

Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 11th June 2024
Online – Zoom
Minutes

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Dominic Cronin, Maria Snell, Martin McEnroe, Neil Walker, Michael Kenny, Maria O’Gorman, Keith Hyland, Connie Rochford, Karin Dubsy, Sinead O’Brien, Charles Stanley-Smith, Marie Doyle, Ciarán Maguire, Jean Rosney, David Downes, David Wright

Apologies: Tadhg Buckley, Eamon Carroll, Suzanne Linnane, Fintan Kelly, Elaine McGoff, Constanze O’Toole, Barry Deane, Steve Conlon, Karan O’Loughlin, Eimear Manning

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

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.0	Welcome & Minutes	<p>1.1 Welcome and apologies The Chair thanked Keith Hyland for stepping in as Chair for the April meeting. The Chair proposed a vote of condolence to Karan O’Loughlin on the passing of her mother (RIP) which was acknowledged by the members present.</p> <p>1.2 Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting no. 58 held on 23rd April 2024 (attached) The Minutes of the April plenary meeting were approved by the members with one amendment to a typo. Page 2 sentence stating, “This includes 87 stakeholder etc, change “which” to “with”. This was agreed.</p> <p>1.3 Matters arising from the minutes None</p>	Minutes to be updated and published on Forum website
2.0	Corporate Update	<p>3.1 Update on Forum’s expenditure to 31/05/24 The SEO explained that the Forum’s expenditure to the end of May 2024 was €253,304.37. The Dept. had written to the Forum & requested information on the budget forecast for the year end of 2024 and projections for 2025 with both to be submitted by 24th June 2024. Discussed budgets for both 2024 and 2025. The SEO explained that the budget for 2025 would see an overall increase of about €36,000 to allow mainly for increases from the new Public Service Pay Agreement wage agreement. Proposing for the research budget to be the same as in 2024; €72,000 to support 2-3 research projects and technical assistance.</p>	

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		<p>Communications and Education budget also similar to 2024 €71,000. To promote the work of the Forum (Newsletters, Workshops, Media Engagements etc); Design of Policy Briefs, Factsheets, Podcasts etc; Education & Awareness (BTYSTE, dissemination with teachers etc). Comment: Q. The budget seems a bit tight, is there sufficient room for inflation? A: The SEO explained that the Forum will have an increased budget amount for salaries in 2025 to provide for increments due along with any general salary increases to be applied in line with the new Public Service Pay Agreement 2024-2026. The general spending proposed outside of this is broadly in line with other years.</p> <p>Comment: Looking at the report and projections, there isn't any mention of linking with Europe or Wider, is there a possibility to highlight that a natural resource such as water doesn't have boundaries. A: The chair explained that we are just discussing budget under the headings. We can choose to link with the EU in the future particularly under Communications & Education, particularly the SDGs and OECD guidance on water governance but this shouldn't affect the budget.</p> <p>Comment: Agree research budget seems low this year. We did have a policy of supporting graduate students to do smaller projects, are we still doing that? A: Research Lead explained that we have not done the Early Stage Research Bursary Projects in a few years, there was a lot of work managing and reviewing multiple research projects and the standard of the research reports varied considerably. We can review this as we decide on what research topics to cover next year.</p> <p>Chair: It is prudent to budget for a similar amount as 2024 along with the salary increases, if we found we wanted to invest more in research there shouldn't be a problem going back to the Department. There is a research strategy, so we may need to revisit this after the release of the RBMP.</p> <p>2.2 Update on meeting between AFU Chair & Executive with Asst. Secretary, Water Division, DHLGH</p> <p>The Chair explained that he along with the SEO & Research Lead had been invited to meet with the Assistant Secretary & Water Unit Heads of DHLGH re Water Forum Governance on the 16th May. The Department are putting their own governance structures in place & intend to meet 3 to 4 times per year with the Forum. It is a good opportunity to explain what the Forum does. Once the Forum has its own governance Sub-committee up and running it would be beneficial to get this Committee involved with discussions with the Department going forward. When the meeting notes are finalised, they will be circulated to the members. Propose to hold the first Governance Sub Committee meeting before September.</p> <p>2.3 Correspondence (attached)</p> <p>The SEO explained that the Forum has written to the Minister requesting a meeting with him to discuss the implementation of the RBMP once it is published/launched.</p>	<p>Schedule Forum governance sub-committee meeting</p>

