

Plenary Committee Meeting No. 31

Meeting held on the 23rd February 2021 via ZOOM

Minutes Agreed

- Attendees:** Tom Collins (Chair), Sinead O’Brien, Denis Drennan, Paul O’Brien, Dominic Cronin, Martin McEnroe, Neil Walker, David Wright, Gerald Quain, Suzanne Linnane, Bernadette Connolly, Ollan Herr, Charles Stanley-Smith, Brendan Fitzsimons, Connie Rochford, Barry Deane, Siobhan Ward, Tim Fenn, Liam Berney, Izzy Petrie, Derrie Dillon, Keith Hyland, Laurie Kearon & Tim Butter.
- Apologies:** Elaine McGoff, Jean Rosney,
- In attendance:** Gretta McCarron, Alec Rolston, Triona McGrath, Angelos Alamanos, Donal Daly and Donal Purcell
- EDI Consultant:** Hilary Curley
- Peatlands Research:** Florence Renou-Wilson, David Wilson & Cat Pschenyckj

Item	Details	Summary
1.1	Welcome	The Chair welcomed the members & staff to the meeting & in particular welcomed Triona McGrath as the new Research Lead. It was agreed that Connie Rochford would chair plenary meetings if there was a communications/internet breakdown or other issue for the Chair, Tom Collins
1.2	Minutes	Minutes of the Plenary meeting No. 31 – 23 rd February 2021 were agreed
1.3	Matters arising	none
2	Corporate Issues	<p>2.1 To receive update on the Forum’s expenditure for 2021 The A/SEO updated the members regarding the Forums expenditure to the 31st January 2021.</p> <p>2.2 Development of Equality & Diversity (EDI) Statement for the Forum The Chair welcomed Hilary Curley, Consultant who has drafted the EDI Statement in consultation with the Chair & staff. Hilary provided an overview of the process in developing the draft document & on the content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement for State Boards to have an EDI Statement based on the Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards, 2019. • Reviewed the work of the Forum in order to develop an EDI Statement. • Drafted a template, to assess the work of the Forum to date, Policy, submissions, annual reports, staff discussions • Aim of the work is to provide guiding principles and how to achieve the EDI statement. • Representation around the 9 grounds, working across the member groups, what groups are impacted by the Forums work, increase staff capacity for EDI. • Monitoring and reporting of EDI principles particularly in annual report. <p>Member feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement is a positive vision for engagement & the forum can do interesting work on

		<p>this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows the necessity for public engagement. • This area may make for an interesting research project on the public we need to engage/target & whose needs may not be included in current participation. • Important not to duplicate the debate. Query re the issue of people being able to participate in forum meetings the barriers might exist including childcare & eldercare needs. Executive to find out if these would be eligible costs for the Forum to contribute towards if they existed. • Query if we could include a point on socio-economic inequality, asking the Forum to add non-discriminatory and positive approaches to those caught in socio economic traps. Need to be conscious of language, background of the people. Hilary to consider this point • Inclusion of a reference to the SDG's incl. Perfect opportunity to include in this report, reducing inequality, responsible consumption, they need to be included in this. Hilary to consider this point. • Question of how the Forum would support member orgs to put forward reps to reflect the 9 criteria. <p>Hilary was of the view that the Forum could support best practice in these organisations, when nominating a rep that they think about 9 grounds, encourage nominations from a diverse backgrounds, support people to come forward and represent, provide support and encouragement, to engage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential of IBEC expert Dr Karen Mc Gowan who runs diversity and inclusion forums, could invite Karen to come and talk to us. • With the current volume of work idea of including other reps from the member Organisations in subgroups, with feedback on policy at main forum. TC share this conclusion, need to shift the burden of work off the members. <p>The Chair was of the view that in preparing a new strategic plan that the SDGs can provide a focus to that. The Chair thanked Hilary for her work & acknowledged that the Forum had made positive strides regarding gender balance on the Forum and its Standing Committees but that there was still more progress required. The statement contained some interesting ideas & suggestions for the Forum to reflect on.</p>
3.	Research Actions	<p>The Chair welcomed Florence Renou-Wilson & her Team to the meeting to report on the Peatlands Research: <i>Peatlands and their management for water quality, biodiversity and climate</i></p> <p>Priority recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To include social values in peatland management as these have been ignored in the past. Need to be identified and concluded to remove barriers and enable cooperation. Stakeholder map. Draft provided needs to be taken forward and developed to start the conversation between stakeholders • Check peatland management decision, to identify synergies, and conflicts, might need to protect climate v biodiversity, need to be id. • Make sure governance and legislation are implemented, WFD, Habitats, etc, • Ag and forestry governances is welcome, within the new CAP measures are very welcome. Payments for farmers to rewet agricultural peatlands. • research land use and land use change in peatlands and ecosystems approach. Schemes are not monitored properly; evaluations need to be shared in a public repository. Tight research network in Ireland so this would not be too difficult. <p>Role of AFU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform relevant stakeholders (begin with map) • To participate in research as actor/advisor, peatland research is now multidisciplinary. • RBMP 3rd cycle; important area out of this research is around compliance with treated water, raw water quality monitoring and interventions for raw water protection is that source protection is key. These interventions need to be considered now, with emphasis on source picked up with GWS already. Part of this monitoring is Total

