

Minutes of the Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 8th July 2025
Ashling Hotel

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Martin McEnroe, Michael Kenny, Dominic Cronin, Steve Conlon, Keith Hyland, Marie Doyle, David Wright, Karin Dubsy, Constanze O’Toole, Charles Stanley-Smith, Brendan O’Brien, Elaine McGoff, Connie Rochford, David Downes, Mark Farrelly, Sinead O’Brien, Eimear Manning, Fintan Kelly & Maria Snell

Apologies: Maria O’Gorman, Ciarán Maguire, Jean Rosney, Tadhg Buckley, Neil Walker, Suzanne Linnane & Eamon Carroll

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

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.0	Research Presentation of AFU National Local Waterbody Survey	<p>1.1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies Chair welcomed the members and presenter from Core Research.</p> <p>1.2 Presentation from CORE Research on the Forum’s National Survey on ‘Knowledge & Understanding of Water Quality in Ireland’ <i>Presentation by Shauna O’Reilly, Senior Research Manager – Core Research</i></p> <p>Discussed survey objective and demographics. Key survey results: <i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79% think it is important for water to be clean healthy and unpolluted. • Only 3 in 10 are concerned about their local waterbody. • Most people don’t know where to find information. • Young people more aware of online information. • Most unaware of groups involved with protecting water. • Only 4% know of local funding initiatives • Only 7% know about ecological status • 67% don’t know how to report a polluting incident <p><i>Communication:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email and Radio still trusted and important – different for each age cohort for messaging. • 57% not involved in any group,43% are engaged. • Lack of Information is main barrier to involvement 	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% willing to get involved (10% dependent on situation). <p><i>Personal Responsibility:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67% think their activities don't impact on water quality. • 57% willing to change behaviour. • 56% open to learning more. <p><i>Behavioural Science:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Norms – what other people are doing, people need to see action. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Action – success stories and positive statistics, shared goals • Friction Costs – Confusing processes and too many steps. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Action - make it seem simple, centralise information, engage groups people trust <p>Discussed 7 Key Learnings</p> <p>1.3 Discussion, Q & A</p> <p>Comment: Younger people are getting information from Instagram – people using it as a search engine instead of Google, they perceive it as reliable.</p> <p>Q: You mentioned that you need to highlight the success stories but would highlighting issues with their local water quality make more impact?</p> <p>A: Need to highlight that things can be done and that both individuals and groups can make a positive influence.</p> <p>Q: Claimed knowledge is higher among younger and older groups, but there is a dip in 25-54, can you speculate as to why that is?</p> <p>A: Maybe these groups perceive they know more, but the middle group may also be incredibly busy.</p> <p>Comment: Getting from wanting to take part to action is a long road, it doesn't happen overnight.</p> <p>Q: Fascinating but really bleak. Is the solution that you need to be getting the message out on all platforms?</p> <p>A: With some social channels there is an ability to get quite targeted. People are also very bombarded with messages, so it's hard to know which message will work.</p> <p>Comment: Excellent piece of work that needs to go into the Forum's strategic plans.</p> <p>Comment: I'd say most people don't know how to report pollution.</p> <p>Comment: Disagree that young people only think they know more, research shows that they are the most educated generation. They are the first generation that have grown up with climate change and eco-anxiety, so they are very knowledgeable on this subject.</p> <p>Comment: Instagram seems scary unless you are on it, it is a really useful and informed tool that people can often get really good information from. TikTok have a page completely dedicated to</p>	<p>Consider how Survey findings</p>