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3.0	Policy and Research Update	<p>3.1 Approval to Publish & Disseminate the Research Report on water commitments within Ireland’s Programme for Government by Dr Cara Augustenborg, Environmental Policy, UCD. (information circulated)</p> <p>Research Lead explained that she discussed concerns raised by Forum members at the April Plenary with the researcher Cara Augustenborg. Report is updated at follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions were reviewed and rearranged to better reflect water quality • Details of those interviewed is in the Appendix • Reviewed the figure on grade scores, it is now presented as % of progress and much more transparent • Recommendation for funding future assessment was revised. <p>There is still a reference to Friends of the Earth (FoE) assessments as they are the only body that have done this type of analysis into Programme for Government commitments. Comment: While the recommendation for future funding was revised to remove reference to FoE, the preamble for this recommendation still references FoE. There is a concern that the ToRs for this project were more favourable to researchers who were involved in FoE Report cards relative to those who were not.</p> <p>A: Research Lead explained that all research projects are advertised in the same manner, shared across third level institutes and research bodies and shared on our website and social media channels. We can review the process again for future research projects. Chair: This can be discussed with the newly established Governance Sub-Committee. The research strategy and procedures can be reviewed. This particular project is completed, so we need to close it out, but take learnings for future projects.</p> <p>Comment: This is a very valid point and raises issues in the governance of research. It’s good to take the learnings forward to the governance committee.</p> <p>Chair: Would like to thank Research Lead for going back to discuss issues with researchers, while maintaining the integrity of the process. We will learn from this in terms of future design of research. It is far better for the members to get excited about the research than not be excited at all. When I read the report the standout thing for me was the small number of general actions for water quality. These need to be stronger with more specific actions.</p> <p>The members approved the report & policy brief for publication and dissemination.</p> <p>Public Participation Report Updated by the PPT Working Group and it is now ready for publication. LAWPRO are already incorporating some of this research into then Catchment Community Fora Workshops. Report Approved for publication and dissemination.</p>	<p>PfG Research Report & Policy Brief to be published on website as report to the Forum.</p> <p>PPT Research report to be published on website as report to the Forum.</p>

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		<p>3.2 Update from Water Service Standing Committee</p> <p>3.2.1 To consider the Forum’s draft Policy position on the Future of Group Water Schemes.</p> <p>Research Lead explained that the WSSC needed some more time on the details of this position, so will give some time for further discussion at the July plenary.</p> <p>3.2.2 Uisce Eireann WSSP Public Consultation.</p> <p>Briefing held last week on this consultation, again we will be talking with the WSSC on this at the next meeting and will propose a final submission for early July.</p> <p>3.3 To note the feedback provided to LAWPRO re. content/format of upcoming scoping workshops for the development of the Catchment Community Fora.</p> <p>To support the Piloting of 5 Catchment Fora - LAWPRO and Quality Matters gave a presentation to the Forum’s Public Participation Working Group. Forum members gave input at the meeting but also requested to provide further input to questions being designed for the scoping workshops. The Research Lead compiled input from members of the working group and made 12 recommendations to LAWPRO/Quality Matters. Engagement to date has been very positive.</p> <p>SEO: Positive that we were able to give feedback to LAWPRO, and that the public participation research is being used.</p> <p>Comment: Member noticed that the first scoping CCF workshop due to run in Dundalk was supposed to be in July and it has now been postponed to latter in the year, in order to refine the process.</p> <p>Comment: What is the timeline for the consultation workshops?. Do you expect to get feedback on the consultations (attendance etc)?</p> <p>A: The process is going ahead in the absence of a published RBMP. If there’s not enough people signing up, they’ll have to delay it or look at how they can get more people on board. We should get feedback from LAWPRO as it develops.</p> <p>Chair: It is positive that we can offer advice, but the Forum needs to ensure we don’t get drawn into the detail too much.</p> <p>3.4 To note the recent publication of draft RBMP as part of the NIS process & updated traffic light assessment</p> <p>Research Lead explained that the latest draft of the RBMP was published with the public consultation of the Natura Impact Statement and that she has reviewed the impact of the Forum’s 20 specific recommendations made to the DHLGH over the last 6 months.</p> <p>The Department have incorporated the majority of the Forum’s recommendations exactly as we have asked. The Forum has influenced this policy report more than any other. This is a positive impact after extensive engagement with the members during this extended consultation.</p> <p>Emailed the EPA and they explained that the Distance to Target Report will be published around the time the RBMP publication.</p> <p>Many new actions were added following Forum’s recommendations, for example updated the actions to include the details and commitment to</p>	

