

Newsletter



An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

Issue 17 / Autumn 2024



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2024-2027

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Water Action Plan 2024-2027 - the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland is launched

On 5th September 2024, in Grennan Mill, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Minister Malcolm Noonan and Minister Roderick O'Gorman launched the Water Action Plan, Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2024-2027.

The Water Forum welcomes the inclusion of its recommendations in the third River Basin Management Plan, but urgent

implementation of this Water Action Plan is essential to achieve outcomes.

The Water Action Plan sets out the actions planned for implementation between now and the end of 2027. With only 52% of rivers; 48% of lakes and 63% of coastal waterbodies currently reaching the required water quality standard set by EU and national law, immediate and comprehensive action is essential to succeed in this Plan and achieve improvements.

Water Action Plan 2024 - River Basin Management Plan for Ireland is launched

Department and agency engagements

The National Water Forum engaged intensively with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and received expert input from agencies responsible for water management to inform its recommendations. Many of these recommendations are included in the Water Action Plan 2024-2027.

A key recommendation made by the Forum was the need for an **outcomes-based approach** to water management, with specific measures to protect or restore water quality delivered in all waterbodies and clear accountability for who is responsible for implementing these measures. The Forum also advised that implementing the right measure in the right place at waterbody level will achieve outcomes for water but can also deliver benefits for climate and nature.

The Forum welcomes the commitment in the Plan to develop Catchment Management

Plans for each of the 46 catchment areas as this will enable the identification, implementation and monitoring of targeted measures at waterbody scale, along with the necessary stakeholder engagement to manage multiple pressures in a catchment. To this end, the Forum urges all agencies and pressure owners to work together to deliver these Catchment Management Plans in a timely manner.

Stakeholder input

As a stakeholder body inputting to water policy, the Water Forum is acutely aware of the importance of stakeholder engagement in the process of developing plans for managing catchments. Responsible agencies need to engage with local stakeholders to identify and deliver outcomes in waterbodies and the proposed Community Catchment Fora can assist in this task. The €60m Farming for Water European Innovation Programme and the increase in support for the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) are also welcomed and

will support farmers to reduce the significant pressures from agriculture on local water quality.

At the launch of the Water Action Plan, Dr Matt Crowe, Chair of the National Water Forum stated 'a Plan is only as good as its implementation. The hard work begins now to reverse declining trends in water quality so that rivers, lakes, estuaries and groundwaters achieve the highest possible quality and are protected from the many human induced pressures that damage our precious waters'. He added that 'well protected good quality water is a fundamental economic, social, environmental and cultural foundation for an Ireland that wants to be seen by the wider world as a clean and green country'.

PICTURED: Water Forum members and staff from left: Eamon Carroll, Keith Hyland, Maria Snell, Karin Dubsy, Matt Crowe, Aisling Corkery, Minister Malcolm Noonan, Marie Doyle, Steve Conlon, Karan McLoughlin, Dominic Cronin, Jean Rosney, Donal Purcell, Constanze O'Toole and David Wright at the launch of the Water Action Plan in Thomastown Co. Kilkenny.



POLICY UPDATE

Alignment of the Water Action Plan with the Water Forum submission recommendations

In its submission on the draft Plan, the Water Forum made 106 recommendations around governance, an outcomes-based approach (i.e. right measure in the right place), public participation and recommendations to address the main pressures.

1. An Outcomes-based approach

A key action identified by the Water Forum is the need for an outcomes-based approach that would identify targeted measures, metrics and key performance indicators for every waterbody. Under the Water Framework Directive every waterbody has an associated objective: to either protect it from deterioration or to restore it to good ecological status. An outcomes-based approach would ensure effective and efficient planning and implementation of actions, provide for transparency, monitoring and tracking to ensure timelines are met.

Sectoral Action Plans

For this Water Action Plan each sector responsible for significant pressures will prepare a Sectoral Action Work Plan that will detail what measures will be implemented to address the pressure. The Forum has recommended that the longer-term objective of the Sectoral Action Plans should be that the sector is no longer a significant pressure on water quality.

