



Minutes of the Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 21st January 2025
Aisling Hotel, Dublin.

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Martin McEnroe, Connie Rochford, Maria O’Gorman, Dominic Cronin, Neil Walker, Constanze O’Toole, Suzanne Linnane, Mark Farrelly, David Downes, Keith Hyland, Tadhg Buckley, Karin Dubsy, Michael Kenny

Apologies: Eimear Manning, David Wright, Marie Doyle, Sinead O’Brien, Jean Rosney, Elaine McGoff, Charles Stanley-Smith, Fintan Kelly, Ciarán Maguire, Maria Snell, Karan O’Loughlin, Eamon Carroll, Steve Conlon

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

Research Presenters: Dr John Gallagher, Prof. Laurence Gill

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| 1.0 | Welcome & Minutes | <p>1.1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced the meeting agenda and welcomed the CBA Researchers from TCD.</p> <p>1.2 Presentation of the Research commissioned by the Water Forum in 2024: <i>The Value of Water Conservation “A Cost Benefit Analysis of setting water use targets at building scale to promote sustainable water management in Ireland”</i> by Dr John Gallagher & Prof Laurence Gill from UCD.</p> <p>Dr John Gallagher presented a synopsis of the report to the Forum Members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently adopt 133LPD for daily consumption • EU average is approximately 100LPD • A target of 50-70LPD is possible with water saving technologies • Ireland lacks incentive for conservation without water charges <p>Proposed strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy standards for new homes • Incentives for retrofits • Water product labelling • Smart metering • Education • Sector coordination. | |

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| | | <p>Literature Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of domestic water use is taps, toilets and showers • Some countries set conservation goals at building scale (80 LPD) • Appliances are homeowner driven and require labelling • Low-moderate cost technologies (efficient taps/showers/toilets) give affordable conservation measures • Advanced technologies (rainwater harvesting, recirculating showers) address higher water reduction requirements • New builds and retrofits face distinct challenges affecting costs, direct and indirect payback periods, and disruption levels related to installation • Flow regulators and smart meters curb water use and waste • Benefits of auditing to ensure technology implementation <p>Discussed Cost Constraints for CBA to the State (savings to water and wastewater service = €6.63/m³) and homeowner (savings relate to energy reduction)</p> <p>Defined Baseline for water consumption rate at 110LPD Discussed Usage & CBA Scenarios Discussed payback to the household</p> <p>Monetary and non-monetary benefits: 90LPD easily achieved with low-moderate measures (taps, showers, toilets) €180 annual water savings 7.3m³ of water saved per household per year. 2.2million m³ water savings per year for 303,000 new home by 2030</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government housing target (€14.6 million saved by the state) - Energy savings €180 (taps and showers) - 84.5GW per year household energy nationally - Estimated reduction of 1.5% of the average Irish person’s annual carbon emissions <p>Uisce Eireann has indicated a capacity issue that doesn’t align with government targets for new builds.</p> <p>Pathways to Impact: Discussed various governance options to bring to stakeholders (government, developers, homeowners etc) and the potential benefits and challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory measures in building codes • Water efficiency audits in homes • Water efficiency labels on products • Low- to moderate-cost measures • Advanced/ innovative water saving products <p>1.3 Questions & Discussion Q: 2.2 million litres saved, is that based on reduction to 90LPD? A: Yes, based on 303,000 new houses built by 2030.</p> <p>Q: Would rainwater harvesting benefit consumers from a cost perspective).</p> | <p>This €6.63 figure has been revised to 2024 data (now €4.40 /m³) On 11/3/25 by J Gallagher</p> <p>The recalculated saving is €9.7 m (not €14.6 m) On 11/3/25 by J Gallagher</p> |

