

Newsletter

An Fóram Uisce – looking after Ireland’s water resources

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An Fóram Uisce’s First Webinar

Webinar on Optimising Water Quality Returns from the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

An Fóram Uisce hosted its first online webinar in December. Dr. Charles Larkin from the Institute of Policy Research at Bath University was commissioned by An Fóram to carry out a Rapid Evidence Assessment research on how Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms could be optimized for water quality in Ireland. The webinar provided an opportunity to share and discuss the research findings with academics and experts. A Questions and Answers session followed, which was moderated

by Dr Tom Collins, Chair of An Fóram Uisce.

The research findings acknowledge the complexity of reforming the CAP to ensure that ecosystems are supported and that climate change is mitigated, while ensuring that households have access to affordable, sustainable and healthy food. It recognises that for many low-income farmers the reality is that it is “hard to be green if we are farming in the red”. But it also acknowledges that



cheap food can come at a price to the land and to water. Existing policies determine how our food is produced and are impacting on the quality of our waters, our biodiversity, and are contributing to climate change, the Larkin report says.

A fundamental conclusion from the Larkin Report is that CAP reform should be underlined by the principle of *public money for public goods*. The CAP provides financial supports to farmers to ensure a secure food supply across Europe. Since 1992 these supports have included requirements for pro-environmental and sustainable farm practice. A review of CAP measures for water quality in 2019 questioned the effectiveness of these supported measures. It recommended that direct CAP payments should be reconsidered in order to better support less profitable farms implementing farming practices beneficial for the environment and water resources *i.e. public money for public goods*.

For dairy farmers, 22% of their overall incomes comes from CAP subsidies, whereas for some sheep farmers it can be 100% of their incomes. This means that many farms are not economically robust and are therefore sensitive to changes in CAP policy and payment structures, and thus need to be supported through CAP or other means to protect, restore and improve water quality.

Discussion and Q&A

An Fóram Uisce would like to thank Professor Alan Matthews, Professor John Fitzgerald, Dr Lee Ann Jackson and Dr Michele McCormack for their contributions to the debate.

Alan Matthews noted the uniformity of CAP across the EU, one-size-fits-all does not work when translated into guidance for different farmers in different parts of the Union. The new delivery model needs to move towards performance-based approaches. The EU Commission have identified 9 objectives for CAP and 1 is specific to water and Ireland has flexibility on how it uses CAP funding to achieve water quality objectives.

John Fitzgerald warned that redesigning CAP to achieve environment benefits is a complex task. Working and delivery mechanisms for farmers and for administrators needs to be simple and easy; environmental outcomes need to be verifiable and easy for farmers to achieve.

Lee Ann Jackson acknowledged that agriculture provides challenges yet it can also be part of the solution. Food systems have a triple challenge of providing adequate food supplies, income for farmers and minimising environmental impacts. Policy needs to address these triple impacts, therefore policy integration is essential for positive outcomes.

Michele McCormack has surveyed farmers regarding measures for water quality and found they are willing to adopt measures if there are no additional costs. Public good provision through agri-environment channels can be difficult and a lot of care needs to be taken if using agri-environment schemes to address these complex issues.

Q&A

Charles's paper shows that agriculture is less and less significant in the Irish economy, with the number of farmers and farm output dropping; yet it accounts for 50% of impacts on water courses.

Agriculture is important politically and for communities. One must be concerned that there are a lot of low-income farmers and workers in the sector. The difference in income across agriculture types is striking. Dry stock enterprises do not give a return to the farmer even if beef prices were increased. We need to look at alternatives potentially paying for biodiversity and water quality.

Irish agriculture is highly export oriented; we need to defend its sustainability in a credible way. Consumer force can be one of the drivers to bring about the changes that are needed. Sustainability as a contribution has not gotten the proper recognition, however this could possibly be achieved through smart use of CAP to reward for flood protections, biodiversity etc. for less intensive farming.

Charles's report mentions the types of land eligible for payments and how making habitats suitable for biodiversity or letting land grow wild will make that part of the farm ineligible.

This was raised in the CAP reform negotiations and it is hoped there will be some movement on this, but it needs to be translated into the Irish context. The new CAP will give greater flexibility to Irish stakeholders to influence these decisions. Basic income support should also be explored.

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The difficulties of scaling up pilot results-based projects are highly relevant to agri-environment schemes. In the next round one approach could be, to put greater emphasis or premium on collective actions by farmers, group activities and schemes. Instead of focusing on individual farmers, there are greater environment benefits with landscape scale changes not just on a farm scale. Farmers can support each other and learn from each other. That way pilot schemes could be brought toward mainstreaming.

Different landscape types need to have measures tailored to individual areas and get buy-in from local farmers. Farmers need to be asked what farmers want to do. Development from the bottom up is important in this. Agri-environment actions needs co-production of solutions in sympathy with the farming community as well as the Irish society at large.

Recordings of the presentations and Q&A are available on Youtube at [An Fóram Uisce Webinar Q&A Session](#).

Research

In September, An Fóram commissioned research to explore the impacts of peatlands management on water quality. We are delighted to announce a draft report: *Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while delivering co-benefits for Climate and Biodiversity* has been submitted in early December, authored by Catharine Pschenyckyj, Emily Riondato, David Wilson, Kate Flood, Connie O’Driscoll and Florence Renou-Wilson.

