

Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 10th September 2024
Ashling Hotel, Dublin

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Dominic Cronin, David Wright, Steve Conlon, Karin Dubsky, Martin McEnroe, Michael Kenny, Constanze O’Toole, Connie Rochford, Marie Doyle, Charles Stanley-Smith, Sinead O’Brien, Jean Rosney, Suzanne Linnane

Apologies: Tadhg Buckley, Karan O’Loughlin, Ciarán Maguire, Maria Snell, Neil Walker, Maria O’Gorman, Keith Hyland, David Downes, Eimear Manning, Eamon Carroll, Fintan Kelly, Elaine McGoff

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

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.0	Welcome & Minutes	<p>1.1 Welcome and apologies Welcomed Charles Stanley-Smith back to the Forum after his recent bereavement. Discussed today’s Plenary Agenda.</p> <p>Water Action Plan – need to prepare plan for next 18 months to 2 years via the sub-committees (CMSC & WSSC).</p> <p>1.2 Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting no. 60 held on 11th July 2024 in Portlaoise A number of typos in the draft minutes were noted for amendment. Comment: Minutes mentioned the need to have a discussion on shared services for rural water – will this discussion be going ahead. Chair: There will be discussions on this with the Rural Water Working Group, the Forum could discuss this in the future if there is a need, however it may not be the within the scope/role of the Forum. It could be discussed under governance in the future. The members approved the minutes of the July meeting.</p> <p>1.3 Matters arising from the minutes Q. Did the launch of the Education Module happen? A. Launch of Education Module has been rescheduled for later this year.</p>	<p>Schedule CMSC for mid to late October</p> <p>Minutes to be updated and published on Forum Website</p>
2.0	Corporate Update	2.1 Update on Forum’s expenditure to 30/06/24	

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		<p>The SEO explained that Forum expenditure to the end of August 2024 was €423,092.93, explained expenditure has to be complete by 30th November so it can be included in the recoupment for 2024.</p> <p>2.2 Correspondence - Recent AFU submission to the DHLGH Statement of Strategy</p> <p>In 2023 the Forum sent in a submission on the DHLGH Statement of Strategy. We felt that this submission was still relevant, so developed a position for the 2024 Review highlighting some of the important points raised before.</p>	
3.0	Research	<p>3.1 Review of Water Forum Research Strategy</p> <p>3.1.1 Research Thematic Areas 2025-27</p> <p>The existing research strategy needs to be reviewed before the end of 2024. The objective of the strategy is to ensure Forum positions and advice are based on the latest science and expertise, and to commission research where knowledge gaps exist. Research Lead presented existing thematic areas which guided the Forum’s research between 2022-2024.</p> <p>Proposed New Thematic Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RBMP Implementation – Governance, resourcing, coherence • Future proofing Ireland’s water resources • Water quality for public health (e.g. drinking water, bathing water, THMs etc) • Coastal and Marine Policy – (alignment with the WFD, climate and nature objectives) • Water and Wastewater Management – transparency, communications and interest of consumers. <p>Comment: Strong list but need to look at Public Participation and how the different Departments engage and getting people engaged at an early stage.</p> <p>Comment: Future Proofing, we need 50 or 100 year planning, particularly for water storage and planning for drought.</p> <p>Comment: Need to consider collaboration between departments, where are the blockages and why are they there? Need to break the Silos. Support the Coastal/Marine theme.</p> <p>Comment: The transparency theme is a particularly important one, there is a need to build public trust so we should spend more time on this.</p> <p>Comment: Can we do special research on caged salmon and looking at procedures, what should happen, what’s in place, who monitors these.</p> <p>Comment: Enforcement should be specifically mentioned in Theme 1 (RBMP)</p> <p>Could we consider 6 topics – to include the Aarhus Convention, subgroup working on this could feed into the other themes.</p>	

