

Draft Minutes of the Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 10th March 2026
via Zoom

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Dominic Cronin, Martin McEnroe, Marie Doyle, Michael Kenny, Connie Rochford, Juan Pablo Martinez, Eamon Carroll, Maria O’Gorman, Constanze O’Toole, Suzanne Linnane, Elaine McGoff, Charles Stanley-Smith, Keith Hyland, Ciarán Maguire, Brendan O’Brien, Tadhg Buckley, Steve Conlon, Eimear Manning and David Wright

Apologies: Sinead O’Brien, Maria Snell, Fintan Kelly, Karin Dubsky Jean Rosney and Mark Farrelly,

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

Guest Speakers: Marie Archbold, Emma Quinlan, Roland Gowran (DHLGH)

No.	Item	Details
1	Water Action Plan RBMP	1.1 Welcome & introductions Chair introduced and welcomed Marie Archbold. Rowland Gowran and Emma Quinlan from the DHLGH 1.2 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest – no conflicts of interest 1.3 Briefing by Officials from the DHLGH- Water Advisory Unit Background to Programme Delivery Office: PDO office allow us to both track the third and planning for the 4th WAP. Through tracking, the DHLGH want to identify what is not working and what needs improving/strengthening. There are implementation lags sometimes, so this can in turn delay assessments. Progress on implementation of the 3rd Cycle River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) - Water Action Plan 2024 <i>Presentation by Emma Quinlan (PDO) on Tracking the WAP</i> High Level actions in the WAP are the focus of the tracking Discussed the functions of the PDO - Tracking Implementation at multiple scales. • 10 SAWPS (Agriculture, Hydromorphology (3), Forestry, UWW, Peat (2), Invasive Alien Species, Drinking Water Safety Plans) – 8 are available online in the Programme of Measures section of DHLGH website. • The pilot Catchment Management Work Plans are being developed, LAWPRO can provide updates on these. • Local Authority Water Action Work Plans are also being developed. • Agriculture SAWP delayed due to data sharing agreements. • IAS SWAP still on hold. CMWPs are under development led by LAWPRO & EPA – process is evolving over time, need to understand what actions currently exist in a catchment via Catchment Trackers which we hope will be really useful to the community. Need

