

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group

Webex meeting – 01 December 2021

Attendees

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Chair)	[DAFM]
Agricultural Consultants Association	[ACA]
Animal and Plant Health Association	[APHA]
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]
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 (07-10-2021). If anybody had any they were asked to forward to the Chair for inclusion and revision.

Chair informed the meeting that Bernie O'Flaherty, LAWPRO representative, was retiring and thanked her for all her contributions. It is hoped that a new representative from LAWPRO would be in place before the next NPDWAG meeting.

• Follow-up actions from the previous meeting

- Detection of the herbicide active substance isoproturon in the Greenmount catchment in June 2021 was reported to the DAFM pesticides enforcement officer. Given the amount of time that had passed, it was concluded that no realistic enforcement action could be carried out.
- It was confirmed by Teagasc that control (containment/suppression) of rushes, incorporating DAFM guidance on this issue, is included in the Teagasc Grassland Professional Advisor course.

4. Irish Water update on drinking water exceedances

- IW presented their national quarterly update for Q3 2021.
- Currently the total population receiving water from a PWS that has an open EPA file for pesticides is 455,218 – a decrease of 388,275 since the last quarterly update.
- Thirty-four pesticide compliance plans are currently open. Since the last quarterly update, ten pesticide compliance plans have been closed (Granard, Navan Mid-Meath, DCC Zone 3, Ballinasloe, Shannon/Sixmilebridge, Dundrum, Tully-Tullycross, Bantry Cahernacrin, Cavanhill, and South Louth East Meath). It is expected that an

additional five pesticide compliance plans will be closed by the end of Q4 2021 (Hacketstown, Wexford Town, Ballymagroarty, Davidstown, Caragh Lake).

- A summary of the current Action List non-compliance files was presented for 2020 vs. 2021. In general, there was a substantial improvement recorded in 2021, with Belturbet PWS, Clonroche, Longford Central, Newcastle West PWS and Foynes/Shannon Estuary each only recording one failing month in 2021. Newport PWS remains problematic, with five failing months in 2021 to date.
- Data on pesticide exceedances (by parameter) for the period January to November 2020 and 2021 was presented. Overall there has been a large reduction in the number of exceedances in 2021 (48 in year to date compared to 89 for 2020). There has also been a decrease in the maximum detected levels in 2021 compared to 2020. MCPA exceedances continue to dominate but show a significant decline in 2021 cf. 2020 (31 vs 44) across the same period. There were also declines in exceedance incidents between 2020 and 2021 for several other monitored pesticide substances, apart from bentazone (two exceedances in 2020 and in 2021), clopyralid (one exceedance in 2020, two exceedances in 2021) and isoproturon (no exceedances in 2020, one exceedance in 2021). Compared to 2020 when there were significant peaks in the exceedances pattern in June (24) and October (17), 2021 showed a more uniform distribution pattern, with only the month of May rising into double figures.
- Results for the North West, East Midlands and Southern Region EPA compliance plans were presented. Except for Newport PWS with five failing months, and Arvagh PWS, Greenmount, Listowel Regional Water Supply and Foynes/Shannon Estuary PWS each with two failing months, all other water supply zones reported zero or only one failing month over the period January to October inclusive.
- Some discussion ensued as to the contributing factors to the improvements recorded in 2021. It was noted that there was a significant drop in exceedances after May, which may have been related to dry ground conditions and favourable weather during the summer and early autumn. It was speculated that this might have allowed spraying activities to be completed relatively early, thereby avoiding applications in the riskier months of October and November. It was also suggested that perhaps NPDWAG messaging was getting through to users. Anecdotally it was also felt that contractors are carrying out more of the spraying activities and would be better placed (experience and equipment) to achieve optimum spraying outcomes. Caution was also expressed that if the improvement was because of optimum weather conditions, things could deteriorate rapidly if such conditions did not materialise in 2022.

Irish Water updates on Catchment Focus Group activities and Stakeholder Action Tracker

- In relation to Catchment Focus Groups, ongoing work to examine data for Lough Forbes (Longford Central) and Newport PWS was noted.
- Limited activity was reported regarding the use of the Stakeholder Action Tracker. Meeting participants were encouraged to submit returns before the end of the year.
- Design and planning work is continuing for IW's Pilot Drinking Water Source Protection Project.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results

APHA summarised the results of the 2021/2022 monitoring plan for the year to date.

