



Plenary Meeting No. 58
Tuesday 23th April 2024
Aisling Hotel
Minutes

- Attendees:** Tadhg Buckley, Eamon Carroll, Dominic Cronin, Maria Snell, Connie Rochford, Keith Hyland, Charles Stanley-Smith, Michael Kenny, Maria O’Gorman, Marie Doyle, Martin McEnroe, Barry Deane, Jean Rosney, Neil Walker, Constanze O’Toole, Ciaran Maguire, Steve Conlon, Eimear Manning, David Downes.
- Apologies:** Matt Crowe, Karin Dubsky, Fintan Kelly, Elaine McGoff, Sinead O’Brien, Karan O’Loughlin, Suzanne Linnane & David Wright.
- In Attendance:** Donal Purcell, Gretta McCarron, Aisling Corkery, Triona McGrath
- Researchers:** Dr Cara Augustenborg, Patricia Lentz & Anne Pender (UCD)

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.1	Welcome & Minutes	<p>1.1 Welcome and apologies.</p> <p>THE SEO explained that the Forum Chair, Matt Crowe was unavailable to attend today’s meeting due to illness. It was agreed that Keith Hyland Chair of the WSSC would chair the meeting in his absence. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Minutes of Meeting No. 57 held on 12th March 2024 were agreed & adopted.</p>	Amend attendees for previous minutes and place minutes on the website
	Research Presentation	<p>2.1 Introduction to the Research by Dr Triona McGrath</p> <p>The Research Lead provided a background to the research to be presented at the meeting</p> <p>2.2 Presentation of the Research Report on the <i>“Review of water and marine related commitments within Ireland’s Programme for Government: progress, challenges for implementation and gaps in existing commitments on the Progress on Water Activity from the Programme for Government.”</i> by Dr Cara Augustenborg, Patricia Lentz & Anne Pender, Environmental Policy, UCD.</p> <p>Dr Augustenborg introduced and presented the Programme for Government (PfG) Project.</p>	

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>Ireland has created a lot of environmental policy over the last number of years, 28 commitments are related to water and 20 related to marine.</p> <p>Implementation of these policies is challenging (the Achilles heel).</p> <p>Project Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess progress & barriers to water and marine commitments in the Programme for Government • Identify emerging issues or gaps • Recommendations to improve implementation <p>This research included 87 Stakeholder interviews over the past 3 years (includes interviews conducted as part of previous assessments) with 12 more interviews specific to water commitments carried out as part of this research project.</p> <p>3 Questions that were asked during interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you update us on commitments? • Any barriers to achieving commitments? • Emerging issues or gaps not reflected in PfG. (<i>SWOT = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats</i>) <p>Commitments were grouped in relation to Infrastructure and Uisce Eireann, Water Quality and Conservation, and Marine Sustainability. Progress was marked under the following headings: Extent of actions, Quality of processes, Outcome achieved/not achieved, Overall score.</p> <p><i>Drinking and Wastewater Infrastructure (C+)</i></p> <p>S: Significant investment in infrastructure and leakage reduction W: Implementation process – treatment of wastewater, Well upgrades, PWS on RAL O: Drinking Fountain/Water refill installations (via DHLDH) T: Admin burdens e.g. application requirement, lack of specialist resources</p> <p><i>Water Quality & Conservation (only 9 commitments) (F+)</i></p> <p>S: Strong stakeholder engagement for the 3rd RBMP, Water Act (Abstractions) 2022. W: Implementation – WFD commitments, delayed publication of RBMP, lack of investment in water consumption/conservation research. Responsibility for water legislation split between Depts. O: Expansion of ASSAP, JOC on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services recommendation for Excess Water use Charge T: Lack of ICM, Fragmented Departments, Under resourcing, Climate change impact.</p> <p><i>Marine Sustainability (C)</i></p> <p>S: Progress on most commitments, including overfishing enforcement W: Overfishing, NMPF implementation, Project Ireland Marine 2020 progress, MPA Legislation delays. O: Marine planning/development (NMPF), MARA.</p>	