The Water Forum recommends that they are developed using a consistent template and clearly aligned with the Water Framework Directive. Each Plan should include information on evidence-based targeted restoration measures to address all waterbodies at risk from that pressure. The plan should also identify protection measures to ensure no additional waterbodies are put at risk from the sector. The Forum welcomes the timeline for completion of the Sectoral Action Work Plans in early 2025, it is essential that this work is delivered as soon as possible. The Forum recommends that the Sectoral Action Plans should be publicly available for transparency and accountability.

Catchment Management Plans

The action for the development of 46 new Catchment Management Work Plans is very much welcomed by the Forum, as these can support the transition towards an outcome-based approach. The Forum has called for the Catchment Management Work Plans to include the list of waterbodies, their associated status, significant pressures/ issues and targeted measures, along with outcomes-based targets for the third cycle and key performance indicators to monitor progress and outcomes. Justification for waterbodies not meeting their WFD objective by 2027 should also be included in catchment management plans, in line with Article 4 of the WFD. While initially five pilots will be undertaken, the learnings from the pilots will inform the development of the remaining forty-one plans.

For transparency and accountability, the Water Forum has recommended that details should be included in these Catchment Management Work Plans about the roles and responsibilities for implementation to avoid fragmented management across sectors. The Catchment Management Work Plans will provide an opportunity to monitor and track actions at waterbody level. This should also allow for the accounting of co-benefits of water focused measures for climate and nature at catchment level.

2. Governance

Programme Delivery Office

The Water Forum's submission called for a full-time project management secretariat for the Water Action Plan that would monitor progress and support engagement between the different tiers of governance and different government departments to ensure policy coherence and alignment. The action to establish a Programme Delivery office to oversee and co-ordinate the Water Action Plan is therefore welcomed. This office can lead on the monitoring and reporting of progress to ensure transparency and accountability of the Plan and review the outcomes of measures, lead on sectoral engagement and collaboration to deliver real and meaningful outcomes. The Forum is now calling for the swift establishment of this office to support successful implementation and monitoring of the Plan.

POLICY UPDATE - continued

3. Public Participation

Community Catchment Fora

In its submission the Water Forum called for a new national approach to public participation that would include a vision and action plan for engagement in the development of the 46 Catchment Management Plans. A framework needs to be developed to support community dialogues, community action planning and project co-creation to deliver outcomes for water, nature and climate. Ideally agencies and local authorities would work together in this endeavour. The Water Forum welcomes the plans to pilot Community Catchment Fora in five catchments.

The learnings from this work should aim to identify how agencies, local authorities, communities and landowners can work together for a combined top-down and bottom-up approach to the development and implementation of Catchment Management Work Plans. Successful outcomes could inform the development of a national approach to public participation.

A rapid shift to implementation is necessary

The Forum welcomes that the Water Action Plan has been published and is eager for a rapid shift towards implementation of the Plan.

The Forum recommends urgent attention be placed on finalising the Sectoral Action Work Plans, with particular focus needed in the areas of agriculture, hydromorphology, forestry and urban waste water, as the four main sectoral pressures on water quality.

The Forum plans to engage with relevant sectors in the coming months to ensure a consistent approach is being taken on the development, implementation and tracking of their Sectoral Action Work Plans with a clear focus on removing significant pressures (associated with the sector) at water body level and putting measures in place to protect water quality in areas where the sector is active.

[Water Forum Submission to the draft River Basin Management Plan.](#)

Information on water quality and actions in catchments

To mark the launch of the Cycle 3, River Basin Management Plan, Water Action Plan, the EPA Catchments Unit published 46 Catchment Reports. These assessments provide an overview of the situation in each catchment and include:

- A Water Quality Summary.
- Details of High-Status Objective waterbodies.
- Water Quality Changes (including status changes from 2007 to 2021).
- Water Framework Directive Risk (at risk, not at risk, in review).
- Significant Pressures.
- Action planned for the catchment.