We are expecting the final report in late January and look forward to beginning the discussion on policy recommendations for peatlands management to optimise water quality, climate and biodiversity returns.

An Fóram is planning on hosting a webinar in the Springtime to report on these research findings and contribute to the debate on the future of Ireland’s peatlands.



Water Services

National Water Resources Plan (NWRP)

Irish Water’s National Water Resources Plan is currently open for public consultation. This draft Framework is the first part of its National Water Resources Plan which sets out how supply and demand for drinking water will be balanced and managed over the short, medium and long term.

This is a 25-year strategy to ensure a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable drinking water is available to everyone.

Phase 1 of the draft Framework Plan identifies how water supply needs at a national level will be identified and the process that will be used to provide for those needs. The consultation invites feedback on the NWRP draft Framework Plan and associated Environmental Reports.

The public consultation will run until 1st March 2021 and all documents are available at www.water.ie/nwrp or at local authority planning offices.



Catchment Management

A submission has been made to the Department of Agriculture on the **Nitrates Action Programme** as part of the first phase of public consultation. This is the first phase of the consultation process with a second public consultation expected to be launched by the Department of Agriculture in March. An Fóram's submission is an overarching high level submission making recommendations for (a) strong policy coherence at National and EU levels; (b) the need for more detailed information to support the consultation process; (c) the need to ensure equity amongst stakeholders and addressing power imbalances; and (d) concerns over the short timeframes presented for

the consultation and decision making processes. This first submission will be available on our website and we look forward to participating in Phase 2 of this consultation process.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform launched a public consultation of the **Review of the National Development Plan** in November. The consultation sought input on the overall level of public spending on capital investment, what types of capital investment should be prioritised, how can governance of public investment be improved and feedback on communications. An Fóram made a submission to highlight; (a) the need for more detailed information to

support the consultation process thus enabling greater public engagement through the dissipation of power and knowledge imbalances; (b) greater policy coherence with spatial planning – An Fóram's Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management recommends spatial planning that takes account of all environmental components resulting in cost efficiency and environmental benefits and; (c) there has been a severe deficit in investment in water infrastructure and the NDP needs urgent targeted investment to deliver water and wastewater services, particularly to the Greater Dublin Region, in the short term.

Education and Awareness

National Science Week

For National Science Week, An Fóram prepared 3 short videos on the Magic of Water, these were widely viewed by schools across the country and are available at:

[Curious Chemistry](#)
[Phenomenal Physics](#)
[Ecological Wonder](#)

actions and report the activity on social media. Development Perspectives have also prepared an information pack to support learning about our water resources. It is available at: [SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation 2021 \(developmentperspectives.ie\)](#)

Learn more at: www.developmentperspectives.ie/SDGChallenge

Share you actions: [#SDG6](#) [#WaterMatters](#) [#Water@AnForamUisce](#) [@SDGchallenge](#)

Water Matters at Home

In order to raise awareness of simple actions everyone can do to reduce their impact on our water resources An Fóram Uisce has worked with the Local Authority Waters Programme to develop a short animated video called 'Water Matters at Home'.

The Forum is currently collaborating with Development Perspectives who are using the video as the basis for their Sustainable Development Goals SDG6 Challenge. The challenge is to watch the video, carry out some of the

Watch [Water Matters at Home video](#)



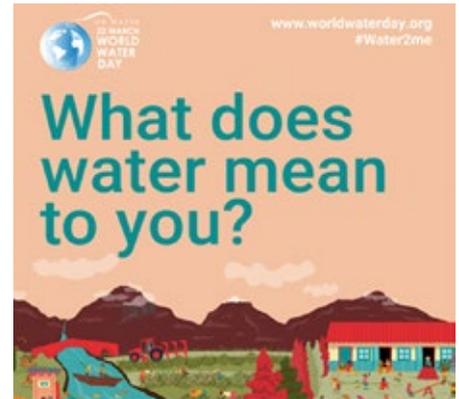
Upcoming Events

World Wetlands Day

Every year, on the 2nd of February, we celebrate **World Wetlands Day (WWD)** to raise global awareness about the high importance of wetlands for people and our planet.

“Wetlands and water”, the theme for WWD 2021, shines a spotlight on wetlands as a source of freshwater and encourages actions to restore them and stop their loss. Information on events is available at www.irishwetlands.ie

An Fóram Uisce Springtime webinar will discuss peatlands management for water quality.



World Water Day 2021, 22nd March

The theme for 2021 is Valuing Water ‘What does water mean to you’

- We want to hear from you
- Tell us what water means to you
- Share your views on social media
- Tag your post with #water2me

Find out more at:

www.worldwaterday.org
[#water2me](https://twitter.com/water2me)

An Fóram Uisce will use this information to develop our awareness and education campaigns going forward.

Members Area

Update from member organisations

Coastwatch invites you to join them to mark the 50th Anniversary of World Wetlands Day at their event on Water and Wetlands on **Monday 1st February from 4pm -6pm.**

Please book in by emailing bernadette@cef.ie who will forward the on-line zoom link.

The session will include a report on Coastwatch Autumn Survey water and wetlands results, trends and legal context.

Recent webinar presentations by the **National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS)** staff Sean Corrigan and Patrick McCabe as part of the Teagasc sustainable agriculture.

‘**Signpost Series**’ are now available to view on YouTube.

Check out our notifications on the news section of our website www.thewaterforum.ie

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