	to understand where measures are working and where there are gaps that need to be filled. Ongoing review of data is challenging. EPA leading on development of an online dashboard and plan to engage with CCF for feedback. Tracking of SAWP occurs on a quarterly basis reported to NCMC & WPAC Presented Examples of data dashboards: • online dashboard for National Barrier Mitigation Programme • NPWS tracker for National Biodiversity Action Plan Q3 2025 tracking - 27% complete, 17% on schedule, 17% delayed (commenced and not commenced), 2% at risk of delay. Discussed progress charts for SAWPs. Interim Review Report will include an update up to end 2025 – focusing on delayed actions and blockages to implementation. EU Presidency: Discussed various activities DHLGH will be involved in (WPIEI, Lead Expert Group, UN Water Conference 2026, Water and Marine Director Meeting, WFD Working Party). <i>Roland Gowran presented on the 4th Cycle WAP</i> • Currently focusing on the SWMI submission – early submissions welcome. Looking to identify the significant Issues. • Discussed SWMI objectives – identify challenges/opportunities, highlight conflicts, issues or constraints, seek stakeholder input • Focus for the 4th Plan is for it to be a Living Plan – strengthen “right measure in right place” and removing blockages. It will consider the Interim Review of 3rd Plan and EU Assessment of 3rd Cycle. • Plan Development: Programme of Measures Working Group established (EPA-DHLGH-LAWPRO) – scoping POM and discussing with sectors. • Q4 2025 it will go for environmental assessment and Ministerial approval. Q & A Q: Who is the tracker targeted at, who are you communicating to, the general public may need a lot of explanation on this information, how can this be done? A: The tracker is helping us feed into the WAP Framework, but it is also for transparency and data availability. On communications, the dashboards might help people find the information they need on their local waterbodies Chair: Good that this information is being disseminated to the CCF, will be interesting to see how progress on this. Q: The Forum recently received a briefing from EPA on the NIP, should there be a SAWP for domestic wastewater (DWWTS), is there a reason why there isn't one? A: DWWTS are being tracked under the LA Work Plan, so we don't want to be doubling up on tracking. Chair: The SAWP for DWWTS could be discussed under the 4th Plan. Q: Even though the Agriculture SAWP is delayed, are you still tracking the actions? A: Yes, we are tracking actions from the WAP, and DAFM are finalising the SAWP. Q: Good to see there will be a public information dashboard tracker. If tracking is on a quarterly basis, what is the process if a barrier is highlighted? It would be good to have a task force. A: Engaging with sector leads at every quarter and they provide updates. Updates are reviewed and delays escalated if needed, barriers will be raised at the NCMC
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	if a resolution is required. If an issue is highlighted at committee level a sub-group (task force) can be formed. The first live issue that came up was the issue of data sharing – a working group was established to deal with the issue. The delay of the Agriculture SAWP was also discussed at last WPAC meeting – decided that plan could be publish and data sharing issues can be resolved at a later date. DHLGH: Not just about WPAC, it's also about the Regional Committees and boots on the ground, not always a policy issue, for example more guidance may be needed from the EPA. Chair: Need to figure out how to relay this information to society and community groups. Q: Are there resources for making communities aware of what is happening, people are interested in their local area? Could be a video or speaker etc, would be interesting the engage with universities to pilot projects. A: The first line is getting the Dashboard up and running, then communicating with the CCF and harnessing the funding that is already there to make a broader template for the country. Chair: LAWPRO also have funding for community projects. Research Lead: The Forum is commissioning research this year on Communications that would support the WAP, hopefully this will provide useful learnings. Q: Are CCF actions included in the tracker? A: There are community actions on the tracker from LAs and LAWPRO. Q: Who will be going to the EU Presidency meetings, will the Forum be represented? A: The Water division withing the DHLGH will be leading out on representing the European Council, from Easter we will have a neutral role and will have to listen to other members states and have a neutral stance – we become facilitators. In the UN Water Conference, we will represent the EU Council. There wouldn't be a role for the Forum in this. Q: Is there an EU country who has a good model for this tracking? A: Ireland has a higher network of water bodies than most EU states, we are ambitious in what we are doing. We have a more variable landscape, so we need to track at higher resolution than most other Member States. We are looking across all tracking mechanisms across the EU but there are none at the scale we need. Currently working off excel to see what we need. IT haven't been involved in developing a dashboard yet. Bringing information from the WFD App to the public is important. We don't want the IT System driving the work, we want to establish what we need first to guide the system. Chair: Ireland are quite good at developing operational dashboards and monitoring programmes compared the other EU states. Officials are looking at ways that this can be done better. Chair: Reminded members that the Forum have made a submission to DHLGH in advance of this SWMI consultation. As well as implementation there needs to be an equal focus on communication and what audiences need to be reached. Suggested a new phrase - "Right Information to the Right Audience and the Right Time". Q: At what stage is the EPA distance to target completed ahead of the 4th WAP, as this was slightly delayed in the 3rd Cycle?
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		A: The EPA are working in tandem with the Programme of Measures (POMs), should have characterisation ready mid-summer. Will be using this to see how POMs can fill the gaps. Chair: Will the Distance to Target piece be available to the Forum to see? A: Will liaise with the EPA on this. Q: The communication piece in plain English appropriate to the audience is so important. What can be learned from the last WAP? A: There will be learnings through the SWMI and the Interim Review, great to highlight the communications piece so it is important to be able to simplify the language appropriate to the audience. 1.4 Members only - Discussion and Next Steps • We need to allow SWMI, Governance Structures and Tracking to evolve. • The Forum can look at what was not taken onboard from the submission it made on the 3rd WAP. • The Forum can also say something on how the SAWPs are progressing – the information is complex but a lot of what we asked for is there. • Some of the research we have commissioned this year will help with Communications and Governance. Chair: Communication Research will be important to help the DHLGH to develop a Communications Plan especially with the establishment of the CCFs. Comment: We need to complement the fact the tracking is being done. Didn't see tracking of synergies between actors, how can this be tracked.
2.	Apologies & Minutes	Chair: Condolence to Marie O’Gorman from the Forum on the death of her brother PJ. 2.1 Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting no. 72 held on 20th January 2026 Minutes Approved 2.2 Matters arising from the minutes - none
3.	Corporate issues	3.1 Update on Forum expenditure to 28th February 2026 Expenditure is €92,960 to the end of February. 3.2 Update on the Forum’s Strategic Planning process including Sub-Group establishment. Developing the next AFU Strategic Plan (2028-2033) in 2 Phases: Phases 1 (2026) - Reflection Impact Assessment and Draft Strategy Development (involving the current members). Phase 2 (2027) – Targeted Consultation and Strategy Finalisation (will involve some of the new member). • In Phase 1, Members will reflect on the Forums current strategy so we can build on it with the next one. Need to look at the impact of our last strategy and consider future impact. • Phase 2 will finalise the Draft Strategy. • A Planning Sub-Group will be established, we are looking for volunteers (5- 6 members). Members to let SEO know if they are interested. • SEO – proposed that we seek Request for Quotation from suitable consultants by this summer. Members to let SEO know if they have any suggestions for suitable consultants. Members to let SEO know: • Of any suitable consultants with expertise in Strategy Development. • If they would like to volunteer for the sub-committee to support process around strategic plan development. [ACTION]

