

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 25 September 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] |
| Environmental Protection Agency | [EPA] |
| Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association | [ICMSA] |
| Local Authorities Water Programme | [LAWPRO] |
| 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. A new participant, representing an existing stakeholder, was welcomed.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (29 May 2024). Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 2 October 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

- Further to an incident of apparent inappropriate pesticide use adjacent to a watercourse in an amenity area, discussed at the previous NPDWAG meeting, DAFM indicated it would engage with Tidy Towns committees and the competition sponsor, prior to the 2025 competition, in relation to building on previous work to increase awareness about responsible pesticide use in such settings. This will include written material for circulation, emphasising promotion of biodiversity as a competition objective.
- The DAFM guidance note on good practice during sprayer operations is now available on the DAFM pesticides website (www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/media/pesticides/content/sud/Guidance%20for%20Sprayer%20Operations%20170624.pdf). It was updated recently with an additional bullet point to note that users must comply with either a minimum 3 m no-spray buffer zone for any watercourse subject to CAP conditionality or a larger product-specific aquatic buffer zone specified on a product label, if one has been set.

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

There are currently 23 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 182,566 – a decrease of 128,939 since the previous update (29/05/2024). Thirteen compliance plans have been closed so far this year, serving a population of 261,157.

Thirty-six exceedances of the parametric limit values for pesticides have been recorded so far in 2024 (21 for MCPA, 5 for 2,4-D, 4 for glyphosate, 1 for clopyralid, 1 for metaldehyde, 1

for triclopyr and 3 exceedances of the total pesticides level). It was noted that many of the exceedances for individual substances were just above the parametric limit value (0.1 µg/L).

UÉ catchments update – The ongoing 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.

4. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities

Monitoring programme

The initial configuration of the monitoring programme for 2024 was as follows – Belturbet catchment (15 sampling points), Lough Forbes (four sampling points), Newport (eight sampling points), Deel (ten sampling points) and Feale (one sampling point). The programme started at the end of the first week in April and was scheduled to run for 18 weeks in total (finishing at the end of September). The Newport sampling points were discontinued after week 23, with four additional sampling points added to Lough Forbes, and eight points added to the Greenmount catchment (River Dee) from week 25.

Results to date

- Belturbet - 60 exceedances so far in 2024 compared to 68 over the same period in 2023.
- Lough Forbes - 14 exceedances so far in 2024. The revised sampling protocol means that comparisons with 2023 are not possible.
- Deel - 16 exceedances so far in 2024 compared to 17 over the same period in 2023.
- Feale - 7 exceedances so far in 2024 compared to two over the same period in 2023.
- Greenmount - one exceedance so far in 2024. This catchment wasn't included in the 2023 monitoring programme.
- Foynes (Rivers Deel and Ehernagh) - 11 exceedances so far in 2024.

Stewardship – Container Management System

APHA continues to work with the Irish Farm Film Producers' Group (IFFPG) to encourage farmers to recycle empty, triple-rinsed pesticide containers. Very good progress is being made to reach the industry commitment of an average 75% collection rate of plastic pesticide and biopesticide containers across EU Member States by 2025. The collection rate in Ireland has increased significantly in recent years. The most recent estimate is 94.54% for 2023 but this is an over-estimate, since feedback from the collection centres indicates that a range of other types of plastic containers are also being collected, such as detergent containers. Survey work being undertaken in 2024, involving sampling of collected containers to determine the proportion of pesticide containers, will enable more accurate estimations of the pesticide container collection rate to be made.

5. Integrated catchment management approach in the Lough Forbes Rinn_010 area (LAWPRO)

LAWPRO gave a presentation on the development of a risk-based approach to target areas for visits by ASSAP advisors, which could potentially be used in other catchments as well.

Efforts in 2023 to improve results in the Rinn_010 area of the Lough Forbes catchment involved ASSAP advisors contacting all landowners in the area likely to be using pesticides. This resulted in approximately 90 farmers being contacted and given information, with some farms selected for in-person visits. This involved a significant workload for a fairly small area, which would not be feasible in a larger catchment.

An alternative approach was piloted for 2024 with the aim of reducing the number of potential visits required in the catchment. A risk matrix was developed which focused on poorly draining, peaty and alluvium soils within 50 m of water bodies with the potential to transport pesticides, and which categorised the farms corresponding to these land parcels according to the size of the land area (>5 ha, 2-5 ha, 1-2 ha, <1 ha). This resulted in the following risk characterisation for farms in this area – see table below.

| Risk Category | No. of Farms | % of total land (poorly drained, near water bodies) |
|------------------------------|--------------|--|
| [1] Greater than 5 ha | 21 | 52% |
| [2] 2-5 ha | 30 | 29% |
| [3] 1-2 ha | 29 | 13% |
| [4] Less than 1 ha | 62 | 7% |
| Total | 142 | |

It can be seen that by visiting farms in the top two risk categories (51 farms), ASSAP advisors would be covering 81% of the riskiest area for pesticide losses. This approach narrows down large assessment areas into a manageable number of farm visits and appears to be a workable model that could be rolled out in other catchments. A similar indicative risk characterisation exercise carried out for the Bunoke area of the Deel catchment suggested that 21 farm visits would cover 71% of the riskiest area for pesticide losses.

6. Communications activities (Uisce Éireann)

There has been significant positive coverage of awareness raising activities in 2024. The communications campaign is focused on building trust and confidence. For example, knowledgeable spokespeople talked to interviewers from various media outlets. It was noted that some communications approaches work better than others. For instance, local stories, photos of people, machinery or livestock and short videos are more effective than images of groups of people, photos without a person, images from outside the county and press releases of more than one page.

It was commented during discussion that Facebook is still used by many individuals as an important source of information and that some YouTube influencers are widely followed, particularly by younger farmers.

7. Update on review of list of pesticides monitored in drinking water (DAFM)

Work is ongoing to update the list of pesticides currently monitored in drinking water. The first stage reviewed the scale of use of pesticides in Ireland, based on an analysis of sales and usage data, and identified 46 substances for further consideration. The next stage involves assessment of various environmental fate and behaviour properties of those substances, focusing on their persistence and mobility in soil and water. Following this, classification schemes will be developed to assess the potential for substance transport to surface- and groundwater bodies.

The review will consider some pesticide metabolites (breakdown/transformation products) in addition to pesticide active substances. This will necessitate decisions on the relevancy/non-relevancy of selected metabolites for drinking water, on a case-by-case basis, and the setting of appropriate health-based guidance values for those substances. The possibility of removing some substances from the existing monitoring list will also be considered, such as those whose use is no longer authorised and for which there have been no detections over a long period of time.

8. Updates on 2024 actions

Attendees were reminded to keep the UÉ 'Action Tracker' spreadsheet updated and if possible to notify any actions in advance going forward.

9. Other stakeholder updates

None presented.

10. AOB

DAFM informed the meeting about a pilot Hazardous Waste Collection Scheme that will be trialled at three centres in Laois, Wexford and Offaly in October and November, in conjunction with IFFPG Farm Plastics Recycling Centres. The lessons learned will inform the development of a national scheme.