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		<p>Comment: Support revised research strategy. Suggestion to add role of members to research strategy.</p> <p>Comment: Transitional waters, we don't want to stop fish farming in Ireland but it needs to be land based. Endangered species need to be protected.</p> <p>Research Lead: We have to remember that we have done a lot of research on Public Participation (PPT), we need to look at using the research we have rather than doing more research on this topic.</p> <p>Chair: The big challenge is what are we going to do research on, to support future policy positions. It needs to be connected back to our strategy. All of these things are itemised in the Water Action Plan - so we can deal with that via RBMP implementation.</p> <p>Overall support to focus on consumers and building trust. Overall support for the coastal theme, we just need to think about the focus of this a little more. We can schedule a meeting with MARA.</p> <p>Comment: All the categories are good; community engagement and communication can go under implementation. Concerned that there is so little time left for implementation. Pilots for Catchment Community Fora are supposed to be this year but there is no funding allocated to the Fora, how can these be funded, ideally it should be based in the community.</p> <p>Comment: Interreg Learning Platform– showcase good practice across Europe. You could apply for experts to give advice on topics, for example fish farming from EU. I will circulate the link to the team.</p> <p>Comment: We need to look more into the PPT Reports we have already commissioned and published. The Forum has spent quite a bit of money on past PPT research, would encourage members to read these reports to see if there are any gaps, unsure if there is enough to do more research.</p> <p>Comment: Many of the gaps in relation to PPT are identified in the recent report by DkIT. Members should review this again and consider what we want to do with these reports.</p> <p>Comment: Water and Wastewater – lots of fish kills over summer, find out the causes of acute incidence verses chronic incidences.</p> <p>Comment: Should we separate out the Water and Wastewater topic. They could make reference to the Recast Drinking Water Directive.</p> <p>Comment: Need to strengthen Theme 5 in terms of transparency. There is very low-lying fruit in terms of access to information. "The Aarhus convention will be implemented as part of these themes" – put in general introduction.</p> <p>Comment: We should be talking to LAWPRO, EPA, Teagasc about research and to have a sense of coordination.</p>	<p>Add role of members to research strategy.</p> <p>Review Interreg link in relation to research support</p> <p>Send the reports from 2 commissioned projects on public participation – ask for input/comments.</p>

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		<p>Research lead: We are already engaging with the other research groups – the team met with the IFI last week to discuss research. However, we can develop a plan to do more of this.</p> <p>Chair: The context for conducting research should be focused on where the Forum wants to give policy advice in the next few years. Do we have enough information to do research. Find the Gaps and this is where we need to focus. Research is important to legitimise the policy advice we give. To summarise, members largely supportive of key thematic areas, the team will review and strengthen the themes following discussion today. The team will review the coastal research theme, consider presentation from MARA and what advice we would like to give.</p> <p>3.1.2 Proposed Research Topics for 2025</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementation of the RBMP, learnings from Past cycles and other EU Members States 2. Septic Tanks, monitoring, planning and regulations (3rd stage rural water advice) – is the 7th pressure on waterbodies 3. Alignment between freshwater and marine policies, recommendations for management and policy coherence 4. Survey (to support CFF) – Community Survey on Water body Water Quality and public participation <p>Discussion Septic Tanks: Comment: Only 1000 septic tanks inspections done per year out of 500,000– not sure where we would get with this research – drive is for looking at Protected Areas. Comment: You can't get grant unless you are inspected. But if you know your tank needs to be fixed you could be waiting a few years to get a grant. If you are in a Protected Area, you cannot just apply for a grant – therefore we need advice to disentangle the issues.</p> <p>Comment: It's worth doing the research, an independent person to compile the information that is available & to include the advice to be given in this area, not much budget needed.</p> <p>Chair: Agree re doing some small piece of research on Septic Tanks is a good idea.</p> <p>Local Waterbodies Survey: Chair: This aligns with some of the discussion on public participation. This could be useful to support future advice on Catchment Community Fora. Overall support for this project.</p> <p>RBMP: Comment: We can get information from other EU countries – our people in Brussels can liaise. Comment: There is a difference between Department reviewing how the RBMP was implemented verses an independent researcher doing a review. Any information is helpful, but we require an expert to do this at a very high level. Comment: Reviewing 1st/2nd cycles might be a bit redundant by the time we have the research done, especially with the new</p>	<p>Develop plan for engaging with research bodies/groups</p> <p>Review wording for 5 research thematic areas</p> <p>Review coastal research theme.</p> <p>Draft overview of septic tank research (smaller budget)</p> <p>Draft overview of local waterbody survey</p>

