

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 27 November 2024

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 Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	[ICMSA]
Irish Farmers Association	[IFA]
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	[NFGWS]
Teagasc/ASSAP	[Teagasc/ASSAP]
Uisce Éireann	[UÉ]
Wicklow County Council	[WCC]

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed attendees to the hybrid meeting of the NPDWAG. Apologies received in advance from several members were noted.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (25 September 2024). Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 6 December 2024 if they had any suggested amendments. The Chair noted that the minutes would be published on DAFM's pesticides website in due course –

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

Action update

DAFM plan to engage with TidyTown's competition in Q1 of 2025 to build on previous work to increase awareness about responsible pesticide use in specific areas.

3. Uisce Éireann updates on drinking water exceedances and Catchment Focus Group activities

There are currently 27 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 206,947 – an increase of 24,381 since the previous update (25/09/2024). Fourteen compliance plans have been closed so far this year, serving a population of 272,710.

Fifty-five exceedances of the parametric limit values for pesticides have been recorded so far in 2024 (33 for MCPA, 8 for glyphosate, 6 for 2,4-D, 2 for triclopyr, 1 for clopyralid, 1 for mecoprop, 1 for metaldehyde and 3 exceedances of the total pesticides level).

It was noted that some of the exceedances for MCPA may have occurred during the closed period for use of MCPA products, which runs from the end of September until the beginning of March. It was speculated that this might have been due to weather conditions, with relatively dry conditions experienced in many areas during October and November compared to the summer months.

It was agreed that there is a need to increase awareness of the fact of the closed period for use of MCPA products, via communications and advisory activities. The possibility of including a neck collar on MCPA products, highlighting the need to take great care to protect water quality, was also raised.

UÉ catchments update – The continuing work of Catchment Focus Groups (CFGs), involving collaboration by relevant stakeholders at a local level in priority catchments, was highlighted. CFGs are currently working in the following catchment areas – Rivers Deel and Feale (Newcastle West PWS, Foynes/Shannon Estuary, Listowel, Abbeyfeale), Belturbet PWS (Cavan), Greenmount-Dee (Louth), Clonroche PWS (Wexford), Newport (Mayo) and Lough Forbes (Longford Central). Regular meetings are held in all these areas.

The possibility of an additional CFG being established for the Hacketstown Water Supply catchment area (Co. Carlow) was noted. An update on UÉ's Erne-Larah Source Protection project was also provided (www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/erne-larah). Evaluation of water quality monitoring data from the study area is progressing, and survey work on farmers' attitudes and practices is ongoing. An on-farm stakeholder event was held during October 2024 to showcase measures being deployed as part of the project.

4. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities

Results from the raw water monitoring programme for 2024, which finished at the end of September, were reviewed. Overall results were as follows –

- Belturbet - 72 exceedances in 2024 compared to 92 in 2023.
- Lough Forbes - 4 exceedances in 2024, compared to 13 exceedances for the same sampled area in 2023.
- Deel - 31 exceedances in 2024, compared to 36 in 2023.
- Feale - 9 exceedances in 2024 compared to 3 in 2023.
- Greenmount - 6 exceedances in 2024. This catchment wasn't included in the 2023 monitoring programme.
- Foynes (Rivers Deel and Ehernagh) - 15 exceedances in 2024.

5. Update on pilot Hazardous Waste Collection Scheme trial days DAFM

DAFM and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) have joint responsibility under the EPA's *National Hazardous Waste Management Plan 2021-2027* for developing a plan for a national collection scheme for farm hazardous wastes, covering unused and expired plant protection products and veterinary medicinal products. In order to progress this work, three one-day trials were carried out at sites in Laois, Offaly and Wexford during October and November 2024, in conjunction with the Irish Farm Film Producers' Group (IFFPG).

The services of a waste management company were procured to manage the collection, removal and disposal of the waste. Farmers availing of the service paid a fee directly to the waste management company on the day (€3.95 per kg for plant protection products and biocidal products, €5.50 per kg for veterinary medicinal products). The information from the trials will be used to inform options about possibilities for 2025 and beyond.

Action

A further update on the amount and types of waste collected will be provided by DAFM at the next NPDWAG meeting.

6. Communications activities (Uisce Éireann)

A brief overview was presented of communications activities carried out by different stakeholders during 2024, and their audience reach. It was noted that local media coverage

is often more effective, with local voices telling local stories. Emphasising co-benefits of protecting water quality, such as protecting biodiversity, is also important.

Some tips were given on preparing for media interviews. Preparation is key. Relatable examples should be included for audiences if possible, and jargon and overly technical language should be avoided.

Action

Group members were asked to contact UÉ if interested in media training.

7. Other stakeholder updates

- GI have developed a Sustainability Portal, in conjunction with ATPI (Association of Turfgrass Professionals Ireland) and DAFM, to assist golf clubs in recording usage of plant protection products. Further information is available at the following location – <https://atpi.ie/sustainability-portal/>

Action

A demonstration of the Sustainability Portal will be included on the agenda of the next NPDWAG meeting.

- CCC informed the group that Limerick City and County Council have prepared a very useful Farm Booklet, which has a key focus on water quality and includes information on protecting drinking water sources from potential impacts of pesticide use. The booklet can be accessed online at the following location – www.limerick.ie/council/services/environment/biodiversity-and-all-ireland-pollinator-plan/farm-booklet

8. Planning for 2025 – general actions, priority area actions

Attendees were asked to ensure that all relevant actions carried out in 2024 are entered in the UÉ Action Tracker spreadsheet (general actions and actions in specific areas), and to start planning actions that could be undertaken in 2025.

9. AOB

- DAFM noted that the need for guidance on the use of drones for application of plant protection products is due to be discussed at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council of Ministers meeting scheduled for 9-10 December 2024.
- Details of how pressures on drinking water sources are taken into account for planned pesticide enforcement activities will be provided by DAFM at the next NPDWAG meeting.