

**Draft Minutes of the Plenary Meeting
Tuesday 21st April 2026
Ashling Hotel**

Attendees: Matt Crowe, Dominic Cronin, Martin McEnroe, Connie Rochford, Eamon Carroll, Jean Rosney, Mark Farrelly, Constanze O'Toole, Charles Stanley-Smith, Elaine McGoff, Eimear Manning, Juan Pablo Martinez, Maria O'Gorman

Apologies: Steve Conlon, Brendan O'Brien, Fintan Kelly, Keith Hyland, Tadhg Buckley, David Wright, Ciarán Maguire, Marie Doyle, Suzanne Linnane, Karin Dubsky, Michael Kenny

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

No.	Item	Details
1.	Apologies & Minutes	Welcome The chair welcomed members and discussed plenary agenda. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest There were no conflicts of interest declared. Consideration of draft minutes of Meeting No. 72 held on 10th March 2026 The minutes were approved by the members. Matters arising: None Action: The approved minutes to be published on the Forum website
2.	Corporate issues	2.1 Report on Forum expenditure to 31st March 2026 SEO explained that expenditure to 31st March 2026 was €138,862.45 Received letter from the Department on funding allocation for 2026 (€802,926 this is an increase of €70,178 on 2025) and in line with the funding application made to the DHLGH. 2.2 Correspondence DHLGH letter requesting AFU to support delivery of Water Conservation Strategy which was dealt with as part of the policy section of the meeting DHLGH correspondence to request Forum to engage stakeholders and advance thinking on public health risk reduction for private wells. Executive to plan future workshop, will engage with DERIVE project, who are having a private wells workshop in May. Discussion - The Forum would seek to identify what Policy levers are required to support private wells - GWS - Schemes funded to transfer people from private wells to GWS, this includes SPSS that are on private wells. SEO read out Letter of Resignation from Forum member Sinead O'Brien (SWAN), SEO and Chair noted the significant contribution Sinead has made to the Forum over the last 8 years. Action: Chair said he would like to send a note to Sinead on behalf of the Forum.

		Suggestion to invite Sinead to the meeting when other members will be stepping down at the end of their term. 2.3 Approval of the Forum's 2025 Draft Annual Report The Communications Lead explained that: - Annual Report content and Design is complete Created new infographic to represent the sectors in the Forum. Explained how the Annual Report is used to focus on what the Forum is doing, focusing on Impact and Outputs. Annual Report was Approved by the Forum and will be submitted to the DHLGH and published on the website once approved by the DHLGH. 2.4 Update on the Development of the Forum's Strategic Plan (2028-33) - Developed Request for Quotation and this has been sent to 5 Facilitators that were suggested by the members.
3.	Water Conservation	3.1 Proposal to support the DHLGH request for the development of Water Conservation Strategy Background Discussed AFU work so far on Water Conservation which resulted in the forming of the Water Conservation Working Group. Discussed how the Working Group has proceeded so far. The DHLGH has requested the Forum to support the Dept. and the working group to develop a Water Conservation Strategy. 3.2 Discussion on key thematic areas for the Water Conservation Strategy Looking for Key Opportunities and Barriers from a Sectoral Perspective on how to improve water conservation in Ireland. <i>Education/Communication (General Public)</i> - Public Education is needed as we do not pay for water. The public should understand that water is paid for indirectly - the public need to know how much it costs to produce water and in what ways are they paying for it. 50L Home Coalitions (50L/day/person) – how we frame the message is important. - People are still running the taps when it's frosty, education is required to stop this. - There should be transparency in water users. If we are asking people to conserve water, we should know who the different users are. - Communications are essential – people don't see any reason to conserve water. Need education on caring about water quality and where their drinking water comes from. <i>Education/Communication (Involving Young People)</i> - Young people are perceived as having a lack of knowledge and are not invited to the conversation - then they are not able to form an opinion and disassociate from the conversation – Need to find a way to tailor how water conservation can be discussed with young people - Community Based Marketing is useful to change the value system for both communities and young people – e.g. bin sticker for doing recycling online course - Younger people more educated because they have done the Green Schools but there is a falloff in Secondary School in the Green Ambassador – Kids have more peer pressure to stop caring about the things they are passionate about. They are encouraged to only speak about things that everyone agrees on. This is why community projects are important as they become an outlet for young people to do the things they are passionate about. - Social media is globalising young people and makes them feel they can't do anything about a problem. But it can also be used for good at a local community level.

		<i>Water Stewardship/Incentives</i> • Water Stewardship programme uptake is relatively low – if prices are still going up it limits how companies can put funding towards water conservation measures. • How can we incentivise water conservation for non-domestic consumers. <i>Leakage, Metering & Consumption Measurement</i> • Water Metering is important as they can indicate if there is leakage – GWS get an annual report even if there is no charge, member's report showed they were just below the usage threshold, so it highlighted a leak in his home. • A challenge for non-domestic water users is measurement of water consumption as wastewater, not all water used goes out as wastewater. • When leakage is improved, contamination is reduced (opportunity) • Leakage needs to be addressed as a priority. <i>Rainwater Harvesting / Water Recycling</i> • Bord Bia ESTAS Programme - water from private wells has to be inspected every 3 years (if water is washing plant or going to animals) • No incentives for installing rainwater harvesting in private houses or farms • Rainwater Harvesting could be used for yards but it very expensive • Member disagrees as local car wash set up rainwater harvesting for their business • Factories should be able to use water harvesting from their roofs to flush the toilets • Capturing water from private houses to use for toilets • Water recycling is most successful at community scale <i>Sustainable Infrastructure/Multiple Benefits</i> • In California they are covering their reservoirs with floating solar panels. • Should be looking at dual piping for clean and treated water and wastewater • Building Regs need to be updated for low flowing taps etc. <i>Low Water Issues</i> • Risk to reputation for tourism • Water abstraction during summer low flows – Peace Plus Projects (opportunity) • Impoundment for fish, when the water is low there is not enough oxygen for fish to survive
4.	Water Services	• Approval of the AFU position on the Interests of Public Water Consumers. Discussed the background work and research that has been done by the Forum to reach the position on Interests of Public Water Consumers. Discussed recommendations that have already been approved by the WSSC. Recommendations were made on: • Public Trust • Advanced notice to disruptions • Customer Services – UE • Customer Services – CRU (Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook) • Access to Data • Water Conservation Some recommendations will be directed to UE, others directly to the CRU. Discussion • Need to consider how public trust could be measured (e.g. through surveys). Chair: Most trusted services are the Credit Union and An Post, UE are 94th out of 100 in a recent national survey carried out. UE need to work on their reputational issue and gaining public trust. Engagement with CRU to formulate advice could be very useful. • Older people are not getting text alerts. Local Radio should also be used for disruption notices.

