

Draft Minutes of the Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 9th September 2025
Ashling Hotel

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Martin McEnroe, Michael Kenny, Dominic Cronin, Steve Conlon, Keith Hyland, David Wright, Constanze O’Toole, Charles Stanley-Smith, Brendan O’Brien, Connie Rochford, David Downes, Mark Farrelly, Neil Walker, Tadhg Buckley, Suzanne Linnane, Eamon Carroll, Sinead O’Brien, Marie Doyle, Karin Dubsky

Guest Attendees: Juan Pablo Martinez

Apologies: Maria O’Gorman, Ciarán Maguire, Jean Rosney, & Elaine McGoff, Eimear Manning, Fintan Kelly, Maria Snell

In Attendance: Donal Purcell, Aisling Corkery, Triona McGrath, Divya Flynn

No.	Details	Summary	Action
1.0		<p>1.1 Welcome, Introductions Chair welcomed the members back from the summer break and introduced Divya Flynn our new Communication and Education Lead and Juan Pablo Martinez who was attending as a guest and will be the new IBEC Representative on the Forum.</p> <p>1.1 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest by members & secretariat There were no conflicts of Interest declared.</p> <p>1.2 Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting no. 68 held on 8th July 2025</p> <p>1.3 Matters arising from the minutes Q: A member queried if the Forum’s representative on the LAWPRO CCF Advisory Group will be in a position to report back to the Forum with updates from meetings? A: The SEO was of the view that this should be possible. Q: Will there be follow up from Presentation from the National survey on community action for water? A: Yes, we are currently having it designed and will develop a dissemination plan.</p>	Minutes to be published on the website
2.0	Corporate Issues	<p>2.2 Update on Forum expenditure to 31 August Total expenditure to 31st August 2025 is €405,568.93</p> <p>2.1 Correspondence – None</p> <p>2.2 Update on Governance documents & procedures required</p>	

No.	Details	Summary	Action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report for 2024 and Chair Report to the Minister has been submitted to DHLGH. • Memo of Understanding between AFU and DHLGH completed & signed • Memo of Funding Agreement between AFU, Tipperary Co. Co. and DHGLH is drafted. • Revised terms of reference, Standing Orders and Operating Procedures drafted • Periodic Critical Review is upcoming. 	
3.0	Research and Policy Update	<p>3.1 Research and Policy update</p> <p>3.1.1 Approval of IAS advice letter to Ministers</p> <p>Meeting with AFU and IAS Sub-group on 22nd July discussed progress and policy gaps in IAS. A letter was drafted for the Minister of State Christopher O’Sullivan which was initially approved by the IAS Sub-Group and now needs Plenary Approval, key recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a suitably resourced, single lead division with overall responsibility for the management of IAS in Ireland, working under the aegis of the NPWS • A National Invasive Alien Species Biosecurity Strategy should be developed, to include the roadmap to managing IAS, key roles and responsibilities and National Guidelines and Biosecurity Protocols <p>Chair: It’s a good time to raise this issue publicly particularly as the issue is currently in the news re the Asian Hornet. Comment: The legislative power rests with Agriculture, so this needs to be cross checked – this is not up to AFU. Response: It should be the NPWS but they don’t have the resources.</p> <p>Plenary approved the letter to send to Minister Browne & Minister O’Sullivan. Agreement to develop a press release to support letter, to be sent after the DHLGH/Minister has had a chance to read letter first.</p> <p>3.1.2 Response to DHLGH Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Water Quality and Water Infrastructure</p> <p>To note the submission made to the DHLGH on the Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Water Quality and Water Infrastructure, which was submitted in July. We have made significant recommendations from previous submissions that are very relevant, we agreed approach at July Plenary to build on these to form our submission – submission sent to DHLGH.</p> <p>3.1.3 Update on Catchment Community Fora - Timeline & Future Engagement</p> <p>Catchment Community Fora (CCF) Pilots will run from September 2025 until January 2027. LAWPRO sent draft Implementation Plan for the CCF in July, requesting feedback from the Forum.</p>	<p>Send final letter to Ministers & DHLGH. Develop press release and social media on letter.</p>

