



Plenary Meeting No. 55 (Hybrid)
Tuesday 5th December 2023
Agreed Minutes

Attendees: Matt Crowe (Chair), Bernadette Connolly, Keith Hyland, Connie Rochford, David Wright, Liam Berney, Tim Fenn, Denis Drennan, Gerald Quain, Martin McEnroe, Dominic Cronin

On Zoom: Neil Walker, Sinead O’Brien, Suzanne Linnane, Tim Butter, Jean Rosney, Derrie Dillon

Apologies: Ollan Herr, Barry Deane, Paul O’Brien, Charles Stanley Smith, Elaine McGoff, Siobhan Ward, Brendan Fitzsimons, Issy Petrie.

In Attendance: Donal Purcell, Gretta McCarron, Triona McGrath & Aisling Corkery

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.0	Welcome, Apologies & adoption of minutes of previous meetings	The Chair welcomed members to the meeting & apologies were noted. The draft minutes of Meeting no. 54 held on 24 th October & the Special meeting held on the RBMP on the 22nd November were approved by the members.	Minutes to be placed on the Forum website
2.0	Corporate issues	<p>2.1 Expenditure to 30th November AFU Expenditure to the end of November was €645,906 which is within budget for the year and is an increase on last year due to additional level of activity with meetings & workshops etc. The Forum hasn’t been informed yet re the funding allocation for 2024.</p> <p>2.2 Correspondence To note the Letter which was circulated to all members from Fintan Towey, Assistant Secretary DHLGH, inviting nomination from AFU to sit on WPAC which had already been agreed at the October meeting</p> <p>2.3 Forum Membership Nomination The SEO updated the meeting on the nomination of members for the next 3 year term where 13 of the existing members would be going for reappointment & 13 new members coming in the join the Forum bringing a range of new expertise.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed this & asked that the January plenary meeting be a fully in person meeting as it will be the final meeting for some</p>	<p>To send formal acknowledgement & nomination of Dr Matt Crowe as Ex-Officio Rep of the Forum</p> <p>SEO & Chair to prepare</p>

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		<p>members, some of who have been involved with the Forum since the beginning in 2017.</p> <p>With the new members coming in the Chair explained that it would be a good time to do a review of our governance, policies and procedures & to also look at the idea of establishing a Governance/Risk Management Sub-Committee</p> <p>Induction for new members: The SEO explained that an induction process for the new members will be undertaken in the spring 2024.</p> <p>Schedule of dates for Plenary meetings for 2024 was circulated. Next meeting 23rd January 2024.</p>	<p>groundwork for a Governance committee</p> <p>Team to prepare induction process for new members</p>
3.0	Water Services Customer Survey	<p>3.1 Presentation on the Water Services Customer Survey from Interactions Ltd (Research Company)</p> <p>The Chair introduced the presenter, Claire Rountree and the survey work. Claire gave the members an overview of the survey based on the document circulated in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Questions & Discussion</p> <p>Some members expressed a level of surprise that some Well owners didn't know where their water comes from.</p> <p>Is the survey representative of social status? <i>Yes</i></p> <p>Is there a breakdown of rural versus urban? <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>How many people drink tap water but filter it first? <i>Question not asked.</i></p> <p>Was bottled water drinking a lifestyle choice or boiled water notice? <i>To follow up and re-look at data.</i></p> <p>Is there information on who used bottled water, was there a reason? <i>The data is there to look at this and do the cross analysis.</i></p> <p>Were there a question to ask did they already have a meter? <i>No</i></p> <p><i>Comments:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have a lot of meters in the country but if the data isn't communicated to the customers their water use habits won't change and education opportunity is lost. ▪ This is one of the elephants in the room, this Forum should insist the Government put these meters in everywhere to monitor use, it is essential. ▪ Timing of meters was at the same time as charges, so we need to revisit this to help people detect leakage. ▪ Survey positive on metering and water conservation. Energy cost might contribute to this. ▪ The Forum should get an idea of the number of meters that are already there, including neighbourhood meters. 	Action: find out numbers of meter numbers and support smart metering

