National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 4 March 2026

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]
Health Service Executive	[HSE]
Jacobs Ireland	[JI]
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.

2. Minutes of previous meeting
There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (27 November 2025). Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 20 March 2026 if they wished to propose any additional 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. Conclusions from the Erne-Larah Water Source Protection Project
JI and UÉ presented an overview of the project and its conclusions. The purpose of the project was to look at catchment management strategies that could potentially minimise the impact of pesticides on drinking water sources, with a specific focus on products containing the herbicide active substance MCPA. Some information on the project can be accessed online at the following location – www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/erne-larah

The project ran from 2019 to 2025 and targeted the Larah sub-catchment area, which is part of the bigger River Erne catchment. This catchment was selected as it displayed characteristics typically associated with catchments in other parts of the country where repeated MCPA exceedances had been recorded.

Thirty-five farms participated in the project following intensive local engagement, and a Water and Environmental Management Plan (WEMP) was developed for each participant. The project also included a water quality monitoring programme, running from 2022 to 2025, and surveys of pesticide use and risk perception conducted in 2022 and 2024.

Examples of interventions provided on farms included new pesticide storage facilities and ancillary equipment (spill kits, drip trays), fencing to improve buffer strip provision, planting of hedges and trees as smart buffers, mulching and weed wiping, and new drinking supplies (nose pumps, trough, solar pumps). There was also extensive ground engagement to support participants, with each participating farm receiving the equivalent of a minimum of three days of "on-the-ground" farm advisor time.

In terms of results, the data from the monitoring programme showed a mixed picture, with reductions of MCPA concentrations in the downstream reaches of the catchment but no overall changes in mid-stream reaches and an increase in the upstream reaches. This was likely due to significant variability in weather conditions during the project and fluctuations in MCPA loading rates.

Regarding the farm survey results, there were clear signs of improved practices in the 2024 responses compared to the 2022 responses for storage, handling and use of pesticides. 70% of respondents indicated that they had changed the way they apply pesticides due to the project guidance and support, and 59% indicated that they would seek to reduce or even stop future pesticide use.

The presentation concluded with some recommendations for scaling up future source protection initiatives. The areas highlighted were as follows:

- provision of greater support and guidance for farmers (including possible integration of requirements with policy/initiatives relating to nutrient runoff)
- implementation of a "train the trainers" approach to upskill farm advisors and ensure consistency in key messaging
- improving farmer access to training (difficulties were noted during the project)
- ensuring consistent capability and performance by contractors (difficulties accessing contractors for weed-wiping were encountered during the project)

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

There are currently 25 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 299,243. Ten compliance plans were closed in 2025, serving a population of 40,763.

Seventy exceedances of the parametric limits for pesticides were recorded in 2025 - MCPA (49), 2,4-D (5), triclopyr (5), glyphosate (4), metaldehyde (2), clopyralid (1), fluroxypyr (1) and 3 exceedances of the total pesticides level. It was noted that there has been an upward trend in MCPA exceedances in the last three years (26 in 2023, 39 in 2024, 49 in 2025), with the north-west region consistently reporting the highest number of non-compliant results.

<u>UÉ catchments update</u> – five Catchment Focus Groups are currently operating in the following areas:

- Rivers Deel and Feale (Newcastle West PWS, Foynes/Shannon Estuary, Listowel, Abbeyfeale)
- Cavan (Belturbet PWS)
- Greenmount-Dee (Louth)
- Clonroche PWS (Wexford)

- Lough Forbes (Longford Central)

Regular meetings and awareness raising activities will continue in these areas during 2026. Improvements have been seen in the Deel-Feale, Belturbet and Hacketstown catchments.

A breakdown of awareness raising activities was presented, showing that most actions undertaken in 2025 related to awareness raising, followed by advisory services and training actions. The awareness-raising actions included TV, radio and podcast interviews, presentations and webinars, press articles, press releases, newsletters and social media posts.

