensive, step-by-step toolkit to support stakeholders, including state bodies, local authorities and community groups, in undertaking comprehensive LCAs at different scales across Ireland. The toolkit was piloted in a number of areas, including the River Shannon catchment and a smaller sub-catchment that has been subject to historical modification (e.g. drainage of wetlands, peatlands). A training module for continuing professional development that updates and refreshes the Heritage Council LCA continuing professional development course was also developed as part of the project.

## Informing policy

Landscape-scale responses are urgently needed to address national policy objectives, including those related to mitigation of and adaption to climate change, the agricultural and energy sectors, forestry and transport. These objectives interact across landscapes, and the commitments in the National Landscape Strategy 2015–2025 and the National Planning Framework require implementation and action. By looking to best practice in other countries, we can improve the implementation of LCA in Ireland. In Luxembourg for example, the Ministry of Culture has adopted an all-encompassing law that ties all strands of heritage together – archaeological, built and natural heritage, tangible and intangible – so that each can be properly accommodated and heritage capacity enhanced. Such best practice examples have been included in the toolkit and accompanying training module.

## Developing solutions

There is a need to commit to undertaking the key actions outlined in the National Landscape Strategy at national, regional and county scales. Education and awareness around landscapes and LCA are urgently required to increase capacity through all sectors. The roll-out of the LCA toolkit, support by capacity-building and training for stakeholders, would assist in bridging this gap. A consistent and holistic LCA approach at national or regional scale would provide a robust baseline to underpin the landscape considerations and assessment of key sectors that are required to address climate change and biodiversity, as well as recognise the sense of place articulated through Town Centre First policies.