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>T: Climate and marine policy have a lack of cohesion (renewable energy and marine protection not joined up), Insufficient planning, lack of resource capacity.</p> <p>Same 5 Barriers in all Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Barriers • Capacity Barrier • Planning Barriers • Lack of Political Will • Policy Making Barriers (Government Structure Barriers) <p>If you address one of these barriers there may be a positive cascading effect on all the others. Addressing issues in a more systematic way to implement policy faster.</p> <p><i>Emerging Issues:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure</i> • <i>Water Quality & Conservation</i> • <i>Marine Sustainability</i> <p><i>Cross Cutting Issues</i></p> <p>Alignment/Coherence of policy areas, Increasing workload & commitment (lack of resources), Declining funding/staffing.</p> <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address financial and staffing resources (audit) • Greater collaboration • More innovative policy and implementation tools • Identifying administrative barriers • Priorities action on Water Quality and Conservation commitments (need to be more specific) • Future assessments of Programme for Government <p>Q&A and Discussion</p> <p>Q: Who was interviewed as part of the process? How did you decide on NGOs, IFA, State Agencies across Agriculture and Conservation. Who was interviewed within the Civil Society category?</p> <p>A: For the 2023 interviews, we sent out a request to 100 but only received a response from 46.</p> <p>Q: What are your thoughts on water charges being included in the new Programme for Government?</p> <p>A: Funding is always an issue/challenge, there has been a history of underfunding for water services, the lack of water charges is impacting this. We need to talk about it but there has been huge damage politically because of previous experience. It needs to be discussed but is there political will?</p> <p>Comment: Concerns with Mariculture in Fish Fin Farming, two species (wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout) have been affected because of sea lice. The other issue is invasive species, while the plan has been drafted and progress has been slow. National Biodiversity Centre are dealing with an eTender process but it is being delayed. There is no Minister</p>	

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>for Inland Fisheries now, Mariculture is under Dept Ag, MARA has been set up but this is not under their remit.</p> <p>Comment: Fantastic piece of work, very useful but quite damning – promises being made are not being fulfilled. Discussion needs to be around what are we going to do about this.</p> <p>Comment: This exercise should be done on an annual basis</p> <p>A: A detailed description of the progress is presented in the Appendix, the Forum could amend and update this.</p> <p>Comment: Need for succession planning in Water services, transition of LA staff, there is a huge amount of work to be done in the LA sector.</p> <p>Q: Did you include the upgrade of septic tanks and leakage</p> <p>A: Answers were negative; funding is available for septic tanks but there are administrative burdens.</p> <p>Comment – there has been recent developments on this; the Admin burden has since been reviewed.</p> <p>Q: Where did you get information on the overfishing?</p> <p>A: Interviews with stakeholders and their response to the questions. If it is not included in the PfG, we didn't analyse it.</p> <p>Q: Always going to have conflicting challenges and goals, there are always unintended consequences. Anything we do from a land use perspective has a knock-on consequence. Can't make changes in one part of policy and not think about consequences in other areas.</p> <p>Comment: The lack of certainty in Funding is very important – for example some state bodies find it challenging to get new staff as majority of contracts are non-permanent.</p> <p>Q: The comment about Agriculture having increasing impact on rural water supplies, what did you mean by this? Is this on Abstraction or public water supply?</p> <p>A: Concern that abstractions are small but accumulative, so they could have a bigger impact than we think. Abstraction – if you have bigger herds, you have bigger abstractions.</p> <p>Comment We don't know the cumulative volume abstracted, so we need to raise awareness that If the water is taken when the river is in drought this increases the environmental stresses –</p> <p>Q: It takes a long time for policies to be put in place and for groups to be able to access funding. Looking at schemes to support farmers (to restore degraded peatland, there is a desire for it, but it is not there on the ground yet)</p> <p>A: This falls under administrative burdens</p> <p>Q: Very interesting research, are you planning to get it peer reviewed?</p>	