- The Appendix in each report includes waterbody scale information for all waterbodies in the catchment, including links to view the data on maps in catchments.ie

How to access the Cycle 3 Catchment Assessment

1. Go to the catchments.ie & Select Data page: catchments.ie/data
2. Type in the name of the catchment you are looking for in the Data search box, or click on the catchment you want to know about on the map of Ireland.
3. Once the page for your catchment is opened, you will see a link to the PDF of the Catchment Assessment.



Cycle 3
HA 36 Erne Catchment Report,
May 2024





Water Forum Conference
Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore,
20th November 2024 - 9:00am to 4:00pm

MANAGING IRELAND'S WATER IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Education and Awareness

The Water Forum is delighted to announce that it is hosting an in-person conference on 20th November 2024 titled "Managing Ireland's Water in a Changing Climate".

The Conference will take place in the Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. It will provide an opportunity to share the latest science on the potential climate impacts on water resources and river catchments.

The challenges and opportunities of taking an integrated catchment management approach

to drought and flood risk management and climate change adaptation will be explored.

The conference will facilitate discussion and engagement between Water Forum members, policy makers, agencies, local authority personnel and academics. Conversation and questioning will be encouraged.

The conference will be an ideal opportunity to network and learn about the latest water science, agency responses and examples of best practice at local levels. We will be circulating registration details over the coming weeks.

Water Forum Conference
Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore,
20th November 2024 - 9:00am to 4:00pm

MANAGING IRELAND'S WATER IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

TIME	PROGRAMME
9:00	Registration and Refreshments
9:50	Welcome and Introduction - Dr Matt Crowe, Chair, National Water Forum
Session 1:	Presenting the science - what are the impacts and why should we care?
10:00	Keynote Address - Prof Conor Murphy, Maynooth University Impacts of climate change on water resources (flooding and drought)
10:20	<p>Response panel presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of water conservation in Ireland - Dr Sarah Cotterill, University College Dublin • Climate Change effects on water quality: Emerging challenges and insights - Dr Michelle McKeown, University College Cork • The impacts of extreme weather events on public health - Dr Paul Hynds, Technological University Dublin • Freshwater ecosystem management: the challenges & opportunities - Dr Ken Whelan, Fisheries Scientist
11:00	Q&A - Chaired by Dr Matt Crowe
11:30	Coffee and poster session
Session 2:	Panel Discussion - management and implementation agency perspectives
12:00	Introduction - Catchment Management and Climate Change Adaptation - Conor Quinlan EPA
12:05	<p>Presentation on Integrated Catchment Management Planning - Dr Bernie White, LAWPRO</p> <p>Response panel discussion</p> <p>Agency perspectives on taking a catchment-based approach to climate change adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conor Galvin, Office of Public Works (OPW) • Kevin Motherway, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) • Mairéad Conlon, Uisce Éireann • Brian Beckett, Inland Fisheries Ireland
12:45	Q&A - Chaired by Dr Conor Quinlan
13:15	Lunch and poster session
Session 3:	Sectoral Perspectives- Management for Water, Nature and Climate Change Adaptation
14:15	Introduction to Knowledge Sharing - Sectoral Examples of Climate Change Adaptation in Catchments - Lisa Cronin, Atlantic Technological University
14:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paludiculture at catchment level - Dr Doug McMillen, Farm Carbon EIP and Adrian & Kieran Egan, Farmers. • Making space for rivers - Rossa O'Briain, Inland Fisheries Ireland • Home Performance Index (HPI) & the Kilbride housing project - John Fingleton, Irish Green Building Council • Rain gardens, a popular urban drainage solution in Carlow - Ciaran Brennan, Carlow County Council
15:00	Q&A - Chaired by Lisa Cronin
15:30	Closing address

There may be limited availability to this conference, if you would like to find out more please email info@nationalwaterforum.ie Please state your role and organisation.





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Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

 www.thewaterforum.ie

 info@nationalwaterforum.ie