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is the investment in a change to Smart Meters worthwhile for conservation alone, CBA required or it will be hard to justify installing meters if they are not charging. ▪ Survey very positive re conservation and metering. ▪ New Drinking Water Directive might give the incentive to inform the public on their water usage, at the very least an annual usage update is required. <p>There is a large number of people on private water supplies, that don't get their wells tested, so they don't know the quality of water that they are drinking. They have to pay for their own test, so some supports on this could be required.</p> <p>There is a lack of awareness among well owners/private GWS that there are contamination issues with their well. This is often only discovered when a person/child comes to visit who isn't immune to the bacteria and becomes ill.</p> <p>Comment: There should be a national campaign by the Department on Our Water and the RBMP.</p> <p>Proposed Next Steps Discussed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support advice to EPA and LAs and communicating about well testing etc • Can Uisce Eireann give the customer maps to inform the public where their water comes from? • 2/3 cost of water is the disposal of water, we need to ask questions on where their water goes – wastewater survey <p>Top Line Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Extraordinary level of lack of awareness ➤ How strongly supportive people are about Water Conservation ➤ Very good information to discuss data with UE, GWS Dept etc ➤ Trust is lowest in public water supplies verses highest in private GWS and wells <p>Great support for the Forum's national policy position for water conservation. Useful information for UE and Rural Water sector.</p> <p>How long do we have before the survey is no longer relevant – <i>6 months should be reasonable.</i></p> <p>Comments</p> <p>We need to work quickly on awareness communication and work with UE to do this also.</p> <p>Suggestions that we could do this survey for the next five years.</p> <p>We could consider asking more specific questions on conservation e.g., what do you understand by water conservation.</p> <p>Need to consider that this survey was done during a very wet year, so answers might be different for different years.</p> <p>Presenter comment: Such a broad number of questions to start with, future surveys could be developed taking learnings from this survey.</p>	<p>Action: Follow up - Cost benefit analysis of smart metering</p> <p>Action: Team will discuss comms plan out of this, bring to water services committee.</p> <p>Action: Examine possibility of a follow up survey to form part of 2024 planning.</p>

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4.0	Policy & Research Actions	<p>4.1 Update on the recent WPAC meeting & next steps re RBMP The Chair & Research Lead updated the members on the recent WPAC meeting . It was explained that the DHLGH are Committing to interim review of the RBMP. There was a positive response to the AFU recommendations. Dept working on text to take on recommendations. After the WPAC meeting, the Forums submission was sent to the other WPAC members.</p> <p>Next Steps Chair explained that he intended to organise a bilateral meeting between the DHLGH & the Forums Chair & Executive for early in the New year.</p> <p>Discussion: Timeline: Q1 is very vague – how long more is the door open, we need to tease out what recommendations we did/didn't get included. <i>Response: Dept are under pressure from Brussels to get this submitted, would expect it could be submitted in March.</i> After the bilateral, Chair and Executive will have to make a judgement call on what is in and what is out and come back to the plenary with this (or perhaps have a CMSC meeting before January Plenary) Chair explained that the Executive will draft a plan for implementation, as most of next year will be working though the implementation engagements. He was also of the view that the Forum probably have had its last recommendations included & it is unlikely to make any further recommendations at this stage as the document needs to be finalised.</p> <p>Is the EPA Distance to Target Data finished? <i>Not fully complete but they will be publishing it. The appendices are in the plan but might not be made available to us in advance. Cannot see us making more recommendations.</i></p> <p>Department getting the funding for the Project Management Office is important. Do we know what the timeline is for the decision on the funding, should we be writing to a Minister? Business case needs to be made as part of workforce planning. We have included a strong recommendation regarding funding. Chair explained that the Forum should always issue letters of advice before any WPAC meeting. We should also engage separately with the Ministers on governance etc., especially after the RBMP is complete.</p> <p>4.2 Forums approach to the public consultation 2023/24 Nitrates Action Plan consultation. In the new year, presentation from Dept and potentially Nitrates Expert Group, develop draft submission.</p>	RBMP next steps proposals for Plenary, Comms plan, Implementation plan etc. most of next year will be implementation engagements. Need to invite all of the sectors in on their plans, ag, forestry, UE, OPW, Fisheries etc