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>A: Submitted paper on overarching barriers and will look to submit another on emerging issues.</p> <p>Q: Have you had any interaction with NESC on this topic. A: We are familiar with their work but haven't engaged with them.</p> <p>Q: There is a communication issue around grants available. If UE found there was a lead connection, they wrote to house to say it needed to be fixed (This was the only way people knew about the lead grant). There are people that will avail of Septic Tank grant but there needs to be huge communication on how to do this. A: Yes, this is covered in administrative burdens – It is only the people that are going out of their way to find out more information on available grants. This is also seen in other areas like energy schemes/grants.</p> <p>Q: Surprised UE have achieved B in their wastewater commitments A: The Commitments in PfG are very specific and achievable, this is why they score high.</p> <p>Q: Easy to understand report, why didn't we do this before? Hope this will be done on an annual basis. We have to be working now on what we want to say to an incoming government. There needs to be balance on the economic view – nobody is viewing what a loss of our environment will do to our economy.</p> <p>Comment: Members should consider reading the NESC report on National Capital Accounting</p> <p>Q: Grading System – there are few items that have been progressed since the report came out. Should this be updated? A: There is nothing to stop the Forum including these items to change the gradings if things have changed (discussed how to do this for actions, progress, outcomes). The results presented are based on a series of interviews over a fixed time. The assessment is restricted by the List of actions in the PfG, there are very few for water quality, the action to comply with the WFD is not specific enough/too broad, difficult to measure and even achieve, it could be broken down in future PfGs into a series of measurable actions where progress can be monitored, so achievements can be shown.</p> <p><i>The researchers were thanked for their presentation and contributions to the meeting and departed at this stage.</i></p> <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the Department that AFU is publishing this. • We should look into updating the table of grades as some of the items have progressed. 	<p>Research Lead to Engage with CA to discuss feasibility of</p>

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is up to the Forum to decide if we agree or not with the contents of the report– we still need to decide what our advice is. • Much of it is subjective (it is an opinion of the researcher). • Important to remember that it is qualitative research, which is a common interview type within this type of research. We have to trust the integrity of the research. • Every research project we have commissioned has been published on the Website, we need to publish it as a report to the Forum, but we need to have consensus on how we proceed with Communications on the report. • Concern that one of the recommendations is increased funding to a specific NGO. 	<p>reassessing the grading for WQ prior to publication of Research report.</p> <p>Discussion on Research to policy advice needed</p>
2.1	Corporate Update	<p>3.1 Update on Forums expenditure to 31/12/24 Expenditure to end March 2024 is €121,993</p> <p>3.2 Correspondence The Forums Annual Report for 2023 is to be submitted (English & Irish versions) to DHLGDH by the deadline of April 30.</p> <p>3.3 Approval to establish Governance Sub-Committee & approval of Membership of the Sub-committee. The SEO provided a back ground on the establishment of a Governance Sub-Committee which would support the Forum in developing effective governance including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with the DHLGH to ensure that governance practices are consistent with its needs & appropriate to the Forum, • Building Forum competence and adherence to best practice, • Establishing & revising succession planning processes for Forum/Organisation leadership • Developing a governance risk register in-line with best practice & link to AFU draft risk register & monitor actions <p>The Plenary agreed to establish Governance Sub-Committee and approved the following membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matt Crowe – Forum Chair • David Wright - Social Housing • Dominic Cronin - Agriculture • Sinead O’Brien - Environment • Karan O’Loughlin - ICTU • Dónal Purcell - SEO <p>Terms of Reference to be drafted & discussed by the Sub-Committee with final approval by the plenary Q: How long will the term be? A: 2-3 years, this will be put in the TOR</p> <p>3.4 Approval of Membership of Public Participation Sub-Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connie Rochford 	<p>Draft TOR for governance sub-committee</p>

