

Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC): Guiding principles



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The development of the IVC has been guided by the following six principles:

1. **It will be statistically based and validated.** A classification will be produced using a range of appropriate contemporary statistical methods and quantitative vegetation data from Ireland. Validation methods will be used to ensure that proposed categories are statistically robust. It will not seek to statistically reproduce categories of existing classification systems.
2. **It will be a vegetation classification.** A classification of vegetation communities will be produced not a habitat classification; thus, the fundamental categories will be produced based on floristic data analysis only. Environmental data (e.g., soil depth, altitude, inundation frequency) and management information (e.g., mowing regime, peat extraction) will be used *post hoc* where available to interpret categories and provide ecological meaning.
3. **It will recognise the vegetation continuum.** Plant species respond individually to changes along environmental gradients; thus, vegetation varies continuously across space and time. For practical purposes, a vegetation classification (which is an inherently artificial framework) seeks to identify the most frequently repeating combinations of plant species as communities. However, it should preferably also recognise that a proportion of vegetation will always be transitional between these communities.
4. **It will be user-friendly.** A classification will be produced which can be readily and consistently applied by the range of potential users. These will include field surveyors, scientific officers, environmental managers and planners, policy makers and academics.
5. **It will be hierarchical.** A classification will be produced with categories organised in a hierarchy. Categories at lower levels will be combined at high levels to produce categories of increasingly broader scope. A hierarchy will facilitate application of the classification at different scales and for a variety of purposes.
6. **It will be expandable and updatable.** A classification is only as good as the data on which it is based. To remain relevant, the classification should be updated and expanded as new data become available. This is particularly relevant when a phased approach to the development of the classification is likely. Web-basing of the classification will facilitate making and logging such changes and their immediate dissemination.