4.	Research & Policy	4.1 Research & Policy Update Discussed the 2 Projects to be commissioned by the Forum in 2026, as agreed at the last Plenary: • The Value of Water – A Communication framework for Ireland’s Water Action Plan • The Implementation of the WFD – Policy Coherence, Managing trade offs, financing and capacity 4.2 To approve membership of Research evaluation panels for 2026 Requested volunteers from the Forum Members for the two Review Panels. Three members volunteered to review the Communications Research quotations and two volunteered for the WFD project with one more volunteer required. Research Lead to follow up with Members who have volunteered. CMSC Policy Update: Discussed Key Recommendations for the National Inspection Plan (NIP) for septic tanks as part of pre-consultation with EPA. Agreed high level recommendations for submission with the CMSC, to include • The need for a SAWP for Domestic Wastewater to coordinate and track activity • Increased inspections to address areas at risk from domestic wastewater • Preventative measures through education and community engagement Comment: Community Engagement and Preventative measures need to be highlighted - increasing inspections will still show 50% failure if no engagement or education is in place Chair: The Forum should request that the EPA bring the proposed 10 year gap (for inspections areas 100m from surface waters identified as being at risk from septic tanks) down to 5 years in line with the WFD. WSSC Policy Update: Interests of Public Water Consumers – we are developing a background paper based on the surveys completed in recent years and discussion with UE at the Liaison Group meeting which will lead to policy advice. Aiming for plenary approval by May 2026.
5.	Education & Communications	5.1 Update on Communications & Education Actions • Members met with UE Liaison Groups last week on the Interests of Public Consumers. • Developing a communications/dissemination plan on published research. • Members were notified about the EPA Water Conference on 17th & 18th June, to let SEO know if they are interested in attending and accommodation in Salthill. • Coastal Research Report is now available on the Website. • Members will be asked the review and approve the Annual Report in the coming weeks. • Field trip to UE Laboratory next week (19th March)
6.	AOB	6.1 Any other Business - None
7.	Date for next Plenary	7.1 To confirm the date of the next Plenary meeting Tuesday 21st April 2026 in the Ashling Hotel