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		<p>Climate action Plan consultation, call for expert advice, will review what has been included UE capital investment plan.</p> <p>Q. LA Climate action plans are out for consultation at the moment, is there any way to do a submission to those? The Research Lead Explained that the Forum had made a submission to each CARO office asking for it to be included in each Local Authority Climate Action Plan. She explained that Tipperary County Council had included some of the Forums recommendations.</p> <p>4.3 Response to invitation from LAWPRO for Forum Rep to be an Observer on the Oversight Committee</p> <p>SEO explained engagement details and proposed observer status on the LAWPRO Oversight Committee & that it is being proposed that the Chair or Staff Member would represent the Forum on the Committee.</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <p>Some members expressed concern re representation of the Forum on outside Committees & that it shouldn't be presumed that it is the Chair or a member of the Staff that would represent the forum. Important that any decision-making process to be with the members. Other members were of the view that the Forum is a voluntary committee and people give their time & that it has a talented and capable executive, the resources are there for the executive to do the heavy lifting. We are being asked to approve a recommendation, we are discussing this now. We should trust the executive to deliver what we ask.</p> <p>It is good to stop and have a reset, if we are going to be invited on to more bodies. We need to trust the independence of the executive.</p> <p>We don't want to become lazy members and leave everything to the Chair & Executive; this should be addressed under Governance Planning.</p> <p>Chair: It would be helpful to have a small sub-committee to discuss this. The 12-month review is a really good idea.</p> <p>In relation to risk, I think what LAWPRO are asking is low risk. Governance is about balancing risk and opportunity, particularly as we broaden our engagements.</p> <p>Does observer status mean a member/executive has the right to speak? - Yes</p>	

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		<p>It was agreed that a Representative from the executive would represent the Forum on the LAWPRO Oversight Committee with a review after 12 months.</p> <p>Brief update on Research & Policy actions Update on CCAC meeting</p> <p>Interreg Project (Building Blue Project – BUBBLE):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research Lead introduced a new call for an Interreg Project for North West Europe which is focused on water efficiency for domestic users: Drinking Water is a territorial challenge, This is in line with our role. The lead partner (Netherlands) are currently Looking for interest from International Partners to join the project. • They are looking to improve water supply resilience, they already have interested partners in NL, France, Germany, Luxemburg and UE in Ireland. • Proposing AFU could apply to be a partner, also supported by NFGWS. They wish to know how we would contribute and are positive about idea because of our role in policy. • Project fully aligns with what we have been doing over the past few years and we would be able to contribute by providing stakeholder input and potentially develop an Irish team, academics, UE, NFGWS, AFU. • Idea to possibly employ a Post Doc for 18months, we could lead the Cost benefit analysis which the Forum has advocated for. This would be a really good opportunity to engage with international experts in this field <p>Chair: We need to work out the details, it's not a bad idea. It's potentially a fairly detailed piece of work. A lot of new information, when does this decision need to be made? First step would be to approach the Dept for spend approval. Are we able to make non-committal interest?</p> <p>Q. what is the potential impact on the research budget? About Half would be used on this proposal.</p> <p>Project leads will develop the project proposal. There is a difference between being a stakeholder and partner in Interreg Projects, so this need to be established. What is the ask/role. It is good to explore and there is a lot we could learn.</p> <p>Is it Interreg project, partner or stakeholder? Need to clarify the ask because full partner is 60% funding, you can contribute time instead. Associate partner is less onerous. Consortium and Networking is a huge positive.</p> <p>Forum approved that further investigation be done on this.</p>	<p>Project to be discussed at the WSSC & then back to Plenary as it needs further teasing out</p>
5.0	Education & Communications actions	<p>5.1 Update on Education & Communication Actions The Comms & Education Lead explained that the Comms plan is being drafted by Carr Communications.</p>	

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		<p>BTYSE – need for volunteers, this is an enjoyable thing to do.</p> <p>Comment: Experience with students and teachers to date shows lots of interest in social aspects of water but very little on the hard science. Might need to work on that aspect of the award.</p>	
6.0	AOB	<p>6.1 Any other Business</p> <p>Martin McEnroe gave an update on the IAS National Committee: They are now employing a company to do necessary work on pulling everything together by Q2 next year.</p> <p>IFI & National Angling organisations see a huge threat to west of Ireland Salmonid rivers, legislation is being put in place. If people are moving boats from the Shannon to West of Ireland, they will need a Cert from a recognised boat cleaner before it is allowed in the West of Ireland</p> <p>Invasive grass species found on Shannon, has spread to the Corrib. Result and outcomes of Stakeholder workshops will be given to the committee.</p>	
7.0	Next meeting	<p>Tuesday 23rd January 2023 at 10.30am in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin</p> <p>Tuesday 16th January for CMSC meeting @10am on ZOOM</p>	