

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building - 2 March 2023

Attendees

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Chair)	[DAFM]
Animal and Plant Health Association	[APHA]
Cork County Council	[CCC]
Environmental Protection Agency	[EPA]
Federation of Agrochemical Retail Merchants	[FARM]
Golf Ireland	[GI]
Health Service Executive	[HSE]
Irish Farmers Association	[IFA]
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	[ICMSA]
Local Authority Waters Programme	[LAWPRO]
Teagasc/ASSAP	[Teagasc/ASSAP]
Uisce Éireann	[UÉ]

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed attendees to this hybrid meeting of the NPDWAG. Apologies received in advance from several members were noted. New participants (representing existing stakeholders) were welcomed.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (30-11-22). If anybody had any suggestions for amendments subsequently they were asked to forward specific text to the Chair for inclusion and revision by 24-03-23. The Chair commented that DAFM would publish the minutes of the previous meeting (30-11-22) and all future NPDWAG meetings. These would be uploaded and available to view on the DAFM's pesticides website at the following location –

www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/sud/waterprotection/nationalpesticidesanddrinkingwateractiongroup

Follow-up actions

- TAMS funding for drift reducing nozzles – scheme unlikely to provide funding as these are not considered 'permanent' fixtures.
- TAMS funding for retrofitting Closed Transfer Systems to sprayers – will be looked at further in next tranche of the scheme.
- DAFM will consider if the 2023 Policy and Strategic Studies Research Call could provide a route to funding research into developing a MCPA formulation suitable for use in weed lickers.

3. Uisce Éireann update on drinking water exceedances – preliminary overview of 2022

The current population receiving water from a Public Water Supply that has an open EPA compliance plan for pesticides is 181,543. The EPA currently has 19 pesticide compliance files open, down from 22 reported on 30-11-22, reflecting continuing good progress in dealing with pesticide issues. A total of 48 exceedances for pesticides were detected in 2022 (40 exceedances of the individual pesticide limit, 8 exceedances of the total pesticides limit), compared with 47 in

2021 (44 exceedances of the individual pesticide limit, 3 exceedances of the total pesticides limit). MCPA still accounts for most of the exceedances detected – 18 in 2022 compared to 31 in 2021.

4. Investigative work on bentazone exceedances – updates from Uisce Éireann and DAFM

UÉ presented summary findings of groundwater investigations carried out in relation to bentazone detections in Clonroche PWS. This is a small scheme (serving a population of 588 individuals and supplying 230 m³/day), with a tightly defined Zone of Contribution (ZoC) covering approximately six cereals and grass fields in the south-west corner of the water supply zone. Significant work has been carried out to try and determine if the exceedances are due to a legacy contamination issue or resulted from more recent use(s) of an authorised plant protection product (PPP) containing bentazone. This work included extensive analysis of raw water samples, assessment of fluctuations of the groundwater level in the aquifer and collection of PPP sales data. No definitive conclusions have been reached yet.

DAFM indicated that sales data has been collected from within the catchment and surrounding counties and that a detailed analysis will be carried out.

UÉ indicated that they intend to establish a local catchment focus group, with representation from appropriate stakeholders, to consider the possibility of implementing targeted actions to address the issue, including awareness-raising activities.

During discussion, some questions were asked about the hydrology of the aquifer and whether the defined ZoC captures all water input pathways, including both surface and sub-surface flows.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities – overview of 2022, plans for 2023

Monitoring programme

A brief synopsis of the main highlights of the 2022 monitoring campaign was presented. There was a slight reduction in the number of exceedances in the Lough Forbes catchment compared to 2020 and 2021 but numerous exceedances continued to be recorded. Significant improvements were noted for the Belturbet and Newport catchments, with recorded exceedances in water bodies decreasing by 30% and 54% respectively, compared to 2021.

Looking forward to 2023, it was noted that sampling and analytical costs had increased by 47% in the preceding two years but, notwithstanding this, it was anticipated that 810 samples would be collected in 2023. The programme will begin in week 15 (10 April) for Lough Forbes, Belturbet, Emy Lough and Newport, and in week 18 (1 May) for the Feale and Deel catchments. There will be more focus on the River Deel this year, with ten sampling points now included for this catchment.

Stewardship

APHA will continue to work in conjunction with Teagasc to promote good farm practice in the use and storage of pesticides, and will further progress the IASIS web-based learning courses.

Regarding container management, it was noted that good progress is being made to reach the industry commitment of a 75% average collection rate of containers in the EU by 2025. The collection rate in Ireland has increased significantly in recent years and was estimated to be 65% by the end of 2022. Work will continue in cooperation with the Irish Farm Film Producers' Group to encourage farmers to recycle empty, triple-rinsed plant protection product containers.

6. Negotiations on proposal for Sustainable Use Regulation – update from DAFM

DAFM presented an overview of the EU examination of the European Commission's proposal for a Regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products (Sustainable Use Regulation proposal – SUR). This will replace the existing Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUD). The SUR proposal was published in June 2022. Scrutiny is ongoing at EU Council level and in the European Parliament. Negotiations are likely to continue for a further 12-18 months.

The aim of the SUR is to reduce by 50% the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides, and to reduce by 50% the use of more hazardous pesticides. Progress will be measured by EU-agreed indicators, using a baseline averaged over the years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The SUR includes the following proposed measures –

- prohibition of PPPs in sensitive areas (or within 3 m of such areas);
- independent advisors (no conflict of interest);
- legal obligation for Professional Users to implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices;
- electronic systems to record PPP use and IPM implementation;
- legally binding reduction targets;
- electronic register for pesticide application equipment (to record purchase, sale/transfer, not in use) and
- National Action Plans (to be reviewed every three years).

DAFM recently held a public consultation on the SUR proposal. Over 300 responses were received.

7. Communications activities – updates and plans for 2023 (Uisce Éireann), update from DAFM

UÉ gave an overview of the proposed NPDWAG communications plan for 2023. The approach involves provision of material for national and regional media sources, the use of web and social media tools, targeted digital campaigns and focused engagement with stakeholders. The plan will commence with a Spring campaign involving a national press release and bespoke county-specific press releases, supported by social media content and updated website material. Digital campaigns targeting priority areas are also planned at appropriate times during the year. Opportunities for providing messaging in conjunction with projects focusing on biodiversity measures, such as the National Federation of Group Water Schemes 'Let it Bee' project, will also be considered.

DAFM indicated that it would consider updating an article on impacts of pesticide use on biodiversity that appeared in the Irish Farmers Journal in summer 2022 to reflect current ACRES payment rates, and also indicated that a communications initiative involving an essay competition for second-level students was being considered.

8. Planning for 2023 – general actions, priority area actions

Participants were asked to submit details of planned activities for 2023 to UÉ, using the action tracker spreadsheet.

9. Other stakeholder updates

ASSAP advisors will formulate plans for the year in the next 4-6 weeks.

10. AOB

No AOB items were raised.