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		<p>There was a very short turn around for feedback, this was raised with LAWPRO at the CCF Pilot Implementation Advisory Group (SEO of AFU attended). LAWPRO acknowledged short turn around and assured AFU there would be opportunity for regular input from AFU as pilots develop. LAWPRO agreed to more structured engagement with AFU over the coming months. This engagement could be with the CMSC or the Public Participation Group.</p> <p>Comment: there are 32 catchment groups in the iCatch Group – LAWPRO gave a presentation to iCatch on the CCF, the presentation is available on the iCatch YouTube channel. Groups were surprised and disappointed about the delay in starting the CCF. There was a lively discussion as catchments are ready to start. The biggest question to LAWPRO is how long it will actually take to roll out the templates.</p> <p>Comment: A member explained that they had attended the recent Slaney Catchment meeting. Something has to happen, and that in her view a year earlier we more or less had the same meeting. Suggested setting up a WhatsApp group for real-time responses and communications between groups. Every group just got 4 minutes to discuss their concerns.</p> <p>Q: Is there any formal response from LAWPRO on feedback from the July document, including things they are not taking onboard and why?</p> <p>Comment: LAWPRO acknowledged the short turn around time. They did send us comments in response to our recommendations which will be shared with the CMSC members before the meeting on 16th September</p> <p>Chair: We all agree that we want this to work there are going to be bumps along the way so we have to allow it to evolve.</p> <p>SEO: Timelines and moving on to the 46 catchments is the biggest concern</p> <p>Chair: If one of the pilots is not ready and another catchment is ready, could we suggest they change?</p> <p>Comment: I don't think they will change the pilot areas as they are connected to the pilots of the catchment management work plans and have been carefully selected to represent different types of catchments. It is not to say that areas that have communities ready cannot progress in initiating local action.</p> <p>Comment: Fully support what is being said and the process, we need to have presentation from LAWPRO and come together collectively.</p> <p>Agree to invite LAWPRO to next CMSC (15th Sept) to discuss the CCF. Suggest LAWPRO highlight what they took on board (and what wasn't) from the Forum's recommendations. To be discussed further at the online CMSC Meeting next Monday.</p> <p>3.1.4 Update on key Policy and Research Areas – Focus for Q3/Q4 2025</p>	<p>Share LAWPRO feedback with CMSC members before meeting on 16th September</p> <p>Schedule CMSC meeting, invite</p>

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		<p>RL gave update on research and policy progress since 2025 and identified what will be the priority for the rest of this year. The interests of public water consumers will be a key focus area for the coming months, we have a national survey commissioned (evaluation of quotations just complete) which will provide us with some information on the interests of public water consumers. The team will work on a draft document to identify what we could include in this position. We will develop idea further with WSSC.</p> <p>In relation to engagements on recommendations made on private wells, we will follow up with the DHLGH on progress.</p> <p>Research Lead reminded members of current Research Strategy and indicated we will be looking for ideas for key focus research projects for next year. Requested that members to send any ideas to TMcG. The team will look into some ideas also. One of the themes we have not yet worked in is “Water Quality and Public Health” and asked members to have a think about any research ideas within this theme from the policy side. – Brainstorming Exercise.</p> <p>Q: UE Capital Investment Plan, what is happening with this? A: Uisce Eireann will indicate how they spend their money in the next 5 years for the next capital investment plan. The CRU will then hold a Public Consultation which the Forum will engage on. Chair – we will need to think of our response to this consultation in the context of our role – will there be sufficient resources to address urban wastewater as a pressure on water quality, or sufficient resources around demand management.</p>	<p>LAWPRO to present</p> <p>Develop background material for WSSC to develop a position on the interests of public water consumers.</p> <p>Follow up with DHLGH on private wells.</p>
		<p>4.1 Agriculture and Water Quality – A balanced stakeholder view of social, economic and environmental perspectives</p> <p>Research Lead gave presentation on “Agriculture and Water - A balanced Stakeholder View of Social, Economic and Environmental Perspectives”</p> <p>The presentation was an overview of agriculture in relation to socio-economics in Ireland (number of jobs, types of farming, profitability). It also covered the current policies which influence agricultural activities and their impact on water quality. It finished with the latest figures and trends on water quality and pressures from agriculture. Presented high level questions for members to consider in relation to a future position of the Forum , aiming for a balanced view of social, economic, and environmental perspectives.</p> <p>Objective: Set the scene for understanding the challenges and developing a constructive position on agriculture and water quality.</p> <p>Water Forum’s vision should be the basis for this position – Looking for Next Steps: Where do we go with the discussion</p>	

