

## National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 27 September 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]
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. New participants (representing existing stakeholders) were welcomed.

### **2. Minutes of previous meeting**

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (25 May 2023). Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 6 October 2023 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](http://www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/sud/waterprotection/nationalpesticidesanddrinkingwateractiongroup)

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

There are currently 33 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 401,197 – an increase of 110,968 since the previous update (25/05/2023). In the year to date, three EPA pesticide compliance plan files have been closed (Borris in Ossory PWS, Longford Central, Newcastle West Water Supply).

Thirty-six parametric exceedances in 2023 were noted by the time of the meeting (18 for MCPA, 6 for 2,4-D, 4 for triclopyr, 3 for clopyralid, 3 for glyphosate, 1 for mecoprop-P and 1 exceedance of the total pesticides level of 0.5 ppb).

Catchment Focus Groups (CFGs) are now well established in priority catchments, and it is proposed to add the Greenmount catchment to this list (first meeting scheduled for 20 October 2023). CFG meetings were held recently in the Newport (12 September), Belturbet (19 September) and Deel/Feale (19 September) catchments. There was some discussion on the merits of maintaining CFG activity in catchments that have shown significant improvement. The consensus

was that this work was resource dependent but that contact with key stakeholders should be maintained even in the absence of a programme of activities so that local networks could be quickly re-activated if necessary.

#### **4. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities**

Raw water monitoring results up to mid-August 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 mid-August 2023 is ahead of the equivalent period in 2022 (98 vs 84 respectively). In the Belturbet catchment the number of exceedances is more than for the equivalent period in 2022 (62 vs 35 respectively) but lower than the equivalent period in 2021 (99). The possibility of additional exceedances in Belturbet during the remainder of the 2023 monitoring programme was noted, based on the pattern observed for this period in 2022 when an additional 43 exceedances were detected in the five-week period from the end of August to the start of October (equivalent to 55% of the total exceedances determined for the Belturbet catchment in 2022).

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 (to week 33) from 23 to 13 to 6 in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively.

#### **5. Uisce Éireann update on Erne-Larah Water Source Protection Project**

UÉ provided a project update outlining the timeline for various actions and deliverables. It is intended that the existing 2-year monitoring programme in the Larah-river catchment will establish a baseline against which the effectiveness of various measures will be assessed. It is anticipated that a contractor will be appointed before year-end to implement these actions between now (Sept. 2023) and next spring (depending on weather) when the monitoring programme will restart. [The monitoring programme reflects established MCPA use patterns and is similar to that adopted by the APHA monitoring program].

The ability to measure river flow rates in the sub-catchment is viewed as critical to accurately determine pesticide load calculations and possible dilution effects. To this end a temporary flow-gauge is to be re-established on the Larah River. Limited sampling data for 2023 was presented, which suggested that the average pesticide loading was similar between years (2022 vs 2023) but occurred very differently, with more extreme peaks and lows observed in 2023 – possibly due to the wetter year in 2023?

Thirty-five Water and Environmental Management Plans (WEMPs) were developed for participating landowners, identifying land parcels and actions to be carried out thereon. These comprise **Core Measures** and **Other Measures**. **Core Measures** are the preferred approach and involve i) advisory and training input, ii) improved pesticide storage and calibration practices, and iii) more judicious rush & dock management strategies, mulching and weed-wiping. **Other Measures** revolved around 'specialised interventions', e.g. watercourse protection and surface flow reduction activities, which will be budget dependent.

Several aspects of the project were clarified during an ensuing discussion. It was also suggested that DAFM guidance on the sustainable management of rushes, to minimise herbicide use, should be emphasised as part of the core measures covering approaches to rush management.

## **6. Communications activities**

UÉ provided an update, highlighting a social media campaign targeting priority areas (*Pesticides Autumn Spray with Care* campaign), which was recently launched. A further update, including some results on the reach and effectiveness of the campaign, will be provided at the next NPDWAG meeting.

The DAFM indicated that an article detailing MCPA detections, drinking water quality and biodiversity had been drafted and submitted for publication in the national media. This was welcomed by the group, which suggested that it also be forwarded to Teagasc and the ACA for internal circulation and use as each organisation deemed fit.

## **7. Updates on 2023 actions**

Participants were reminded to keep the UÉ 'Action Tracker' up to date, as a means of accurately tracking the activity/work of the NPDWAG.

## **8. Other stakeholder updates**

- Recent contamination incident in Cork

CCC provided summary details of an investigation they carried out in relation to a fish kill incident in a stream in South Cork during the summer. In synopsis it appears that a sprayer containing 6000 L of a fungicide mixture was left unattended after being switched on to agitate. Subsequently the operator returned to find a hose uncoupled from the sprayer, and an estimated 200 L of the spray mix running into a drain, which eventually emptied into a water course feeding the stream in question.

The landowners were considered to be competent operators, and cooperative with the CCC investigation. Although there was an element of bad luck contributing to the incident, concerns were highlighted during discussion at the meeting about an apparent lack of awareness of best practice measures that could have prevented the incident or reduced its impact. It was agreed to develop further guidance on best practice measures for sprayer filling operations and to raise awareness among sprayer operators by disseminating this guidance through advisory and other appropriate stakeholder networks.

### Action

- The DAFM to draft guidelines for the filling and mixing of sprayers in yards, focusing on the containment of spillages, and bunding for large sprayers. Agitating sprayers should never be left unattended.
- The DAFM to facilitate the NPDWAG visiting the DAFM Crop Variety Evaluation Farm to view sprayer handling and pesticide storage facilities.
- Water EIP project

ASSAP provided details of a successful European Innovation Project (EIP) funded by the DAFM and DHLGH to provide support to farmers willing to implement voluntary water protection actions over and above mandatory actions. The project will follow best catchment science advice and will eventually be rolled out at a national scale. It is hoped to involve 15,000 farmers in several innovations, including results-based payments, research hubs and rainwater management plans.

EIP measures will include items such as spatially targeted riparian margins, riverbank supports, establishment of small wetland ponds etc., along with other measures focusing on pesticide use, such as retrofitting existing sprayers with i) closed transfer systems, ii) back flow valves and iii) low drift nozzles.

### Action

- The DAFM will consult internally and provide suggestions for additional pesticide-related measures that could be added to the list of those already under consideration for funding.

### **9. Regulatory updates**

SUR – This is still progressing slowly at EU level. The definition of Sensitive Areas remains a contentious issue.

Glyphosate – The EU Commission has proposed that the active will be renewed for a further 10 years, subject to strict product authorisation conditions and various restrictions. A vote by Member State representatives is scheduled for October 12/13 at the EU Standing Committee dealing with pesticides legislation.

EU proposal to update the list of groundwater and surface water pollutants – This is likely to impact some pesticides. Stricter water quality standards may be adopted in some cases.

### **10. AOB**

NFGWS mentioned a scheme in the Roscommon area where 50 farmers were committed to planting 50 orchards to promote biodiversity on their farms (*Orchards for Farmers* initiative). An update will be provided at the next NPDWAG meeting.