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		<p>Programme Office being set up. We should consider this in the proposal.</p> <p>Comments: We need to look to Europe first, so many things have been done and we can take learnings from this.</p> <p>Chair: Need to think more on the RBMP Implementation piece, not clear what the focused research might be. We might be able to look at something more specific in October.</p> <p>Coastal:</p> <p>Comment: It would be helpful if the Forum focused on this area as we need to move things along, no management plans for Natura 2000 sites (Ireland in EU courts because of this). What are peoples first priorities of what they want and work backwards.</p> <p>Chair: Need to think more on Marine area policy advice.</p> <p>General Comments:</p> <p>Comment: Coordination/collaboration piece has dropped off the research themes.</p> <p>Chair: We don't necessarily need to do research on this. We can engage with Departments and agencies on this.</p> <p>Q: How soon do you need specifics on what topics we are doing? A: Ideally October, the later we decide the later projects start.</p>	
4.0	Policy	<p>4.1 Water Action Plan</p> <p>4.1.1 Recent AFU letter/advice sent to WPAC re RBMP implementation</p> <p>Chair: Agreed to give piece of advice to WPAC and was submitted to WPAC ahead of the September WPAC meeting. A lot of the time spent at the WPAC meeting was on discussing the Forums advice. Going forward ideally, we should send a letter in before every meeting.</p> <p>4.1.2 Update from the WPAC meeting on 4th Sept</p> <p>The meeting focused on getting Sectoral Plans up and running, progress with CMPs and Community Fora.</p> <p>Next steps: A CMSC meeting will be scheduled to include an item to discuss what the Forum has already given advice on and how do we follow up on this advice, follow up with Dept, LAWPRO, project leads.</p> <p>4.1.3 Update from the launch of the RBMP on 5th Sept and follow up discussion on implementation of the Plan</p> <p>No further update- successful event</p> <p>4.1.4 Next Steps</p> <p>RBMP to be discussed at the next Catchment Management meeting in October</p> <p>4.2 To receive update on the Nitrates Action Plan Consultation</p> <p>Consultation is likely to be October.</p> <p>4.3 To discuss the draft Water Forum Position on Water Related Priorities for the Programme for Government</p>	Schedule CMSC meeting

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		<p>(2025-30)</p> <p>The Research Lead explained that in April we had a presentation from UCD on the commissioned research on the water and marine actions in the Programme for Government (PfG). There was a member discussion about research, and at a higher-level, members were happy with the outcomes of the research.</p> <p>What advice based on this could we give for the next PfG – high level, cross-departmental recommendations. Reflecting the cross departmental nature of water, nature and biodiversity.</p> <p><i>General Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdepartmental policy group • Develop interdepartmental financing strategy • Review of internal and external capacities • SMART Environmental commitments • Review PfG shortfalls and commitments <p><i>Specific Recommendations for Water Conservation and Water Quality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Conservation Strategy • Building Regs amendment for water efficiency • Implement excess use charge • Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Improvements • Improve private well grant schemes • Review of septic tank planning process <p>Comments: Concerns re the past research and not getting into lobbying the Department as it's not the role of the Forum. Response: The recommendations from the PfG research started the discussions, but the content of the recommendations in this advice are based on the Forum's previous policy recommendations.</p> <p>Chair: Timing of communications of PfG recommendations – not before election, but when PfG is being established. The main problem with the current PfG is that the water actions are too broad and difficult to measure.</p> <p>Comment: Periods of drought are underestimated – the piece that I think is missing is actual water storage, there are big projects that need to be considered e.g. storage in West Cork. Response: There should be a recommendation for a need for drought management plans.</p> <p>Comment: Going to come more into focus given the research on the cost of the Shannon Scheme and looking at impoundment instead.</p> <p>Comment: Recommend that it is preferable to use Nature Based Solutions in relation to water quality.</p> <p>Comment: DkIT Project ResiRiver – Nature Based Solutions project, a lot of learnings from this, urban and rural water quality benefits.</p>	<p>Members to Give feedback on the proposed recommendations on the PfG and the Research Topics within the next 2 weeks</p> <p>Review PfG recommendations – condense, add recommendation on drought management and water storage, add NBS recommendation, specify interdepartmental group, excess water use only for public consumers</p>