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| | | <p>A: Not in the short term, it is a long-term investment, but it may encourage unforeseen negative behaviours e.g. if all my water for the toilet is coming from rainwater harvesting why would I bother with an efficient toilet.</p> <p>Q: What's the uptake of these energy efficient taps with the plumbing industry? A: The big developers have 2 or 3 suppliers they go to where they pick products within a specific range.</p> <p>Q: A member who needed a new shower/shower head, spoke to his plumber and they were very reluctant to put it in or didn't know what was best. A: Standardisation is the best way to go with the industry, it is not always the most expensive fitting that delivers the most efficient solution.</p> <p>Comment: Powerful message there between the Governments ambition and UE supply limits.</p> <p>Q: Did you look at gardening use for rainwater harvesting, especially during drought, UE can't supply water at times of drought, so it is beneficial. A: Rainwater harvesting for this is a small proportion overall water use. We didn't look at it for drought scenarios, this project was looking at the National Annual CBA not individual incidents at certain times of the year, garden use is a small percentage of annual usage.</p> <p>Comment: Working from home or being at home is something that would change the water use data</p> <p>Q: Did you come across the Unified Water Label (voluntary by manufacturers but is EU wide)? A: No, we didn't look at this.</p> <p>Comment: The key benefit of water efficient buildings could be that it would be possible to build more houses within the existing limits UE have on water available for use.</p> <p>Comment: There is a clear need to have regulations for housing and retrofitting, how do they compare? A: Retrofitting is a problem because we change our fixtures and fittings over time anyway but how do people make their choice, do they choose themselves or leave it to the plumber.</p> <p>Q: Could we stipulate this within the Green Procurement Policy. A: We don't know who has taken this policy onboard</p> <p>Q: Did you explore whether water efficiency should be included in the BER rating? A: The HPI is looking to cover more sustainable measures, including water, so we need to be embracing this instead of the BER.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Q: Could this benefit domestic wastewater treatment systems by reducing the cost to a householder. A: It wouldn't make a huge difference; the tanks are always massively oversized.</p> <p>Comment: We are nation of people who liked incentives (e.g. derelict homes incentive is working), so we need to look at an incentive for water conservation.</p> <p>Comment: We need to be conserving water during times of harsh weather, people are turning on the taps at night to stop pipes freezing. We have to start small, or we will lose everybody. A: A pilot of some description might be useful, if you have a meter UE will give you a call to say there is a leak if they are recording water use during the night.</p> <p>Q: Good to get figures to be able to bring these to the DHLGH, should we make recommendations to get UE to do some analysis on water use based on metered data? A: I think UE are doing analysis, they must be but maybe not in the lens that we may want.</p> <p>Q: We support having water butts in houses to water the garden, we need to make people aware that these are helping with reducing stormwater, people need to know more. A: The problem is if the water butt is already full it will still overflow into the stormwater.</p> <p>Comment: We asked UE to send out a statement of water use to customers on an annual basis, but they stated this wouldn't be financially viable.</p> <p>Q: At the moment there is a push to get septic tanks upgraded, what proportion of that can be put into dry toilets? A: Dry toilets not acceptable under EPA Code of Practice. Bill Gates is inventing Smart Toilets, in 20 years time we could be looking at things very differently.</p> <p>Comment: We can't overlook the importance of awareness and education as we have no incentives. There could be benefit in doing a cost benefit analysis on the behavioural component.</p> <p>Comment: Two new directors of CRU in the past few months, so it will be worth having a discussion with them.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the research Team who then departed the meeting.</p> <p>1.4 Next Steps We will design the reports and plan out a series of engagements with DHLGH, UE and CRU, this a perfect opportunity to engage with them outside of consultations.</p> | <p>Approved to put Report on the Website today and circulate</p> <p>Develop Policy advice and recommendations over the next few months</p> <p>Circulate the Sarah Cotterill Water Conservation Report to members</p> |

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| | | <p>When we met with Minister O'Brien on Water conservation in 2023, this piece of work came out of that discussion. It is great to have information to bring back to the Minister and the DHLGH/Water Conservation Team.</p> <p>We need to make a clear distinction between new build and retrofit – the benefit for the Dept/Government is being able to build more new houses. Need to keep pushing for the Water Conservation Group.</p> <p>Awareness of Toilet habits (cistern size, what buttons are for, flushing habits) is important. Plumbers advise against reduced flushing as it blocks pipes.</p> | |
| 2.0 | Minutes and Corporate Update | <p>2.1 Consideration of draft minutes of Plenary Meeting 03/12/24 2.2 Matters arising from the minutes Minutes Approved</p> <p>2.3 Update on Forum expenditure to 31/12/24 The SEO explained that Forum expenditure to the end of December 2024 was € 679,279,87. He stated that the Forums funding allocation from the DHLGH for 2025 has yet to be confirmed but he expected it to be line with 2024.</p> <p>2.4 To approve the revised membership of the Forum's Liaison Group with Uisce Eireann SEO explained the purpose of the UE Liaison Group and the proposed Membership. AFU Liaison Group with Uisce Eireann - Proposed Membership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keith Hyland (WSSC) Chair • Neil Walker • Connie Rochford • Sinead O'Brien • Karan O'Loughlin • David Wright • Mark Farrelly <p>WSSC Chair explained that the liaison group is very important to allow the Forum to engage with Uisce Eireann & that it should be open to all members if they wished to participate. There is a difference in terms of approach, it is less formal than when they meet the WSSC on a specific consultation.</p> <p>Comment: It was beneficial in the past as it is more informal, yet detailed, issues are discussed in a less guarded way.</p> <p>Comment: Has the issue of workers transitioning from the LAs been solved as this is a big issue. A: That is something that could be discussed at a future meeting.</p> <p>Q: How many times would the group meet?</p> | Minutes to be published on Forum Website |