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		<p>Wide Lens - What are the Sectoral Perspectives and agriculture and water? - How can the Forum Contribute</p> <p>More Granular: What are Simple measures to improve progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better comms • Farm specific education – local catchment issues and tailoring advice to farms • What does Ireland look like with/without the N derogation, Wider implications, water quality outcomes • Should other farming types be discussed (e.g. tillage) • Some farmers will be affected more than others <p>Discussed stats from Farm Structure Survey 2023 Challenges to getting younger people involved. Essential part of Irish Economy Discussed Export Stats of Agri-food sector</p> <p>Discussed Types of Farming and no. of farms, jobs and economic contribution for each type (e.g. dairy, cattle, pasture, tillage, horticulture, sheep, mixed farming)</p> <p>Farming Direct Payments Gave an overview of farming incomes. Only dairy has a positive market income all others are fully reliant on direct payments from the government. Showed graphs for Livestock Numbers (cattle) – dairy cows increases between 2010 and 2023, followed by a reduction. Suckler cows have decreased since 2010.</p> <p>EU Good Agricultural Practice (GAP Regs) All Farms need to comply with the EU GAP Regs that protect water from agricultural pollution. Discussed the Nitrates Action Programme’s (NAP) measures and role in preventing surface and groundwater pollution from agricultural sources and in protecting and improving water quality New agricultural inspection plan is risk based under the WAP, this is a better use of time and resources.</p> <p>Dairy Farming Showed map of dairy cow numbers by county (72% in southern region) and stats on investment, milk production and jobs. Investment is expanding the dairy industry, this investment is at stake when suggestions of reducing stocking rate.</p> <p>Nitrate Derogation Farms DAFM have stocking rate calculator (no. cows/hectare) N Derogation is up to 250 kg N/ha but there have been reductions to 220kg N/ha since 2024. 41% (7060 farms) in derogation – these farms need to implement more strict controls to improve water quality. They get more inspections from DAFM for compliance. The number of farms going</p>	

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		<p>into derogation is increasing since 2010. Up to 2023 only 15% of farms were above 220 kgN/ha</p> <p>Reduction in N Derogation Derogation limit will reduce to 220 kg organic N/ha (from Jan 24 / Dec 25) in areas where the EPA have identified a need for nitrate reduction measures as a priority to improve water quality.</p> <p>Debate on whether we should keep the derogation or not – discussed options for farmers if derogation was removed and the potential pros and cons. With no Derogation, Farmers with stricter controls will no longer have to do these controls. Teagasc research just published shows socio-economic reports but it doesn't include environment or stocking rate reduction consequences on water quality – this is a gap.</p> <p>Agriculture and Water Quality Different Agricultural pollutants effect water quality in different ways/pathways – depends on soil type (N versus P)</p> <p>Targeting Measures – depends on local soil conditions, type of farming and source of nutrients.</p> <p>Nitrogen Loading Reductions - Estuaries are particularly susceptible to nitrogen pollution and are currently in a poor condition. Graph showing a range of catchments requiring reductions in N loading (EPA report, August 2025) have shown reductions in N loading (except Blackwater) since 2018-2019. This graph also shows the scale of the problem for nitrogen reduction in some catchments, where a range of N reduction measures will be required. Urine and Chemical Fertilizer are the biggest sources of N (Teagasc research). Other sources of N will need to be considered, e.g. tillage.</p> <p>Targeting of Measures - discussed different projects making progress on this</p> <p>Discussion Comment: Age of farmers is a significant factor, societal issue – younger people are not wanting to go into farming. Comment: Can we get more young farmers into farming/ agriculture sector. We need to recognise this big gap and what it means for Ireland's future food security.</p> <p>Comment: Significant issue in the cost of cattle being sold at market Comment: The no. of older cattle being exported in Ireland is increasing, there is an EU shortage in cattle. Older cattle are leaving Ireland as the price of a cow is so high in EU. Bovine TB and</p>	