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominic Cronin • Suzanne Linnane • Jean Rosney • Sinead O'Brien • Michael Kenny • Charles Stanley Smith • Karin Dubsky • Constanze O'Toole <p>Discussed PPT committee membership to consider outcomes of PTT Research.</p> <p>Comment: Youth Representative is available for committee to reach out if youth views are required.</p> <p>Sub-committee membership was approved by the members.</p> <p>Discussed Annual EPA Water Conference (Galway Bay Hotel, June 12-13th).</p>	
.1	Policy and Research Actions	<p>3.1 Research & Policy Update</p> <p>Policy Update - WSSC</p> <p>Briefing from Douglas Kelly, Rural Water Section (DHLGH) to the WSSC meeting on 22nd March 2024.</p> <p>GWS will be discussed at next meeting (30th April)</p> <p>Discussed Field Trip to GWS in Roscommon on Tuesday 21st May meeting</p> <p>Introduction to GWS & NFGWS, looking at source protection, treatment and network management.</p> <p>Q: Can members who are not on the WSSC go to the GWS Field Trip. A: Would encourage anyone who is interested to attend</p> <p>Research:</p> <p>Research on Private Wells (Project – Private Household Well: Policy Recommendations to Improve Supports and Communications) – Following evaluation - Research Awarded to Dr Paul Hynds (TUD), Prof Eoin O'Neill & Dr Simon Mooney (UCD). Research will continue until September, and we will arrange a presentation to members.</p> <p>Update on CBA Research</p> <p>Following evaluation research was awarded to Prof John Gallagher and Prof Laurence Gill.</p> <p>Proposing to have a steering committee for this project (Suzanne Linane, Neil Walker, David Wright, Charles Stanley Smyth, Triona McGrath, Aisling Corkery and Kevin Murray (UE).</p> <p>Suggestion that representative from NFGWS be included. Steering Committee for CBA approved by members.</p> <p>Upcoming Policy Consultations to be presented</p> <p>WSSP, Water Supply Project, CRU stakeholder consultations</p> <p>Member Comment: The way UE are communicating incidents are falling below standard needs to be improved. Future work on UE communications may be required.</p> <p>Water Services Policy Statement</p>	<p>Add NFGWS Representative to CBA Steering Committee. Invite Kevin Murray to sub-committee.</p>

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>Comment: Water Service Policy Statement was published, and some of the Forum’s recommendations were not taken onboard. Executive have done a preliminary tracking of recommendations.</p> <p>On a positive note, the DHLGH have said they will have a Water Conservation Team, and they have cited the work of the Water Form. They didn’t take onboard our restructuring advice but maybe there are reason why which we need to find out.</p> <p>Presentation from DKIT to CMSC on PPT Research (10th April). The public participation working group will be re-convened to look at next steps.</p> <p>Nitrates Action Plan Consultation (30 days) At least two Meetings will be required during consultation to facilitate the development of Forum’s submission (a possible May date TBC)</p> <p>RBMP – No date yet, perhaps May/June</p>	<p>Re-establish PPT Working Group.</p>
4.0	<p>Education & Communications actions</p>	<p>4.1 Update on Communication & Education Action</p> <p>Catchment Science fieldtrip: Field Trip for the plenary on Catchment Management on 9th July @10am Meet in Portlaoise – Introduction to Science of Catchment Management. Site visit to local river catchment.</p> <p>Water Climate Event In person Water Climate Event to be held in October/November 2024 (Venue: Midlands or Dublin venue) Discussed who would be invited and what would be discussed during each of the sessions (3 Sessions) Outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of Climate change on water resources incl. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentations of Water Forum Research findings • Climate adaptation - Agencies (presentations & panel discussion) focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flood management ○ Drought management • Local Climate Action – Community & Sectoral perspectives – • Just transition presentations & panel discussion <p>Asking for Forum Members thoughts/ideas Members would like to make it as participative as possible, don’t use Slido, open discussion is better. Format to include Panel Discussions, members would prefer to give more time to audience questions. Water Climate Event approved; Executive will proceed with planning the event.</p> <p>AFU Publicity Comms lead explained that the Water Customer Survey had got a lot of coverage in the Media nationwide (RTE, Irish Independent, Drivetime etc). The Spring Newsletter is in design</p> <p>Education:</p>	<p>Members to send Gretta their Organisations contact details.</p> <p>Team to proceed with planning the event.</p>

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<p>Second Transition year Education Module (Global Impacts of our water use) was launched yesterday for Earth Day. Module 3: Freshwater Habitats is being designed Awareness campaign on Water DAFM proposed national Public Awareness Campaign on Water for Farmers LAWPRO want DHLGH to run a similar awareness campaign for the public & to share position paper with the Forum.</p>	<p>Executive will engage with LAWPRO on progress.</p>
5.1	AOB	<p>5.1 AOB The SEO referred to the member workshop on 12th March & that the report had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Invasive Alien Species. The Forum to request an update from the Department on the progress on developing the IAS plan.</p> <p>The June Plenary is due to be held virtually on zoom as the EPA Water Conference is on the following two days, suggested that we may need to consider holding the meeting in person to further discuss the programme for government research.</p>	<p>Request update on IAS progress.</p>
6	Confirm date for next Plenary meeting	<p>7.1 Confirm the date & location of the next Plenary meeting. 11th June currently planned as a virtual meeting on ZOOM</p>	

•