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| | | <p>A: 3-4 times, it's important not to duplicate work with that of the WSSC.</p> <p>Comment: Suggest some of these meetings are face to face, it would be more beneficial to build relationships.</p> <p>Comment: The WSSC also focuses on research (rural water/water conservation) and responding to consultations, so this group could be used to deal with wider issues with UE, outside of consultations.</p> <p>Comment: If there are problems getting data from UE, then this is the perfect way to have a chat about it.</p> <p>Comment: Smaller groups work better, it can't be just another talking shop, we need to get something out of it, a goal.</p> <p>Comment: ToR states the group is set up to improve engagement and build partnerships.</p> | |
| 3.0 | Work Program for 2025 | <p>3.1 To discuss the Water Forum key priority areas & advice for 2025</p> <p>RL Discussed work program for 2025</p> <p>CMSC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with DHLGH & WPAC on WAP Governance - Engaging with sectoral leads re SAWPs - Engage with LAWPRO on CMWPs and CCF - 6th NAP Public Consultation - Advertised Waterbody Community Action Survey - Marine and Transitional Waters Research - Review of sectoral climate change plans <p>WSSC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural Water Services (Private Well research) - Upcoming public consultations (Water Supply Project, UE RC4) - Water Conservation – outputs from CBA - Wastewater (section 4, urban wastewater) - UE Communications - Drinking Water Quality Control <p>Discussed focus areas for Policy Advice (WAP, water conservation, rural water, interest of public water consumers) and to whom we intend giving advice.</p> <p>Comment: Important we have a meeting with the New Minister once established, it is important for them to understand what we are doing and why.</p> | |
| 4.0 | Research & Policy | <p>4.1 To approve the Forum's draft position on Private Wells based on the recent Research Report</p> <p>Discussed position and recommendations of the Forum based on the Private Well research report and WSSC meeting.</p> <p>Comment: Need to make it clear that the well testing should be free and voluntary. Recommend the testing campaign as a public health measure, it is a big issue in Ireland.</p> <p>Comment: People don't have a well by choice; We also have the highest proportion of one-off housing.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Comment: This is a really good opportunity to engage with a broad rural audience.</p> <p><i>Position and Recommendations approved by the Plenary</i></p> <p>4.2 Forum’s upcoming meetings on the Sectoral Action Work Plans Discussed dates for briefing with the Sectors on the WAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture: 28th Jan at 11:00 • Urban Wastewater: 10th Feb at 10:30 <p>Others: TBC</p> <p>4.3 Policy Update – WSP Public Consultation Discussed consultation and draft submission, will circulate draft once it has been circulated to WSSC. Highlighted dates for UE Regional Consultations Chair: Suggest sending it to the wider Plenary to allow input to process.</p> | <p>SEO will Recirculate Zoom meeting invites</p> <p>WSP submission to be sent to the wider Plenary</p> |
| 5.0 | Education & Communications Actions | <p>5.1 Education & Communications activities:</p> <p>BT Young Scientist Discussed Forum’s participation in the BT Young Scientist Exhibition in January 2025, the award winners and the overall increase in Water Projects since the Forum initially sponsored the Water Award in 2023. UE was not at BTYSTE. In Members views it is important that they are, to be discussed at Liaison Group.</p> <p>The Water Forum have an invitation to attend the ESB Science Blast in March. Will explore meeting with Subject Teachers to disseminate Transition Year Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 2024 Newsletter, Annual Report. SEO: New stipulations from the DHLGH on what is to be included in the Annual Report including member attendance at plenary meetings etc. • Discussed design of Research Reports, Infographics, Media PR • Highlighted the ReMark Project survey on Septic Tanks – 2 weeks left to get results back, asked members circulate survey to their organisations. <p>Comment: Social media and email communication may not work to get survey results back from rural Ireland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed Workshops and Field Trips planning and preparation for the year | |
| 6.0 | AOB | <p>6.1 AOB</p> <p>Invasive Species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listened to a Teagasc Webinar with the Farming Community. There is a lack of knowledge on invasive species among the farming community. If one farmer doesn’t engage with species removal measures, efforts of others are pointless. • Engaging with Sailing Clubs – need to ensure sanitation takes place after competitions in waterways where there are invasive species. | |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need a national plan but there is no finance for this, we need to talk the Minister on this. Biodiversity centre is putting plans in place. <p>Comment: Significant chance in Law as the EU was going to bring us to court, so the decision is who is going to do the enforcement.</p> <p>Chair: It would be good to have an IAS sub-committee meeting to see where we are overall before talking to the Minister. We could combine it with the IAS sectoral action plan and include the Biodiversity Centre as they have a huge role in this now.</p> <p>Coast Watch Workshop: Alert systems for Slurry, Septic Tanks etc – Workshop in Trinity</p> <p>Chair: Two new cabinet sub-committees in the Programme for Government, Water Quality (focused on agriculture) and Infrastructure, both chaired by the Taoiseach. There is also a promise to develop an All-Island plan for Water Quality</p> | |
| 7.0 | Confirm date for next Plenary meeting | 7.1 Confirm date & location of the next Plenary meeting. Plenary Meeting: Tuesday 11 th March in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin. | |