Organic Carbon (TOC) and ammonia from these sources in catchments within the RBMP.

- Follow up on RBMP 2 to ensure Peatland's strategy is revised, licencing of 30 hectares is important for water quality and climate change is still not dealt with.

Discussion- Q & A

The Chair thanked the Florence & her Team & thought the work was a comprehensive read.

- *Definition in natural peatlands? emphasis bringing peatlands back to where they were 200 years ago, originally covered in trees.* Member was of the view that we do not have any intact peatlands in Ireland, least degraded and disturbed. Blanket bogs were never afforested in Ireland, blanket bogs and raised bogs were drier and there was forestry, but the climate changed. Climate and type of peat is not suitable with wind in west of Ireland for forests. Intensity is the issue here.
- *Rewetting is not restoration; we are not bringing back pristine peatlands.* Very anthropogenic managed response to bring back ecosystem services. Rewetting for the purpose of keeping peatlands wet, protect biodiversity, reduce CO2.
- Rewetting will bring back biodiversity, reduce carbon and water pollution.
- Positive presentation, concern for older people who cut a small amount of turf for home use, who cannot buy coal & wood which has to be dry, retrofitting a house is costing €20,000 + & is prohibitive. The chair was of the view that this is a good item for discussion as part of the carbon justice debate.
- Question of the Socio-economic effect on farming, rewetting grassland, effects of peat, peat needed for mushroom industry. Closing ditches, righting the water table which could impact the farm next door! A lot of farmers unhappy with the hen harrier project, what is the economic effects of this for farmers? Issue for neighbouring farmers.

Florence explained that less than 15% of peatlands is protected where we impose restoration and stop turf cutting. Gov needs to address the just transition issue. All the work so far on peatlands has been done in the midlands, but this is a small proportion. We have twice as much blanket bog as raised bog.

David Wilson explained that:

- looking from the top down to agriculture that emissions from grassland on peat soils is very high, 8 million tonnes per year out of a total of 30 million. Easy win for the agri sector.
- Pressure is building on agri to get this done in some shape or form. Difficult to do as it is hard to identify the fields that need these measures, to block drains know where they are and rewet successfully rather than flood. If done correctly will not flood neighbouring farm. Rewetting seeks to make moist they should not be flooded.
- Rewetting bogs from cutover, they have buffer zones so the agri land surrounding do not get wet. Fundamental for reporting purposes what has been rewetted and how successfully.
- Hard to find out how much grassland is on peat soils. Little knowledge of acreage that needs to be supported by compensation for the farmers, who essentially will be carbon farming.

Member comments/queries

- Socio-economic element is interesting, what about the midlands, how will that impact
- Has there been a survey of how much ag land is high carbon, contributing to high ghg emissions?
- Interesting presentation, it is general belief that we are 5 years away from quantitative figures on carbon sequestration from any soil. Years away linking CAP scheme to carbon with scientific rigour. Let us design something that has the ability to potentially sequester carbon, but we need new money for this public good, cannot use

the current CAP. In the UK, planting of forestry in peatlands has had to be uprooted because it was the wrong measure at the wrong time. Need more science, in order for farmers to get credit for carbon sequestration will not happen in this term.

David Wilson explained:

that with Agriculture there is 8 million of carbon released per year, if successfully rewetted CO2 sequestration will begin, but will be small per year, but cumulatively it will add up.

Must ensure we stop releasing carbon.

As soon as you rewet to keep the carbon in peat, then biodiversity draws down the carbon.