An analysis of pesticide exceedances in the last ten years was also presented. This indicated that the proportion of samples with exceedances during the period 2018-2025, expressed as an averaged percentage over that period, had decreased by 53% compared with the baseline period of 2016-2017.

There was also a reduction of 52% in the maximum concentration average in the last eight years compared to the preceding two-year baseline period.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities – overview of 2025 and plans for 2026

An overview of results from the APHA raw water monitoring programme for 2025 was presented, confirming provisional figures presented at the previous NPDWAG meeting. Further details are available in the minutes of the previous meeting, which are available online at the following location – www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/media/pesticides/content/sud/2025-11-27%20National%20Pesticides%20and%20Drinking%20Water%20Action%20Group%20Meeting180526.pdf

The overall exceedance rate across the monitored catchments in 2025 was 22% compared to 19% in 2024 (182 exceeding samples from a total of 832 samples in 2025, 139 exceeding samples from a total of 716 samples in 2024).

The priority catchment areas for 2026 are Belturbet (12 sampling locations), Lough Forbes (6 sampling locations), River Deel - Newcastle West (9 sampling locations), River Deel - Foynes (5 sampling locations) and Greenmount (8 sampling locations) – 40 sampling locations in total. The monitoring programme will run across 18 weeks, resulting in a planned total of 720 samples.

Examples of ongoing and planned stewardship activities were also presented. Some of the items highlighted included product neck collars displaying specific water protection advice, material for distribution at the point of sale (posters, leaflets, stickers etc.) and social media posts.

6. Update on review of list of monitored pesticides (DAFM)

An update was provided on work to revise the list of pesticides monitored in drinking water. Forty-six active substances were selected for review based on data about their scale of use in Ireland.

A technical analysis of these substances is ongoing, involving the application of various regulatory and scientific decision-making criteria to identify a subset of substances for further consideration. The technical analysis has been completed for 35 active substances and is progressing for 11 active substances. Twelve EU-approved active substances have been identified so far as meeting the decision-making criteria.

The review also looked at identifying pesticide metabolites for possible inclusion in the monitoring programme. These are substances that are produced from the breakdown/transformation of pesticide active substances by environmental processes. Thirteen candidate metabolites have been identified based on a detailed analysis taking account of a wide range of scientific information and pertinent regulatory decision-making criteria.

Decisions on the relevancy/non-relevancy of these metabolites have been made in accordance with the requirements of the EU Drinking Water Directive (Directive (EU) 2020/2184) in order to determine if they should be subject to the legal parametric value of 0.1 microgram/L (for relevant metabolites) or the national guidance value of 0.9 microgram/L (for non-relevant metabolites). Health-based guidance values have also been derived for these metabolites.

It was also noted that some substances could be considered for removal from the current programme if they are no longer approved and haven't been detected for several years.

7. Communications activities – updates and plans for 2026 (Uisce Éireann and DAFM updates)

UÉ informed the group that the planning of communications activities for 2026 is underway. The annual campaign will commence in Spring with a national press release, followed by regional press releases and supported by social media content.

UÉ also asked group members to forward details of any relevant communications activities planned for 2026.

DAFM proposed drafting an article for the Farmers Journal to raise awareness of issues associated with spraying MCPA.

DAFM also raised the possibility of developing a mnemonic to help users of pesticides more easily remember key actions to protect drinking water quality. An example mnemonic is presented below.

SMARTY
Speak with your advisor and consider all alternatives before using pesticides
Make sure you are aware of the location of nearby water bodies
Assess weather conditions ahead of spraying
Read and follow the product label
Take great care to avoid drips and spills
Your choices matter to protect your drinking water

8. Other stakeholder updates

No items were noted.

9. Planning for 2026 – general actions, priority area actions

Attendees were asked to consider actions that could be undertaken in 2026 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

The EPA informed the group that some pesticide-related items were on the agenda of the ENDWARE meeting scheduled for April 2026. (ENDWARE is a network for European drinking water regulators.)