

Terms of Reference for the Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM)

Working Group – 2019 to 2021

Background

Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM) are multi-functional measures that aim to protect and manage water resources and address water-related challenges by restoring or maintaining ecosystems as well as natural features and characteristics of water bodies using, or replicating, natural means and processes.

They are designed to enhance and preserve the water retention capacity of aquifers, soil, river channels and their associated ecosystems. The over-all effect is primarily to slow the inflow of water to rivers and streams, and to then attenuate the flow in-stream, and reduce the impacts of downstream flood events in terms of peaks and duration.

The purpose of the Working Group will be:

The purpose of the Group is to assist and advise the EPA on issues related to NWRMs. This group will be formally established in 2019 with a view to operating through the second cycle developing approaches and into the third cycle of the Water Framework Directive in an implementation phase. This group will therefore likely continue after 2021, according to need. Therefore, the terms of reference for this group have been drafted to reflect this.

The Agency has the responsibility of assessing significant pressures, impacting surface waters and groundwaters, and developing appropriate measures to address those identified pressures. The requirement for NWRM's is set out in Section 7.8.2 of the current River Basin Management Plan.

This says "Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRMs) could potentially be used as mitigation measures to address water-quality problems as part of the second RBMP programmes of measures. They could be used in a similar manner to the measures described in the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) and the DAFM Native Woodlands Schemes, providing multiple benefits in relation to water quality, biodiversity, climate-change adaptation, fisheries, landscape amenity objectives and flood attenuation. NWRMs work by storing or attenuating water in the environment, allowing it to be released slowly, either as runoff to rivers and streams or by soakage to the water-table. By slowing or reducing runoff, flood flows downstream can be reduced. This is typically achieved by changing land-use practices in the catchment, so that soils have a greater capacity to store water. These land-use changes can include the rehabilitation of wetlands and the construction of new storage, such as retention ponds. In-channel works and restoring river meanders can also be used to slow the flow."

The Working Group will support the EPA in matters related to this programme. This will ensure effective integrated catchment management and the achievement of WFD objectives.

It also may facilitate the development of synergies with other complementary work areas such as the Floods Directive. This will in turn prevent duplication of effort and maximise effectiveness.

The Working Group will:

- Advise and support the NTIG in identifying examples of best practice, assessing the appropriateness of NWRM's in the Irish context, reviewing research and identifying knowledge gaps, development issues and potential pilot projects going forward.
- Collaborate with other WGs (e.g. National Hydromorphology Working Group, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government Technical Working Group on Hydromorphology to support the Planning Guidance) as necessary.
- Report to the National Technical Implementation Group and, where appropriate, inform the Water Policy Advisory Committee, of progress.
- Interact with Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) technical activity at EU level.
- Facilitate communication among relevant stakeholders.

Actions and deliverables

to develop a proposal for including NWRMs as part of a broader suite of mitigation measures that could contribute to the achievement of environmental objectives set out in the second RBMP

support further research on NWRM

(a) To explore new measures; (b) To consider how existing measures can be adapted to achieve multiple benefits in an Irish setting.

OPW to work with the EPA, local authorities and other agencies to identify, where possible, measures that will have benefits for both WFD and flood risk management objectives

Proposed Outputs of Working Group

- The national EPA NWRMs work plan for 2018 to 2021 includes the following:
 - assessment of NWRMs in Irish conditions;
 - assessment of research and appropriate pilot projects
 - proposed approach for roll-out of NWRMs (if appropriate)
 - best practice guidance for NWRMs.

Working Group Members

- Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
- Local Authority Sector representatives
- Local Authority Waters Programme
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Office of Public Works

- National Parks & Wildlife Service
- Forest Service/Coillte
- GSI
- Bord na Mona
- Teagasc
- EPA Representatives (Catchments unit, Ecological Monitoring and Assessment, Hydrometric and Groundwater, Licensing)

Consultancy assistance may be procured by the EPA to assist the Working Group as necessary.

Proposed Chairperson: Jenny Deakin

Secretariat will be provided by the EPA.

Proposed Timelines: The Working Group will be temporary and will operate from **March 2019** until at least **December 2021**. If there is need to continue the group after this date new terms of reference will be developed for the group.