

# National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group

Webex meeting – 07 October 2021

## **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 Co. Co.	[CCC]
Environmental Protection Agency	[EPA]
Federation of Agrochemical Retail Merchants	[FARM]
Golf Ireland	[GI]
Health Service Executive	[HSE]
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	[ICMSA]
Irish Farmers Association	[IFA]
Irish Water	[IW]
Local Authority Waters Programme	[LAWPRO]
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	[NFGWS]
Teagasc/ASSAP	[Teagasc/ASSAP]
Wicklow Co. Co.	[WCC]

## **1. Welcome**

- Chair welcomed attendees to the Webex meeting.

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

- There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (27-05-2021). If anybody had any they were asked to forward to the Chair for inclusion and revision.
- In terms of follow-up actions from the previous meeting, DAFM commented that no obvious source for the bentazone detection in the Fanad East (Shannagh) catchment (DL) had been found. Discussion with local Teagasc advisors confirmed that no crops of peas or beans were grown in the local catchment and that commercial growers of potatoes no longer favoured the use of Basagran SG (contains bentazone) as a post-emergence herbicide. As previously speculated, it was considered that this might have been an isolated incident in which an amount of residual product was used on potatoes in a small garden plot. APHA confirmed that enquiries with the product authorisation holder for Basagran SG indicated no sales locally.

## **4. IW update on drinking water exceedances**

- IW presented their national quarterly update for Q3 2021.
- With respect to the current Action List, non-compliances in 2021 were noted in Belturbet PWS, Clonroche, Longford Central, Newcastle West PWS and Foynes/Shannon Estuary (one failing month each) and Newport PWS (four failing months). Whilst this represents a deterioration on the position described at the previous meeting in May, it is a considerable improvement on the same period in 2020.
- Currently the total population receiving water from a PWS that has an open EPA file for pesticides is 813,170 – an increase of 227,428 since the last quarterly update.

However, IW hope that the figure for the overall population receiving water from a PWS with an open EPA file for pesticides will fall by 201,562 with the closure of four EPA files (Navan-Mid Meath, Ballinasloe, DCC Zone 3, Granard) due to compliant results up to and including the end of Q3 2021.

- In addition to the Action List supplies, IW requested the assistance of the NPDWAG in dealing with 12 supplies that had either two failing months so far in 2021 or one failing month in the last quarter. These supplies comprise Castlecove (Kerry CC), Cloneycavan (Meath CC), Emyvale (Monaghan CC), Fingal Zone 1 (Fingal CC), Glanmire (Cork CC), Glaslough (Monaghan CC), Gowna (Cavan CC), Kilsellagh (Sligo CC), Listowel RWS (Kerry CC), Louisburg PWS (Mayo CC), Arvagh PWS (Cavan CC) and Greenmount (Louth CC).
- Data on pesticide exceedances (by parameter) for the period Jan to September 2020 and 2021 was presented. MCPA exceedances continue to be the most frequent and are similar across both periods. However, apart from bentazone and clopyralid, all other parameters show substantial declines in the number of exceedances between 2020 and 2021.
- 44 investigation files are currently open (6 Action List files, 38 Watch list files). Since the last update (27 May 2021), five supplies have been added to the Watch List, comprising Castlecove (Kerry CC), Cloneycavan (Meath CC), Fingal Zone 1 (Fingal CC), Glanmire (Cork CC) and Gowna (Cavan CC). MCPA accounted for 3 of 5 exceedances across the newly added supplies. Five files have been closed since the last quarterly update (Glengarriff, North Leitrim, Glashaboy, Rhode, Carlow Town).
- Detection of isoproturon residues in the Greenmount catchment (Louth CC) in June 2021 generated some discussion. The active substance isoproturon is a selective, systemic herbicide used in the control of annual grasses and broad-leaved weeds in cereals. The registration for all products containing this substance expired on 30 Sept. 2016, becoming illegal to use after 30 Sept. 2017. No repeat detections were recorded in July, August, or September. DAFM agreed to pass details onto their enforcement unit for further consideration.
- Newport PWS was also singled out as a catchment of concern in relation to MCPA detections, with 4 of 6 sampling months in 2021 being non-compliant. This catchment has been the focus of significant awareness-raising activities.

#### **Irish Water Catchment Focus Group (CFG) update**

- Activities were progressed in all CFG areas, including stakeholder meetings and various key actions, such as monitoring and engagement activities.  
Lough Forbes (Longford Central) – met in June and scheduled again for mid Oct.  
Newport – met June and Sept., launch of *Let it Bee* campaign and several other awareness-raising initiatives.  
Cavan (Belturbet PWS) – met in July and Sept., IW to start own pilot catchment activities.  
Tullycross – met in May and early Sept.  
Feale and Deel (covering Newcastle West PWS, Foynes/Shannon Estuary, Listowel) – met in April.  
Catchment maps and data are now available for download from an IW shared area.

#### **IW project updates**

- IW *Interim Pesticide Strategy* now complete and available online – [www.water.ie/projects/strategic-plans/interim-pesticide-strategy](http://www.water.ie/projects/strategic-plans/interim-pesticide-strategy)

- Details of a *Stakeholder Action Tracker* were presented which seeks to track the various activities and initiatives carried out nationally and in the CFGs to promote compliance with the Interim Pesticide Strategy and the common goal of reducing the risk of pesticide contamination to public drinking water supplies. This is a work in progress, and IW requested feedback from the members of the NPDWAG as to how it can be improved and made more user-friendly.
- An update on a Pilot Drinking Water Source Protection Project was also provided. The project is currently in the design and planning stage and follows on from a scoping exercise in 2019/2020. It is anticipated that this aspect of the project will continue into 2022. Phase 1 monitoring is currently underway and will focus on Belturbet PWS which is a sub-catchment within the much larger Upper Erne catchment.