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		<p>STEM and if you are interested in water, it will feed you more and more water information and you get to know about more sources and people giving information.</p> <p>Chair: Work Programme for next year – is there something we can do to raise the level of awareness.</p>	<p>can be included into the next Forum strategic plans.</p> <p>Write up findings and report & disseminate findings</p>
	Minutes & Apologies	<p>2.1 Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting no. 67 held on 10th June 2025. The draft minutes were approved by the members</p> <p>2.2 Matters arising from the minutes None</p>	Minutes to be published on the website
2.0	Corporate Issues	<p>2.2 Update on Forum expenditure to 30 June Total expenditure to 30th June 2025 is €294,997</p> <p>2.3 Approve the draft Code of Conduct for Forum members & secretariat. The SEO gave an overview of the additions to the draft document since the June Plenary meeting including the meaning and example of “conflict of interest” and “fairness and respect”. Clarified what members should do re communicating with the media.</p> <p>Q: Will the conflict of interest be drawn up at every meeting A: Danger is that it becomes proforma, we can do it but it must not become a box ticking exercise, particularly with research and procurement. It was agreed to add this as an agenda item to meetings. Amendments to be added. <i>Approved by members</i></p> <p>2.4 Update on recruitment of Comms & Education Lead HR are following up with the successful candidate.</p> <p>2.5 Email correspondence from LAWPRO re Catchment Community Fora (CCF) Steering Group to advise on rollout of the Pilot CCFs LAWPRO requested that someone from the executive be on the CCF Steering Group. Q: Can we be there as an ex-officio member, this should be our default approach. Q: Will you be able to report to members what you have learned and that it is not bound to confidentiality? A: Agreed to communicate with LAWPRO & that the SEO be nominated as an ex-officio member to the steering Group</p> <p>2.6 Update on the meeting with Christopher O’Sullivan, T.D., Minister of State, DHLGH with special responsibility for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity</p>	<p>Amendments to Code of Conduct to be added</p> <p>Contact LAWPRO re nomination of SEO as Ex-Officio member of the CCF Steering Group.</p>

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		<p>Chair discussed meeting with Minister, the planning we did in advance worked well in terms of our key messages & the positive engagement on the day.</p>	
3.0	Research and Policy Update	<p>3.1 Policy update</p> <p>3.1.1 Discuss & approve the draft submission on the timelines for the 4th cycle RBMP</p> <p>Research Lead gave an overview of the Water Forum’s draft recommendations on the timeline for the 4th WAP – Submission Approved by members.</p> <p>3.1.2 Recent AFU advice to WPAC</p> <p>6th NAP Consultation is expected to run from mid-August to end-September.</p> <p>Discussed having a briefing on Nitrates consultation from DHLGH & DAFM – CMSC for 1st week Sept, this date suits members.</p> <p>Q: Appropriate Assessments are still being figured out – will there be material added to the consultation based on this, will it be included in this consultation.</p> <p>Q: We need meaningful public engagement, Government is in close engagement with the EU Commission about this how much influence do the Forum have?</p> <p>Proposing to explore developing a Forum Position on the Nitrates & Water Quality – a balanced view of Nitrates and water quality from a social, economic and environmental perspective.</p> <p>Comment: Good to pull all the research together.</p> <p>Response: Proposal to discuss with individual members to produce a short paper and then bring to CMSC.</p> <p>WPAC Update:</p> <p>Update given on SAWP progress and CMWP template development. LAWPs to align LA functions with CMWP.</p> <p>Significant Water Management Issues (4th WAP) Workshop – 23rd Oct</p> <p>Q: Are they waiting until all plans are ready before they publish the SAWPs as we understood they were to be published in Q1 2025)</p> <p>Comment: As soon as they go up, we should review them and compare them to our recommendations.</p> <p>3.2.3 Update from National Water Conservation Working Group</p> <p>The research & Policy Lead updated the meeting:</p> <p>Objective of the group is to develop National Strategy for Water Conservation</p> <p>Presentation at first meeting from AFU on water conservation position and key research learnings.</p> <p>Very interested in hearing about John Gallagher’s CBA research.</p> <p>3.2.4 Update on Invasive Alien Species- recent developments</p>	<p>Send submission to DHLGH.</p> <p>Nitrates: Organise briefing on this from DHLGH & DAFM – CMSC for 1st week Sept</p> <p>Proposal to discuss with individual members to produce a short paper and then bring to CMSC</p> <p>SAWP: Review all SAWP with reference to our recommendations once they are all published</p>

