

Hydromorphology Expert Group Meeting

Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise

Monday 23 September 2024

Actions:

- All presentations to be circulated.
- Revert with comments on SWAN Report to Lisa Egan by 27 September.
- Jonathan Turner to circulate questionnaire on behalf of HymoGuide.
- Members asked to keep parent departments/organisations up-to-speed on the content of Expert Group meetings.
- Terms of Reference to be finalised.

Attendees:

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM):

- Michael Callaghan, Dymphna Kehoe

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH):

- EU & International Planning Regulation: Lisa Clifford
- National Parks and Wildlife Service: Norma O’Hea, Shane Regan, Richard Cronin
- Water Advisory Unit: Colin Byrne, Donal Cronin, Eimear O’Keeffe, Averil Gannon, Lisa Egan
- Waters of Life: Anne Goggin
- Water Policy: Gary McGuinn, Donal Grant, Paul O’Brien

Electricity Supply Board (ESB):

- David O’Connor, Mark Fielding

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

- Keiron Philips

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI):

- Cathal Gallagher

Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO):

- Margaret Keegan

Office of Public Works (OPW):

- Lorna Dempsey

Teagasc:

- Eddie Burgess

Uisce Eireann:

- Mairead Conlon, Katie Smart

University College Dublin (UCD):

- Jonathan Turner

Waterways Ireland:

- Daireann McDonnell, Paula Treacy

Chair: Colin Byrne, DHLGH

- Welcome and introductions

Presentation for discussion by Lisa Egan - Hydromorphology Expert Group: Terms of Reference (ToR), Technical Sub-groups, Timelines and Interim Measures.

Terms of Reference

- Discussion on the draft ToR regarding meeting frequency and membership (to be finalised).
- Discussion on technical sub-groups. May require more specific technical sub-groups under the three broad headings of (1) policy, legislation and future regulatory framework, (2) National Restoration Programme, and (3) Management of pressures on hydromorphology – priority interim solutions.
- Due to breadth of sectors in on the Expert Group, not all members will require input to all areas. Suggest smaller groups convened as required with relevant technical expertise, under the umbrella of the three larger themes.

Priority Interim Solutions

- Group discussed possible priority interim solutions that could be addressed, including amendments to the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations, and the requirement for arterial drainage maintenance.
- With respect to arterial drainage, maintenance is driven by policy. Could that obligation be removed for specific scenarios where it is no longer needed? Noted that the call for land drainage comes from agricultural policy and any changes to it will likely be driven by the Land Use Review (due Q1 2025, public consultation November).

Assessment of Pressures on Hydromorphology

- A more granular approach to environmental quality elements for hydromorphology was raised. Are they correctly aggregated and targeted?
- Anomaly in WFD to only recognise for High/Good status. The five status classes are represented in overall hydromorphology scores – need to look at another approach.
- Needs to be more assessment and monitoring outside of what is required in the WFD. If the correct temporal scale is not monitored, impacts will be missed. Fully described publicly available method.
- Is it the role of this group to drive what restoration needs? e.g. what are we restoring arterial drainage channels to? The NTIG to undertake technical work.
- What additional research needs to be done and what does success look like? How much space/room is needed for rivers?
- Do we need a database of the implications for each agency/body?
- How do we regulate impacts on hydromorphology? We need to assess what other Member States are doing. Can we have a programme of measures for each impact and what would the implications be for monitoring?
- Information is disparate and hard to follow. Do we need a database?
- Discussion around who would be the competent authority for WFD assessments. Would they be the same as those for AA?

- Need to focus on policy alignment. If policy is under the remit of one organisation, it may not align with the WFD or other agency.
- In terms of pressures of land use, are we missing some of the detailed baseline? Do we need to fill that gap in with longer term perspective on landscape change? e.g. legacy sediment from degradation of the landscape, not arising from clearfelling? (ref: HydroSED Project).

Factors Affecting Mitigation

- Note delays in planning system. Is there an avenue for a planning regulation amendment to address planning applications of purely environmental benefit?
- IFI note that processes can be burdensome. If they want to get a licence for a survey, they need to do a screening. IFI in talks with NPWS where works are supposed to be for the benefit of designated species there may be an easier way.
- Note as an outcome of this group, Uisce Eireann and IFI have collaborated in relation to barrier removal/mitigation.

Draft SWAN Report: Physical modifications of Ireland's water resources and implications for meeting Water Framework Directive objectives

- Presentation given by SWAN, group to provide feedback by Friday.