- Feale catchment (FC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40 & 42. Aside from the detections previously reported in weeks 15, 17, 20 and 33, (four of which were upstream of the WTP), a further five non-compliances were detected for this catchment - two each in wks. 37 and 38 and one in wk. 42. Three of these five were again upstream of the WTP. MCPA continues to be the principal residue of concern.
- Deel catchment (DC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40 & 42. In addition to the non-compliances previously reported for this catchment (weeks 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 31 & 33), a further 24 non-compliances were detected between weeks 37 and 42. MCPA continues to be the principal residue of concern but 2,4-D and MCPP also featured. Compared to the results reported for 2020, the data for 2021 reflects a deterioration in performance – especially in the second half of 2021. The data suggests the use of multi-active products as opposed to straights (products containing only MCPA).
- L. Forbes catchment (LFC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40 & 42. This catchment continues to disappoint with detections recorded in all sampling wks. and sampling locations. While 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, particularly the exceedance recorded in wk. 37 (3.360 µg/L) indicates 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, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40 & 42. In contrast to the first part of 2021 (wks. 14 to 33), wks. 35 to 42 show a reduction in the frequency of non-compliant detections, and while most of the breaches could be considered marginal, reflecting diffuse pathways, some exceedances (concentrations up to 0.508 µg/L) strongly suggest point source contamination.
- Newport catchment (NC) – weeks 14 to 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39 & 40. In contrast to the picture emerging in the BC, wks. 35 to 40 reflect an increase in the frequency of non-compliant detections, with significantly elevated concentrations of MCPA recorded, e.g. 1.93 and 0.866 µg/L of MCPA in week 36.
- In terms of stewardship initiatives for 2021, and in addition to those outlined previously (see minutes from previous meeting), APHA participated in Dairygold webinars held on the 17-18 November, and are to present to Teagasc Agriculture students on 8 December.
- In discussion it was commented that the picture presented by the APHA monitoring data conflicts with the positive picture emerging from tap sampling by local authorities. There is no room for complacency. The consensus view emerging is that non-compliances largely arise from contemporary use and are not resulting from legacy issues. The comment was also made that parallels could be drawn from work currently underway in the Lough Derg catchment in N. Ireland, where contemporaneous use of MCPA is considered to be the principal cause of non-compliant detections of MCPA. This work has also demonstrated how quickly MCPA is mobilised in catchments after rainfall, and best practice is to avoid applying MCPA products if rainfall is due within 48 to 72 hours – a difficult to achieve window on the island of Ireland.

- It was noted that the Source to Tap project is coming to an end. The group considered it appropriate to look for an update.

6. Sustainability Committee of Golf Ireland

Golf Ireland have established a Sustainability Committee to promote environmentally sustainable practices within golf clubs on the island of Ireland. The aims of the committee are to:

- ensure all clubs comply with legal requirements in relation to pesticides, water etc.;
- ensure all clubs have the information and advice to make decisions to meet and exceed national climate action aims, e.g. energy audits, energy savings, reductions in fossil fuel usage, insulation programs, carbon sequestration and power generation;
- undertake regular surveys to record fertilizer and pesticide usage;
- promote survey/mapping exercises with the aim of improving biodiversity and habitats within the confines of the property/site;
- communicate effectively with golfers, the public, politicians, environmental groups and the media about the positive environmental initiatives undertaken and
- show the world that Ireland can have the highest quality golf courses in the most pristine settings.

The following seven workgroups have been established to advise the committee:

- Energy and Climate Action
- Plant Nutrition and Plant Protection
- Golf Course Machinery
- Biodiversity
- Water Quality and Water Use
- Education
- Communications

Specifically in relation to the work of the NPDWAG, it was stated that golf clubs are moving away from the use of MCPA and 2,4-D, resorting in the main to glyphosate, fluroxypyr and clopyralid based herbicide products instead. Insecticide use is limited to Coragen (contains chlorantraniliprole) to control chafers. Fungicide use is confined to approx. 1 ha/golf course and used only on greens. The aim is to reduce and minimise the use of PPPs.

7. Communications activities

- IW commented that no further campaigns had been instigated since the previous meeting nor had there been a need to issue any reactive press releases about exceedances.
- DAFM sought views from group members about dissemination mechanisms for NPDWAG minutes, such as publishing the minutes on DAFM's pesticides website. Some pros and cons were raised and it was agreed to reflect further on the issue.
- DAFM indicated that an article is being drafted to highlight the negative consequences that spraying with MCPA and other grassland herbicides is likely to have on species diversity, and the knock-on effect this would have on an individual's biodiversity score when applying for entry to various agri-environmental schemes. As has been widely highlighted, the schemes will include a results-based payment

element. Demonstrating high levels of biodiversity will maximise the level of funding that can be drawn down. Placing emphasis on maximising biodiversity should by default reduce applications of herbicides to vulnerable eco-systems and help protect water quality.

8. Other updates and discussion

- No updates were provided.

9. AOB

- No issues arising.