

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building / Backweston Farm – 29 November 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]
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	[NFGWS]
Uisce Éireann	[UÉ]
Wicklow County Council	[WCC]

1. Visit to Backweston Farm

The meeting began with a visit to the Crop Variety Evaluation Farm (Backweston) to view sprayer filling facilities. A 'state of the art' pesticide store was also on view, demonstrating what is required of a sizable tillage operation to achieve compliance with current regulatory requirements.

2. Information note on best practice measures for sprayer handling operations

A draft DAFM document detailing good practice during spraying and filling operations was discussed. Initial comments were positive, with suggestions to refer to rainfall predictions and proximity to wells. Options for raising awareness about the note were also discussed, such as referring to it in UÉ communications campaigns, circulating it directly (via DAFM databases) to registered Professional Users, advisors and sprayer testers, and promoting it on the Farmers Journal Sustainability Page. Attendees were asked to forward any additional comments to DAFM by 8 December 2023.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Clarifications were provided on a couple of points in the draft minutes from the previous meeting (27 September 2023). Attendees were asked to forward any further suggested amendments to the Chair by 8 December 2023. 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

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

There are currently 31 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 394,543 – a decrease of 6,654 since the previous update (27/09/2023). Five EPA pesticide compliance plan files have been closed so far in 2023 (Borris in Ossory PWS, Longford Central, Dundrum Regional, Kilmacthomas, Mogeely), and also four EPA Directions (Belturbet PWS, Newport PWA, Newcastle West Water Supply, Longford Central).

Forty-six parametric exceedances have been recorded in the year-to-date (25 for MCPA, 8 for 2,4-D, 4 for triclopyr, 3 for clopyralid, 3 for glyphosate, 1 for mecoprop-P and 2 exceedances of the total pesticides level of 0.5 ppb).

An update was given on the most recent progress report for UÉ's Interim Pesticide Strategy, covering actions undertaken in 2022. The strategy is available online at the following location – www.water.ie/projects/strategic-plans/interim-pesticide-strategy

Over 90% of the planned actions for 2022 were completed or progressed, with the focus being on awareness raising, training and advisory services. It was noted that there was a 53% decrease in the number of pesticide exceedances over the period 2018-2022 and that there was little indication this trend was driven by external factors such as weather patterns or changes in sales of herbicide products, suggesting that the catchment-focused efforts of various stakeholders are having a positive impact.

The work of Catchment Focus Groups (CFGs), involving collaboration by relevant stakeholders at a local level in priority catchments, was also noted. CFGs are now working in the following catchment areas – Lough Forbes (Longford Central), Newport, Clonroche, River Feale and Deel (Newcastle West PWS, Foynes/Shannon Estuary, Listowel, Abbeyfeale), Cavan (Belturbet PWS) and Greenmount. The Greenmount group (Louth) was recently established and held its first meeting on 20 October 2023.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities

Raw water monitoring results up to the start of October 2023 were reviewed. The programme commenced 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.

For the Lough Forbes catchment, the number of exceedances up to October 2023 (138) exceeds the number recorded in any of the previous three years. In the Belturbet catchment (over the same sampling window) the number of exceedances (92) represents an increase on detections recorded in 2022 (78), but a decline on the number recorded in 2021 (114).

The Newport and Deel/Feale catchments both continue to show improvements on the 2022 position. The Newport catchment has recorded a sustained drop in the number of exceedances over the year from 44 to 20 to 6 in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Options for enforcement-related activities in catchments were discussed.

6. Update on Orchards for Farmers initiative (NFGWS)

The initiative plans to fund the development of small orchards on 230 farms in four different counties (Cavan, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon). Apple trees are seen as a symbol of the link between the protection of drinking water sources, sustainable land management and biodiversity. Each recipient will plan to manage the orchard without recourse to pesticides. The initiative has been developed by the NFGWS as part of a DAFM-funded source protection project in collaboration with Roscommon County Council and ASSAP. A wider future roll-out across other Group Water Schemes around the country is envisaged.

7. Communications activities

UÉ provided a summary of their recent communications campaign (*Pesticides Autumn Spray with Care* campaign), which was launched on 29 September 2023. The campaign included a press release issued to national and regional media outlets, highlighting the success of the collaborative approach in Newport. This resulted in 14 pieces of coverage (nine online pieces, two print media articles and three broadcast pieces), which were very positive and had a combined estimated reach of 1,164,840. There was also an accompanying targeted social media campaign, focusing on priority areas, which was considered to be effective.

Total media coverage to date in 2023 was noted as well, comprising 116 media items (72 online, 38 print, 6 broadcast), with a total reach of nearly 8 million views.

DAFM reported that it had provided an article to the Farmers Journal on how to reduce MCPA use to protect water quality and biodiversity, which was published online on 15 November 2023 and in the print edition on 18 November 2023. DAFM agreed to forward a copy of the article to FARM, Teagasc and the ACA for wider circulation and use in various regional awareness raising events. The possibility of DAFM drafting an article on the safe and sustainable use of PPPs for amateur users was also discussed.

8. Other stakeholder updates

No specific stakeholder activities were noted.

9. Regulatory updates

Glyphosate – The European Commission recently adopted Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2660 renewing the approval of glyphosate for ten years. Various strict conditions have been specified for Member States to implement as part of the product authorisation process.

Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR) proposal – The European Parliament rejected the SUR proposal in a plenary vote held on 22 November 2023. This was an unexpected development and it is unclear what will happen next. The proposal is still being discussed by Member State representatives at EU Council level. The next steps will be determined based on the outcome of those discussions.

10. Planning for 2024

Attendees were asked to ensure that all relevant activities carried out in 2023 are entered in the UÉ 'Action Tracker' spreadsheet, and to also reflect on activities that could be undertaken in 2024.

11. AOB

No AOB items were raised.