

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 4 March 2025

Attendees

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Chair)	[DAFM]
Animal and Plant Health Association	[APHA]
Association of Turfgrass Professionals Ireland	[ATPI]
Cork County Council	[CCC]
Environmental Protection Agency	[EPA]
Federation of Agrochemical Retail Merchants	[FARM]
Golf Ireland	[GI]
Irish Farmers Association	[IFA]
Local Authorities Water Programme	[LAWPRO]
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	[NFGWS]
Teagasc/ASSAP	[Teagasc/ASSAP]
Uisce Éireann	[UE]
Wicklow County Council	[WCC]

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed attendees to the hybrid meeting of the NPDWAG. Some new participants were welcomed and one apology was noted.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (27 November 2024). Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 11 March 2025 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

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 206,589 (compared to 33 open files at the end of 2023, serving a population of 401,197). Fourteen compliance plans were closed in 2024, and a further four compliance plans have been closed so far this year, serving a total population of 286,885.

Provisional data for 2024 indicates that 69 exceedances of the parametric limit values for pesticides were recorded (39 for MCPA, 13 for glyphosate, 9 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 several of the exceedances for MCPA were recorded during the closed period for use of MCPA products and that there should be a focus on raising awareness about specific restrictions on use of products. The possibility of using a neck collar on MCPA products, highlighting the need to take great care to protect water quality, was discussed and appropriate wording was suggested.

Possible reasons for the MCPA exceedances that were recorded after the end of the spraying season were discussed. The relatively dry weather experienced in many areas during October and November was highlighted as a potential contributing factor but it was

also pointed out that the hydrodynamics in some catchments could result in a lag period of several weeks between the use of a product and a recorded exceedance. It may be possible to investigate this further.

UÉ catchments update – Six Catchment Focus Groups (CFGs) are currently operating 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 and awareness raising activities are held in all these areas. Nineteen CFG meetings were held during 2024. A new CFG will be established for the Hacketstown Water Supply catchment (Co. Carlow).

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 continued during 2024 and a survey of farmers' attitudes and practices was completed. The survey results show that:

- 78% of farmers recognise that spraying rushes is not necessary to keep land eligible for payments
- 88% expect to spray rushes and docks going forward
- 60% would seek to reduce the amount of pesticides used on their farms

4. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities – overview of 2024, plans for 2025

Overall results from the 2024 raw water monitoring programme 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)

The plan for 2025 will involve sampling in seven catchments, across 45 locations for 18 weeks, resulting in the collection of 810 samples. It was noted that there has been a significant increase in costs in recent years, with the projected cost for the 2025 programme being 51% more than the cost of the programme in 2021.

5. DAFM updates (stats from hazardous waste collection trials in 2024, 2025 enforcement planning)

A summary was presented of results from three trial days held in October and November 2024 for the collection of farm hazardous wastes. The sites were located in Laois, Offaly and Wexford and approximately 200 farmers attended each of the days. The fixed costs of the hazardous waste operator used were funded by DAFM, while the waste stream costs were paid by the users of the service (€3.95/kg for plant protection products and biocidal products, €5.50/kg for veterinary medicine products, €0.64/kg for waste paint, €0.10/kg for waste oil). The average cost to participating farmers was €250.

A total of 94,995 kg of hazardous waste was collected from the three sites, comprising 10,149 kg of plant protection products, 496 kg of biocidal products, 7891 kg of veterinary medicines, 53,500 kg of waste oil, 9,336 kg of waste paint, 8045 kg of empty oil drums, 4398 kg of oil filters, 700 kg of sharps and 480 kg of other wastes (coolant, adhesives etc.).

It was noted that the pesticide products waste stream included a significant number of empty containers that had not been triple-rinsed (4,177 kg). If these empty containers had been triple-rinsed they could have been disposed of much more cheaply via a separate waste collection stream, at a cost of €10 per 500 kg bag. This suggests a need to raise awareness of guidance for the management of empty pesticide containers (www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/media/pesticides/content/sud/Good_Practice_Guide_for_empty_pesticide_containers.pdf).

Some interesting findings from a survey of the farmers attending each site were highlighted as well. Most of the farmers (78%) learned about the trial days via a text message that had been sent to them from one of the participating organisations. The main farming enterprise represented was dairying (42%), followed by beef (29%), tillage (18%) and sheep (11%). The main reason given for keeping waste materials for a significant period of time was that farmers were unsure of how to safely dispose of the material.

DAFM also gave a brief update on its enforcement plans for 2025, noting that information on catchments of interest to the NPDWAG will be specifically considered as part of this process, with a view to identifying areas for inspection covering different use sectors.

6. Demonstration of Sustainability Portal for golf courses (ATPI, Golf Ireland)

ATPI and GI presented an overview of a new Sustainability Portal that has been developed to help golf clubs record the usage of plant protection products and to assist in complying with relevant EU regulatory requirements for the sustainable use of pesticides. In addition to use records, users can upload details of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices and information about pesticide application equipment. Access is free and the system is very user-friendly.

The portal will also be able to generate information on the cumulative use of products on golf courses and provide various breakdowns, including the following – (i) total active ingredient per period/region, (ii) total active ingredient for all greens per period/region, (iii) specific product use per period/region, (iv) application frequency of products per period/region and (v) top five products used per period/region. It is anticipated that 100 clubs will be actively inputting data by the end of 2025. Further information on the portal can be accessed on ATPI's website at the following location – <https://atpi.ie/sustainability-portal>

During subsequent discussion, it was suggested that there could be potential for other sectors, such as local authorities, to use this or a similar system.

7. Communications activities (Uisce Éireann)

UÉ gave a brief update on its planned approach for 2025 and will give a full update at the next NPDWAG meeting.

The annual campaign will commence in Spring with a national press release, followed by regional press releases and supported by social media content.

8. Other stakeholder updates

UÉ informed the group that there will be a successor to the Source to Tap project, which will be supported by PEACEPLUS funding.

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

Attendees were asked to consider actions that could be undertaken in 2025 and to ensure that the UÉ Action Tracker spreadsheet is kept up to date (for both general actions and actions in specific areas).

10. AOB

DAFM noted two items.

- NI Water Farming for Water Scheme (Clay Lake catchment, Keady, Co. Armagh)
This scheme, which has been in operation since July 2023, aims to provide services (100% funded) for landowners and farmers within the Clay Lake catchment area to make environmental/water quality improvements. A number of measures relating to pesticides are included, such as the provision of storage units, spill kits, drip trays, assistance in managing rushes without the use of MCPA and free pesticide training. Further information is available on the NI Water website at the following location – www.niwater.com/farmingforwater
- Publication of EU's fifth Watch List under the Water Framework Directive (WFD)
The European Commission recently published the fifth WFD Watch List of substances of potential concern that need more data to determine how widespread they are in surface waters. The list contains 12 new substances, including pesticides, pharmaceuticals, a sunscreen agent and an additive used in tyres. Member States will be required to monitor these substances at a limited number of surface water monitoring stations for at least the next two years to provide data on their concentrations and environmental presence. Further information is available on the Commission's website at the following location – https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/new-substances-added-eu-surface-water-watchlist-2025-03-03_en