## 5. APHA catchment monitoring results

- APHA summarised the results of the 2021/2022 monitoring plan for the year to date. In terms of the results.
  - Feale catchment (FC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33. Aside from the two detections previously identified in weeks 15 and 17 (both upstream of the WTP), a further three non-compliances were detected for this catchment - two in wk. 20 and one in wk. 33. MCPA is the principal residue of concern.
  - Deel catchment (DC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33. After a good start as previously reported, non-compliances were detected in weeks 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 31 & 33. MCPA was the principal residue of concern, but 2,4-D and MCPP also featured. Some of the detections of MCPA suggest point source contamination, e.g. 0.605 and 0.86 µg/L MCPA in wks. 20 & 21 respectively.
  - L. Forbes catchment (LFC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33. Disappointing with detections recorded in all sampling wks. and sampling locations. Whilst residues of MCPA represent the bulk of the detections, 2,4-D is also recorded in excess of statutory limits at multiple locations. The magnitude of many of these breaches might indicate point sources – either filling directly from a water source with associated spillage, or product reaching a drain(s) in a farmyard. A major discrepancy exists between the APHA picture reflecting conditions in the catchment and IW sampling results at the tap.
  - Belturbet catchment (BC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33. MCPA exceedances were detected in all sampling wks. and sampling locations but not to the same extent as in LFC.
  - Newport catchment (NC) – 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33. Considerably better than BC and LFC but with only 8 sampling locations compared to 15 and 18 locations for BC and LFC respectively.
- In terms of Stewardship initiatives for 2021, APHA participated in the Teagasc Signpost Series in March, and the Teagasc Grassland PA courses in Clonakilty and Ballyhaise (total attendance 74). APHA also provided input to the IASIS Professional Distributor CPE course, reaching 130 participants.
- Precision farming is another area in which APHA is taking a keen interest. Examples include raising awareness of the Syngenta *Spray Assist* App, which helps improve the timing of sprays to cereals and grassland, and the *EasyConnect* Closed Transfer System, which will be rolled out by all the major manufacturers over the coming years.

- In discussion it emerged that the Teagasc Grassland PA courses did not contain any module on rush control/containment/suppression. DAFM committed to consult with the course organisers on this point.
- The ICMSA reported that feedback from their meetings indicated a large body of part-time farmers who were not 'in the loop' regarding various initiatives undertaken to protect drinking water supplies. The suggestion was to target messaging and videos etc. to be shown at weanling sales held between Sept. and Christmas.

## 6. Forestry presentation to NPDWAG

- 11% of country covered in forestry, approximately 50% of which is in private ownership (85% = farmers). Between the early-50s to the mid-80s the bulk of forestry plantings was carried out by public bodies, e.g. Coillte but since then the bulk of plantings have been carried out by private bodies – farmers.
- What's regulated?
  - Afforestation – forest creation on green field sites
  - Thinning, felling and reforestation
  - Forest road works
  - Aerial fertilisation
- Coillte, as the largest forestry company in Ireland, have developed various initiatives to protect the environment, including –
  - Integrated Pest Management Strategies
  - Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines
  - Environmental Requirements for Afforestation
  - Forestry Standards Manual
- In many cases there is little requirement for herbicides when planting trees. Historically the forestry sector would have used cypermethrin to control pine weevils, which emerge from dead wood, and are only a problem in reforestation. Since late 2018 Coillte has switched to acetamiprid. The private forestry sector is also moving away from cypermethrin.

## 7. Communications activities

- IW summarised media engagements between July and October. This included 40 pieces of coverage (17 regional radio pieces, 8 online pieces 10 regional print articles and 5 national articles across print and online). Results from an autumn Facebook campaign run by IW and from sponsored content on Agriland, featuring animated material developed by IW in consultation with NPDWAG members, were also presented.
- An initiative under the *Let it Bee* project, involving volunteer beekeepers looking after hives at Newport Water Treatment Plant, was noted. The initiative, which was supported by IW, Mayo CC, NFGWS and LAWPRO, generated positive local media coverage.
- DAFM reported on a trial undertaken in two test catchments (Fanad East (DL) and Dundrum (TP)) that alerted herd-owners via SMS to risks associated with pesticides entering local drinking water supplies. The generic nature of the SMS text approved for issue failed to generate any significant reaction from recipients. It was felt that if such an initiative were to be repeated it would be better if it were backed up locally with more explicit details provided by Teagasc and other concerned bodies. Another possibility would be to explore if Teagasc or another stakeholder could issue a more specific text message tailored to the particular issue in a particular location. (GDPR

issues may prove challenging in this regard if the DAFM is required to provide herd nos. and phone nos.).

- DAFM indicated that in light of the evolving CAP and the move towards results-based agri-environmental schemes, it might be appropriate to highlight to farmers that spraying rushes with MCPA has knock-on negative consequences for sward biodiversity, which could potentially impact on the financial returns from participating in such schemes. DAFM indicated willingness to draft an article for comment by the group, and subsequent publication.

#### **8. Other updates and discussion**

- ICMSA enquired as to the possibility of using WhatsApp to engage with farmers on the issue of pesticide detections in drinking water supplies.
- LAWPRO commented that all agencies and bodies should maximise the impact of the IW animated video and circulate to as wide an audience as possible.

#### **9. AOB**

- Public consultation is ongoing on the draft River Basin Management Plan for 2022-2027. The consultation will close on 31 March 2022.
- DAFM's Food Vision 2030 strategy has been published. It makes specific mention of pesticides, including MCPA. In relation to control/suppression of rushes, it clearly states that there are no land eligibility issues requiring the use of MCPA.