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		<p>AFU Secretariat met NBDC for update - Serious resource barriers to finalising the National Biodiversity Plan or making progress/implementing it. IAS Regulations in place since 2024 but no resources to implement them and no assignment of roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>IAS Subgroup – new members required to replace previous members. Karin, Constanze and Matt will be new IAS committee members.</p> <p>Chair: Need to figure out who is responsible and a develop a focused piece of advice Comment: had discussion with Minister, he is open to looking at having rules similar to NZ as an island state. Comment: Part of the National Plan needs to include the Roadmap for implementation which will need a huge amount of money. Money it takes to do this is nothing compared to what it will cost if we have invasive species removed.</p> <p>Public Consultation on draft Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure SAP 2025 Closing Date 6th August AFU submitted previous consultations to the CCAC etc - propose to develop position building on previous positions due to time constraints. Proposal agreed by members.</p> <p>Q: What are we doing re HMWB? Chair: Forum advice was aired at the WPAC meeting, DHLGH will now consider this. We have something to follow up on.</p> <p>Q: What indication did you get from the DHLGH? A: DHLGH indicated it has been a learning process in relation to communication. It is within the WFD to designate waterbodies. UE have given their reasons why they need designated waterbodies, if they require an abstraction license from a waterbody and this waterbody is a HMWB, this needs to be specified for the license.</p> <p>Q: Can we find out what the timeline is for review of consultations and designations? A: Next step is Minister needs to make a decision on it. We can't expect that every piece of advice is going to be taken onboard. Comment: Is there a threshold when we say we are not happy with their decisions, where we can react?</p>	<p>Schedule a meeting with IAS subcommittee to develop draft piece of advice to Minister on IAS.</p> <p>CC SAP: Develop position using previous relevant recommendations.</p> <p>HMWB: Request timeline for consultations review and designations and potential for follow up.</p>
4.0	Education & Communications Actions	<p>4.1 Communications & Education Update EPA Water Conference update. Triona's Forum presentation will be on YouTube. Other presenters referred to the Forum's work as being important. Forum members made significant contributions to the discussions.</p> <p>4.2 Update on the Consultative workshop with Young People Engaged with young people, to share information about water and find out how to communicate better with young people.</p>	Send link in weekly update

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		<p><i>Workshop 1:</i> What did they learn about water, what was new. Water communications needs to improve, be short, simple and repeated. Messages need to be positive and tell success stories. More information on water security and that we are wasting water.</p> <p><i>Workshop 2: Interview with Stephen Reid (You Tube Lough Neagh)</i> Platforms for engaging youth: Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Spotify Visual and interactive messaging using all platforms repeatedly. Targeted and support youth engagement at local level- suggested groups similar to CCF idea to give young people a voice.</p> <p><i>Workshop 3: Barriers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge - Local activity days, make issue visible to them, QR code with information, summer schools, eco-camps. • Access – transport, distance to event is an issue, disability access. • Youth Engagement - meaningful engagement and valued voices, Tidy Towns youth section, LA should be proactive in engaging young people, LA youth champions. • Interest – Use sports clubs to engage young people in water issues. Eco/Summer camps with teachers, green campuses, get young people outdoors. Show outcomes, positive messages and positive change is important. <p>Key Findings will be shared with Participants, it will be in the newsletter and report. Need to use this to communicate with LAWPRO.</p> <p>Young People were very positive re having their voices heard, they never had an outlet to talk about water issues before. Young people are interested, people ask youth opinion but don't listen or act on it – so follow up is important. They wanted to hear about next steps to engage in the future.</p> <p>Really interesting to see this Workshop versus the Survey. Tidy Towns having a youth section is a very interesting idea. Tidy Towners need to be educated on how to give young people a voice, they are not just free labour, they are wonderful workers but they are more than that.</p>	<p>Key Findings will be shared with Participants. Included in the newsletter Share findings with LAWPRO.</p>
5.0	AOB	<p>6.1 AOB To confirm the date of the next Plenary meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 9th September, venue Ashling Hotel <p>Rural Water Service Conference is 11th September in Clayton Hotel, Galway</p> <p>Members asked about getting a larger meeting room for plenary meetings. The SEO explained that if we get a larger room, the hotel can charge for more Teas, coffees and lunches. Item to be investigated.</p>	
	Retirement presentation to	The Chair, Members & staff acknowledged the tremendous work done by Gretta McCarron since she started with the Forum in 2019,	

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	Dr Gretta McCarron. Communications & Education Lead	mentioning in particular her role in the development of the Forum's Communications Strategy; the organisation of various webinars, workshops & the successful Water & Climate conference in November 2024; and with the development of Communication & Education materials. Members wished Gretta well in her Retirement. Gretta thanked members for their good wishes on her retirement.	