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		<p>address 216 waterbodies at risk from forestry, along with a commitment to incorporate the HYDROFOR recommendations. Also new actions to address pearl mussel waters and bathing waters.</p> <p>Q: Where is the Forum at with the RBMP document, where are we going with this from here on? A: The Chair explained that the final document will be going to Government in the next few weeks. Once it is approved by Government it becomes the 3rd RBMP. The Forum will be doing communications around the publication. Our next piece of formal advice will be to the Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC) and further advice to the Minister on the implementation of the RBMP. When talking about the plan publicly we need to acknowledge that our recommendations are included but it is only worthwhile if the recommendations are implemented.</p> <p>Comment: Well, done to the team and would it be possible to share the traffic light assessment slides with the members. A: Yes, we can share the detailed assessment analysis.</p>	<p>RBMP Traffic Light Assessment to be shared with the members</p>
4.0	<p>Education & Communications actions</p>	<p>4.1 To discuss the draft communications plan for the RBMP The Education & Comms Lead explained that it is proposed to do National media messages around the RBMP, highlighting considerable engagement between the Forum and the Department and the numerous meetings with Agencies over the past 3 years. We have 3 years to deliver the plan, so it is important that we emphasise the need to focus on implementation and actions.</p> <p>Propose to develop an explainer for the Media – target specific media outlets (Farmer Journal etc, social media, regional media – to discuss the water quality measures and actions in each) Hoping to have information on RBMP Launch/photos etc for the press release.</p> <p>Chair: Key message is that we welcome the engagement and inclusion of the Forum’s recommendations, but we will be forceful on the need for rapid implementation and evidence that the implementation is happening. Will need to have advice ready if the implementation is not happening quick enough. Will let you all know when the plan is going to be released.</p> <p>4.2 Communications update Update on the Water Service Field Trip to GWS on 21 May Discussed Fieldtrip to Roscommon GWS and thanked the NFGWS for hosting the Forum.</p> <p>Chair was quoted in the Irish Independent Newspaper on septic tanks and was also interviewed on Cork Radio. The 3rd Education Module “Freshwater Life and Habitats” shared with schools and Scoilnet.</p> <p>The 4th Education Module is in design - for launch in September, want to include teachers, education centres, Scoilnet etc – Hope to launch it to coincide with World Rivers Day.</p>	

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		<p>4.3 Update on the Water Climate Event to be held in November 2024 Save the Date: 20th November, Tullamore Court Hotel Discussed the reasons behind the Conference, who will be presenting, what will be presented, how the day will run.</p> <p>Comment: How much of the Conference is going to be one person speaking to many as opposed to many people contributing? Participation is key, there are things to say and there is a need for people to engage.</p> <p>Chair: Would be great if this Conference can kick start the conversation on Water and Climate within your own sectors to get people to join the dots.</p> <p>Comment: A member expressed concern that the Forum plenary sessions are sometimes too passive; we are here for discussion – will take this up under Governance in the Autumn.</p> <p>Comment: Happy that you made the connection between the water and climate issues and the sectors. Will members be updated on the Conference as planning develops. Reiterate that the conference needs to be a creative space with space for conversation.</p>	
5.1	AOB	<p>5.1 AOB SEO: Hope to see people at the EPA Water Conference in Galway</p>	
6	Confirm date for next Plenary meeting	<p>7.1 Confirm the date & location of the next Plenary meeting. Plenary Fieldtrip/ Meeting on Catchment Management – 9th July Portlaoise - SEO discussed details Plenary Meeting Tuesday 10th September in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin</p>	