Kate explained that for Just transition, one of the recommendations provide bridging organisations or support existing orgs, need to connect the top and bottom, next report on just transition to develop a template for Ireland, 25 community groups getting funding, short term no longterm planning,

Community Wetland Forum (CWF) could be a bridging organisation, recommend that these existing groups are supported. BnM €103 million, CWF 250k for just transition, little equity. Innovative methods to create dialogue, such as a water quality citizen assembly, takes time and is more expensive but delivers more transparency and trust in the long term.

David explained that study on emissions from land use categories, with exception for forestry and natural peatlands everything else was a source of GHG, if it is drained it is a source. Tier 1 data for all land use sectors in Ireland, emphasis on moving to tier 2 or tier 3 each country has to measures sectors representing their own situation. Ireland has tier 2 data for peat and tier 3 for forestry. Very little data on grassland peat sources, not enough to base a tier 2 reporting on. If rewetting grassland is an issue, we need to get researching to determine the emission factor for this area, deep drained, shallow drained, nutrient rich and nutrient poor, there is not enough data. Without activity data, and the area of these sites we will struggle to rewet some and keep some drained.

- The Chair queried if anyone had developed a policy on carbon farming?

Florence explained that the UK and Germany are rewetting grassland but our climate is different so we could have better values in Ireland. Importance is to stop the emissions rather than sequestration. *REDUCING emissions is a big figure and is very important to tackle schemes existing and needs to be set up in Ireland.*

- Members queried re Trade-offs between different benefits, what would be the one or 2 recommendations for peatlands management, a lot of talk about rewetting not preservation of current peatlands?

Florence explained that not one size fits all for peatlands, BnM different options and outcomes, rewet a BnM cutaway might have vegetation that does not lead to good biodiversity but deals with climate and water issues, the ultimate is a natural peatlands, has biodiversity climate and water quality, cannot have that so we need to deal with each case individually.

No 1. Wet peat to prevent carbon emissions and reduce pollution to water

No 2. different avenues depending on case.

- Members were of the view that the research aligns with FILLM and, integrated approach to source protection taken in GWS. Drinking water protection, upland schemes with pressures from turf cutting grappling with these, using integrated approach. Needs template for engagement. Communities coming together to lead change within their catchment area. An example in Tydavnet, where peat is having an impact & where the community worked together. Core funding is an issue, GWS funding through their operational costs, compensating people to change practice. Need for the state to be more involved in this, the Forum can take a role in highlighting this in policy.

The Chair welcomed Alec Rolston to the meeting who had co-ordinated the call for this study & asked for his reaction.

- Alec was of the view that the key part of the next 6 months was around how to inform the next RBMP & that once the draft is published that the Peatlands report can be

		<p>included in the Forums response to the draft plan. Need to take stock of how to use this strategically, great resource also for GWS who had source protection in peat catchments. How can money be made available for communities to be brought along to improve water quality. THMs is truly a catchment scale issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triona McGrath queried about the impact of rewetting of the peatland in that while it stops carbon emission it releases methane & what is the balance between CO2 sink and methane release? <p>David Wilson explained that measuring per gram- more CO2 is taken up, rewetting will have some negative impact on climate change in that it will increase global warming but at a much less rate than if the Peatlands were left in their current condition without rewetting. Methane emissions reduced over 20-to-30-year period.</p> <p>Members queried about publishing the Peatlands report. The Chair explained that the Plenary can discuss the report at the next meeting including the actions to be taken & how to communicate it.</p>
4.	Education Actions	<p>4.1 To receive update on the Forums Communication & Education Actions</p> <p>The Education & Comms Lead updated the meeting in regard to progress on the education actions including the focus on World Water Day, the launch of the Water Matters Video and school competition results.</p>
5	WS Standing Committee	<p>The Chair of the WSSC referenced the response from the CRU to the Forums letter concerning the delay in progressing the EMWSP. The CRU response outlined that the NWRP needs to be completed to move forward to the EWSP. Members expressed frustration at the length of time it was taking to progress this & questioned if there was more the Forum could do to push this project forward. The Chair of the WSSC explained that the Standing Committee was seeking further clarification from the CRU on what they require from IW to complete their review of the EMWSP.</p>
6.	CM Standing Committee	<p>The A/SEO informed the meeting that the CMSC is meeting with the DHLGH on Friday to discuss the progress on the dRBMP</p>
7.	AOB	<p>The Chair explained the Post Doc. Angelo will be working work remotely from his home in Greece from now until the summer during the COVID restrictions.</p> <p>Gretta explained that the FILLM document includes a reference in the table to planting native woodlands</p>
8.	Date & time of the Next Plenary meeting	<p>23rd March at 10.00am</p>