

Forestry and Water Quality Outcomes Project Group

Terms of Reference ~~for 2023~~

Background

Forestry has been identified as the third most prevalent significant pressure, impacting 216 waterbodies or approximately 13% of all water bodies 'At Risk' of not achieving their environmental objective under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), as outlined in the third River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) (~~to be published~~).

An action of the third RBMP proposes the development of integrated catchment management plans (sub-plans to the RBMP) and associated sectoral action plans for each of the 46 catchments. Five pilot catchments have been selected to inform the development of these plans through discussions with implementing bodies, and examination of data on activities and actions to support the tracking of measures. Each pilot catchment will represent various catchment characteristics including issues, with the Mal Bay catchment in the south-west region focusing on forestry activities.

The EPA Catchment Science and Management Unit and Coillte initially met in November 2022. An action of this meeting was to initiate a technical project to improve both data exchange and interpretation of water quality outcomes with forestry operation data, which will support the above RBMP actions. This would focus initially on one or more of the five pilot catchments.

The purpose of the Forestry and Water Quality Outcomes Project Group

The purpose of this technical group is to explore the link between forestry operations and forest land-use change data to understand the link with water quality outcomes in a data driven way with the aim of reducing the impact of forestry on water quality. The intended project will ~~look to understand the following~~ analyse the following:

- What type of forest operations ~~ry activity~~ can cause an a significant impact on water quality?
- What are the potential impacts from issues driven by forestry activities forest operations (nutrients, fine sediment, pesticides, acidification, physical modification)?
- What mitigations are in place to reduce the impacts on water quality and are they effective? ~~actions are working to prevent/mitigate these issues?~~
- What spatial analysis can be leveraged upon to collate evidence-based information to monitor the impacts on water quality from forest operations.
- ~~techniques/methodologies can be utilised to support a data-driven evidence-based approach (remote sensing)?~~
- How ~~can~~ could such an approach be scaled nationally to facilitate the exchange of relevant data for the entire Coillte estate to support a national monitoring framework? such a process be rolled out nationally?

In so doing, the Project Group will:

- Assist Coillte and the EPA in tracking the implementation of forestry actions forest operations and in assessing assess the ir effectiveness of mitigation measures in terms of maintaining or improving water quality.
- ~~Provide input to the catchment management plan and sectoral action plan development as set out in the updated river basin management plan.~~

- Support an enhanced ~~more~~ data driven approach to inform the WFD characterisation process with regard ~~respect~~ to forestry activities ~~forest operations and potential impacts on water quality~~.
- Streamline a bilateral process of data exchange between Coillte and EPA. Review the EPA-Coillte data sharing agreement as necessary.
- Circulate minutes of meetings and track progress of the project group. The Project Group will report on progress and provide input to the catchment management plan and sectoral action plan development as set out in the updated river basin management plan.
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Composition and Operation of Group

Membership of the Group consists of representatives from the EPA ~~Catchment Science and Management Unit~~, and Coillte ~~and the Forest Service~~.

The Project Group will meet as required as the project progresses on a quarterly basis. We anticipate that the project should take no longer than 6 months.

Progress on the groups work will be reported to an EPA- at EPA-Coillte Senior Management Steering Group meetings which will be held every 6 months as per the timeline below.

Timelines

TBC

Kick-off meeting: September 2024

Interim progress discussion: November 2024

Progress report and project review: March 2025