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		<p>Comment: 2nd recommendations would be better to specify on what (e.g. water, nature, biodiversity)</p> <p>Comment: Wastewater section is a bit weak – need to align this with the RBMP recommendations. Removing urban wastewater as a pressure.</p> <p>Question: Should Ireland have a policy that any new wastewater treatment facilities have tertiary treatment? Response: No this is not part of the EU UWWTD, therefore unlikely to be a national policy.</p> <p>Comment: I presume the excessive used charge are for public water not GWS. Response: Yes, Will amend.</p> <p>Comment: The document was long and wordy, if we could tighten it up and focus on what we are really recommending, so the major points jump out</p>	
5.1	Education & Communications actions	<p>5.1 To receive update on Comms & Education Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RBMP communications • AFU Water & Climate Conference on 20th November <p>Members were asked to note 20th November in Tullamore Court Hotel as the date for the conference. Will send an email with a registration link to people that we want to invite. Discussed Conference agenda, including sessions and speakers, posters etc.</p> <p>Q: Can we have plenty of time for Questions?</p> <p>Comment: Conor Murphy’s presentations can be very technical, can we ask him to simplify his message. A: Yes, we have asked him to just discuss the learnings.</p> <p>Comment: Could we have four presentations in Session 3 but broken into 2 workshop sessions. Response: This Conference is at an advanced stage of planning so it may not be feasible at this stage, but we can have the Chair of each session versed to get information from the audience tables.</p> <p>Comment: We have to model what we are talking about – we should look into the options for discussion between attendees.</p> <p>Social Media Plan</p> <p>The company Fuzion won the tender and we had a workshop with them already – discussed learning and outcomes from workshop.</p>	<p>Consider inviting Carlow Rain Garden Project and follow up with IGBC for Session 3</p> <p>Team to finalise session 3.</p> <p>Members to send in ideas for a Water Forum #hashtag</p>
6	AOB	<p>6.1 Any other Business</p> <p>IAS: Martin McEnroe explained that 2 new invasive species have been located (Stary Stonewort plant has taken over the whole of Lough Ree).</p> <p>Invasive plant on the Avoca River.</p> <p>Developed a video in Dromineer to inform people about Invasive Species and mitigation measures for all watercraft.</p> <p>Six new people employed by National Biodiversity Centre.</p>	

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		<p>IAS Plan has hit a wall – has spoken to the Minister on this. Conference coming up on the 12th November.</p> <p>Comment: Query on the Internal Data Centre research that the Forum did, was it published on our website? Response: Yes, we did Internal research on water use by Data Centres. It has already been presented to the WSSC who recommended it would go for Plenary approval to publish it on the website. Action, agree to circulate research report for Plenary approval</p>	<p>Circulate Data Centre research to Plenary.</p>
7	<p>Confirm date for next Plenary meeting</p>	<p>7.1 Confirm the date & location of the next Plenary meeting. Plenary Meeting: Tuesday 22nd October in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin</p>	