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		<p>other illnesses have also been an issue this year and caused reduced cattle numbers.</p> <p>Q: Do we have any stats on density, are there any farms where cows are not outside? A: No dairy cows are inside; Some beef cows might be.</p> <p>Comment: We want to maintain the family farm model – factory/company farming is not an area we want to go; It is not a good model for many reasons.</p> <p>Comment: Agri-forestry model could be very positive in the future.</p> <p>Comment: Challenges facing the agriculture sector is huge both financially, environmentally and socially - agree next generation is not committing to farming</p> <p>Comment: Want to highlight the benefits of agri-forestry, really good for the land and soil/water. However, the agri-forestry scheme is currently a forestry scheme, so you are committing your land to forestry and this is a barrier.</p> <p>Comment: There are other issues with smaller animal farms (pigs, sheep etc) and small animal access to water.</p> <p>Comment: Small holdings (40-50 acre) farms are now being taken over by commercial farmers. Now farms are 1000 acres, small farms are diminishing and are no longer viable.</p> <p>Comment: The effect is not only on water, methane is also an issue, there are wider environmental targets.</p> <p>Q: Could we get a figure on the percentage of food that is made in Ireland versus eaten in Ireland.</p> <p>Comment: The vast majority of Irish land is not suitable for growing crop (only grass or trees) due to climate conditions</p> <p>Q: How much food can people grow themselves?</p> <p>Comment: Land use in Ireland compared to EU, 60% of land is grassland, Netherlands is next at 30%. Irelands climate has big pest issues due to wet climate, so crops fail.</p> <p>Comment: Missing piece is what is the outcome of this for water quality.</p> <p>Comment: The consequences of this goes beyond agriculture, the second biggest asset we have is the beauty of the landscape. Anything that ruins this asset will ruin the tourism industry, which brings more money into the country than Agriculture does in certain regions. Social economic studies are difficult to do and difficult to map, there are unseen consequences for other sectors</p>	

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		<p>and interpretation of the data is important. We are light on the social and economic side, agriculture is only 8% of GDP.</p> <p>Comment: There is an independent study by EY. IBEC have a team that works on policy issues, Conor Mulville writes pieces in the Irish Times, he makes the argument that derogation can be kept at 220 kgN/ha and Water Quality can be improved. We could consider a presentation from Conor to the Forum.</p> <p>Comment: Hugely important that agriculture is maintained from a social point of view – large areas of the UK are dead socially due to loss of agriculture.</p> <p>Comment: Max N loading has gone down depending on the band of cow you have, this has contributed to N reduction. The derogation gets too much focus in terms of Water Quality. For example: Barrow 9% is derogation, 32% is tillage Slaney only 7% is derogation Bandon 28% is derogation Lee 25% is derogation</p> <p>Comment: It is hard to judge percentage because catchment sizes are different. Comment: Environmental NGOs never called for an end to the derogation if it is not compromising water quality. Comment: Where there are improvements in water quality or N loading – there should be recognition given to farmers for this improvement and for efforts. Negative press recently despite improvements in N, this really bothers farmers.</p> <p>Q: Nitrates regulations were a one size fits all, have we moved away from this because catchments are so different. A: No, however, the mantra is “right action in the right place” and Targeted Actions. This is what we are trying to learn how to do better via the LIFE Projects</p> <p>Comment: In the WAP they said there would be an interim review on progress or Distance to Target and success of measures – we need to follow up and ask them on this. Comment: Suggest we do a citizen assembly approach to a future Forum workshop – get people in to give evidence with facilitators at each table and rapporteur. Chair: Citizen Assemblies come together to get a consensus on agriculture and water quality in terms of social, economic and environment. How to encourage long-terms commitments to</p>	<p>Consider possible speakers for future workshops</p> <p>Follow up on interim review of distance to target and success of measures.</p> <p>Explore ideas for future workshop on Agriculture and Water</p>

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		<p>implementing measures – what is the behavioural changes we need for farmers to think of the next generation.</p> <p>RL: The team will work on this and come back to the CMSC.</p> <p>Comment: citizen assemblies tend to be biased in one direction – we need to ensure we get a balanced input for a presentation.</p> <p>4.1. Update on public consultation on the 6th NAP</p> <p>Update from the DHLGH is that the public consultation on the 6th NAP is delayed, we expect it will be published over the coming weeks and we will reschedule the briefing from the DHLGH.</p>	
4.0	Education & Communications Actions	<p>4.1 Communications & Education Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming Events – Rural water conference in Galway, TMG will be presenting and AFU will have a stand. • Chair will be speaking at the Environment Ireland Conference and SDG Conference. • Upcoming Activities – discussed website updates and social media activities, sharing more timely news etc • Young Scientist – working with new sponsor STRIPE, we will be asking for member volunteers again. <p>Following up from the Youth Workshop – Former Comms Lead had drafted report and was being reviewed by Youth Representative, not shared yet with participants but it will be.</p>	Team to follow up on progress of youth workshop report and identify next steps.
5.0	AOB	<p>7.1 To confirm the date of the next Plenary meeting -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 4th November, venue TBC • SWMI event on Thursday 23rd October in Spencer Hotel 	Book venue & notify members