

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group

Webex meeting – 3 March 2022

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]
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 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 (01-12-2021). If anybody had any subsequently, they were asked to forward them to the Chair.

3. Irish Water update on drinking water exceedances – preliminary overview of 2021

- IW presented their national quarterly update for Q4 2021.
- Currently the total population receiving water from a PWS that has an open EPA file for pesticides is 475,415 – a decrease of 337,755 since the last quarterly update.
- Thirty pesticide compliance plans are currently open. Since the last quarterly update, 19 pesticide compliance plans have been closed.
- A summary of the current Action List non-compliance files was presented for 2020 vs. 2021. In general, there was a substantial improvement in 2021, with Belturbet PWS, Clonroche and Longford Central each only recording one failing month in 2021, and Newcastle West PWS and Foynes/Shannon Estuary each recording two failing months in 2021. Newport PWS remained problematic, with five failing months recorded in 2021.
- Data on pesticide exceedances (by parameter) for the period January to December 2020 and 2021 were presented. Overall there was a 43% reduction in the number of individual substance exceedances in 2021 (47 in 2021 compared to 82 in 2020). There was also a decrease in maximum detected levels in 2021 compared to 2020. MCPA exceedances continued to dominate but showed a significant decline in 2021 compared to 2020 (31 vs 47). 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), isoproturon (no exceedances in 2020, one exceedance in 2021) and propyzamide (no exceedances in 2020, two exceedances 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, Arvagh PWS, Greenmount, Listowel Regional Water Supply and Foynes/Shannon Estuary PWS each with two failing months, all other water supply zones reported only one failing month over the period January to November inclusive.
- It was noted in discussion that 2021 had the lowest number of exceedances on record.

4. Irish Water updates on (i) Catchment Focus Group activities, (ii) Interim Pesticide Strategy, (iii) Stakeholder Action Tracker, (iv) temporal analysis of pesticide exceedances, (v) Pilot Drinking Water Source Protection Project

- (i) Catchment Focus Group activities have been limited to date in 2022 and will increase significantly once the spraying season starts.
- (ii) The Interim Pesticide Strategy was published by IW last summer and is available online at the following location – www.water.ie/projects/strategic-plans/interim-pesticide-strategy. Tracking stakeholder actions is an important part of the process to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- (iii) There has been a good response to the appeal to stakeholders to submit actions for recording in the Stakeholder Action Tracker spreadsheet. Fifty-seven activities were noted, including training, providing advice and raising awareness. Awareness-raising activities included press releases, newspaper and online articles, radio/podcast interviews, a TV interview, presentations, webinars and social media campaigns. 56% of actions have been completed, 38% have commenced and 6% have not yet started.
- (iv) The percentage of drinking water samples with pesticide exceedances has decreased significantly since 2016 and 2017. 0.44% of samples had exceedances in 2021, compared to 1.48% in 2016 and 1.64% in 2017, representing a reduction of approximately 72% in the exceedance rate (compared to an average exceedance rate of 1.56% for 2016 and 2017). There has also been a significant decrease in the maximum concentrations of pesticides being detected. These decreases aren't correlated to annual rainfall amounts or trends in herbicide sales, and may represent to some degree a greater awareness among pesticide users of potential impacts on water quality and improved practices to minimise those impacts.
- (v) Consultants were appointed by IW in 2021 and commenced design and planning work. Baseline water quality monitoring has been undertaken in three sub-catchments within Upper Erne (Belturbet PWS) to help select the target area for the project. A kick-off meeting involving the project working group and the advisory group was held in March. Work is continuing on designing and selecting measures, including a pesticide use survey in the selected sub-catchment.
- Some discussion ensued on the possibilities for better targeting of activities in catchments based on pesticide sales and usage data. This is difficult to do in a granular manner at present. It was noted that discussions are ongoing at EU level on proposals for more frequent collection of robust pesticide usage data.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results – overview of 2021, plans for 2022

- Some winter monitoring has taken place in the Lough Forbes catchment. There was one exceedance in November (MCPA - 0.146 µg/L) and no exceedances in December.
- For 2022, the limit of quantification has decreased from 0.01 µg/L to 0.005 µg/L as the laboratory has been reaccredited. Any detections >0.005 µg/L will be reported.
- Monitoring for 2022 will commence in week 15 (week beginning Monday 11 April) in the Lough Forbes, Belturbet, Emy Lough and Newport catchments, and in week 16 in the Feale and Deel catchments.
- Belturbet, Lough Forbes, the River Feale and the River Deel will have 15, 17, 3 and 10 sampling locations, respectively. Newport will have 8 sampling points, which represents good coverage for this small catchment., including a new location with better accessibility for sampling point N02. Overall, 941 individual samples should be analysed over the course of the 2022 catchment monitoring campaign.
- Stewardship actions for 2021 included a presentation for the Teagasc Signpost webinar series in March, contributions to Teagasc training for grassland Professional Advisors in September and to IASIS training for Professional Distributors in September, and a Dairygold webinar in November. There was also a visit to Teagasc students in Athenry in December to show APHA's 'demonstration sprayer'.
- A Teagasc review meeting was held in Longford in February 2022 to identify priority interventions to encourage best practice to protect water quality. A target area for focusing intensive interventions was identified (in the vicinity of the Lough Rinn 010 sampling location). There will also be engagement with contractors in the Lough Forbes area.
- Printed support material on point source and diffuse contamination is available from APHA. Pdf versions of TOPPS support materials can be obtained from APHA for inclusion on appropriate stakeholder websites.

6. Communications activities – updates and plans for 2022 (IW), potential impact of biodiversity measures in agri-environmental schemes (DAFM)

- IW presented a review of the 2021 communications campaign, which included the national 'Spray with Care' campaign (March and April 2021), targeted advertising on DoneDeal.ie last spring, publication of the IW Interim Pesticides Strategy, awareness-raising for the 'Let it Bee' project, spring and autumn FaceBook campaigns, a feature on RTE's Ear to the Ground programme (looking at work in the Newport catchment) and regular press releases.
- The proposed communications campaign for 2022 was presented. A national press release and county-specific press releases are expected to issue in April. The campaign will also feature adverts on Agriland and Donedeal, collaboration with the NFGWS's 'Plant a tree and be pesticides free' campaign, proactive press releases, updates to IW's website and updates via social media channels.
- DAFM has drafted an article for the farming press highlighting the negative consequences that spraying with MCPA and other grassland herbicides can have on species diversity, and the potential for this to impact on farmer payments in new agri-environmental schemes, which will contain results-based elements based on farm biodiversity scores.

7. Planning for 2022 – general actions, priority area actions

- Group members were reminded to use the stakeholder action tracker spreadsheet to submit information to DAFM and IW on actions planned for 2022 (both general actions and priority area actions).

8. Other updates and discussion

- No updates were provided.

9. AOB

- No issues arising.