		• Need to think about how to measure customer interactions not just via their surveys or calls. • One challenge in relation to non-domestic users is that businesses do not fully understand that the CRU set the water tariffs. We get lots of complaints about why UE are increasing the rate – UE communications need to state that the CRU set the water tariffs. • There could be improvements in information on who to contact for non-domestic customers. Multi-media methods should be used for information, text alerts can be more granular to specific areas (also door to door flyers), local radio covers a broader area. • Need to be careful when publishing exceedances that the public understand what these mean to prevent scare mongering. • New DW regs have new targets for leakage, which will influence how leakage is addressed. • Reporting Leakage is easy via their online form – need to make the public more aware of this. Action: Colour should be added to the Taste and Odour issue. Add communications in relation to reporting a leak. Add recommendation for better communications for non-domestic customers, on who to contact and water efficiency stewardship. Following the changes raised above, the Plenary has approved this Position. The work of the WSSC acknowledged. Discuss future steps and policy advice to the CRU, following recent meeting with the CRU Commissioner The secretariate, Chair and WSSC Chair met with CRU Commissioner on 10th April Next Steps: • Structured Engagement (annual meeting) • Identify key focus areas • Share Interests of Public Consumers position • Revise Domestic and Non-Domestic Customer Handbooks • Discussion on proposed Stakeholder Evaluation Panel
5.	Education & Communications	5.1 Update on Communications & Education Actions • Website refresh in progress – launch planned for end of May. • Spring Newsletter – May publication. • Coastal and Transitional waters research dissemination with feature on Catchments.ie • Developing communications materials for stakeholder workshop on water conservation. • Science Week 2026 has a water theme this year.
6.	Water Action Plan	6.1 Development of AFU position in response to SWMI Consultation & the 4th WAP • There will be overlap between the 4th Cycle SWMI Consultation and advice to WPAC on the 3rd cycle. • CMSC discussion meeting on 7th/12th May and Plenary Approval 26th May • Research Lead will be giving a presentation on the SWMI Consultation at the EPA Water Conference. • Discussed Briefings from DHLGH (10th March), EPA and LAWPRO (14th April) - progress being made on 3rd WAP is welcome. • Proposal to send piece of policy Advice to WPAC on the implementation of the 3rd cycle. Draft Advice to WPAC: EPA Dashboard Advice

		• Forum welcomes the dashboard and support that it will go live without a full data set (recommendation to declare data gap on the dashboard). • Need to acknowledge that dashboard data is capturing national measures, and even if there is full compliance with these measures, it may not be enough for some waterbodies to meet their WFD objective. Supplementary targeted measures would then be required. • Data sharing obstacles are a concern – call for discussion at next WPAC meeting to gain clarity on data obstacles. CMWPs While Catchment trackers are essential for assessment the Forum is concerned CMWPs are being rebranded as Catchment Trackers. Stated ambition for CMWPs should remain as the identification and targeting of measures at catchment scale Discussion Member raised concern that farm level data be shared. Chair replied that the EPA indicated that farm level data would not be shared. Member had query re low confidence data on the dashboard, such as Agricultural Data. Research Lead stated that EPA indicated that currently urban wastewater data is of high confidence, but it is more complex with diffuse pollution sources. Data is being gathered to figure out where additional measures are required in the catchments beyond the national measures. As more data is being uploaded into the system, it will reduce the data uncertainty. Member stated that targeting measures is not just what the WAP has committed to do it is what the WFD requires and what we are legally bound to do. Member had query about Golf courses and Gardens and what pressure they fall under in terms of fertilizer/pesticides –Response: There is an “Other” category or depending on their location, they could be included as “Urban Runoff”. On the EPA Corine maps golf courses are classified as “Sports Grounds” or “non-agricultural grassland”. Member suggested that the EPA data dashboard includes a tool to visualize the distance a waterbody is from its WFD objective, like a bar chart. A user could then compare the actions in an area with the distance to meeting WFD objectives. Member: SWMI Consultation has 17 links to detailed reports - not very accessible to the public. Exemption Regulations: The Consultations acknowledges Ireland is not going reach GES for all waterbodies by 2027 and talks about Exemption Regulations. Need to watch this as it could be way of staying compliant while decreasing water quality, the Heavily Modified Water Bodies are an example of this. Research Lead stated that if the Forum asks for DAFM to explain the data obstacles, members will have a better understanding of the issues.
7.	AOB	• Member mentioned that the Quagga Mussel has now reached Lough Sheelin, there is no plan, and nobody is taking it seriously • The All About Water Education booklet was circulated by Mark from NFGWS
8.	Date for next Plenary	6.1 To confirm the date of the next Plenary meeting Tuesday 26th May 2026 – Ashling Hotel