

Minutes of Meeting

Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group

25th March 2021 at 11.00am

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed attendees particularly those attending their first meeting (*Ger Breen, Bord na Móna, Pat Dowling, Clare Co. Co. and Bill Callanan, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*).

Opening Comments from Minister O'Donovan

Minister O'Donovan acknowledged the basis on which the Group was established and its work to date. The Minister informed the Group of his intention to seek Government approval to draft legislation to provide for the establishment of the Group on a statutory basis.

Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th December, 2020 were approved by the Group.

Correspondence and Matters arising

The Secretary updated the Group on correspondence received since its last meeting. The format varied between Parliamentary Questions, TDs Representations and queries from the general public. Topics covered many of the areas on which the work of the Group is focussed including water levels on the River Shannon, removal of the Callows 'pinch points', strategic maintenance, flood relief schemes and meetings of the Group. Responses were co-ordinated with input from the relevant agencies.

Review of Winter 2020/21

The OPW gave a presentation on water levels on the River Shannon during the past winter. It was a wetter season than average and while water levels rose accordingly, they have consistently dropped since. The ESB confirmed that the discharge at Parteen Weir reached 210m³/s in mid-February and that no properties were affected by flooding as a result.

Communications

The OPW gave an update on the newly established Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement. The Sub-committee has held two meetings to date and it has developed a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). The FAQs were approved by the Group and will be published on gov.ie/opw. The Sub-committee is examining a range of areas and considering how best information

on the Group, and its work, is promoted to ensure ease of access for the public. A discussion took place on the importance of resourcing active communications.

Sub-committee on the Work Programme and Measures

The OPW gave an update on progress on the work of the Sub-committee on the Work Programme and Measures.

- The draft Work Programme for 2021 which sets out the extensive range of activities planned by the members of the Group has been prepared. Correspondence has issued to additional local authorities in the Shannon River Basin District for their input as relevant, to the Work Programme. The Group approved the 2021 Work Programme and agreed to its publication on www.gov.ie. Further updates will be published where additional activities are identified.
- The ESB is preparing an application for a Section 21 Licence to continue with the protocol for lowering the lake levels on Lough Allen. This includes tender enquiry documents for various surveys which will enable monitoring to identify any impact on wildlife habitats from operating the protocol. It is envisaged that these surveys will commence during the summer months. The associated costs will be split equally between the ESB and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Following the completion of a Hydro-Geomorphology study of the Lower River Shannon, work is underway to explore the various options, potential benefits and indicative costs of each option. The Steering Group established to oversee this work met in December 2020 and agreed a strategy for the implementation of the preferred option, subject to approval at each stage. This will include environmental studies, planning and detailed design of the preferred option. A draft brief for professional services to support this work is at an advanced stage. It was acknowledged that this is a sensitive area of the Shannon.
- Waterways Ireland has identified five areas for maintenance work to commence in 2021 subject to the necessary environmental screening.
- Work is underway to engage professional services to support the project for the removal of a series of 'pinch points' through the Callows region. It is expected that this project will be subject to the full environmental assessments for planning consent to proceed.

Implications of Covid-19

A discussion took place on the Work Programme and the impact of Covid-19. Work is continuing overall having regard to Government restrictions and health and safety considerations.

Update on Flood Risk Management Plans for the Shannon Region

The Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) include 34 flood relief schemes for the Shannon River Basin District. Of these, work has commenced on 22 schemes which are currently at various stages of development. Good progress is being made and Steering Groups are meeting on a monthly basis to progress the design of individual schemes.

An update was provided on the following schemes:

- **Athlone:** Construction is ongoing. Expected completion date is 2022.
- **Ennis South:** Construction is ongoing.
- **Ennis Lower:** Construction is ongoing.
- **King's Island:** Limerick City and County Council lodged a planning application with An Bord Pleanála in December 2019. Construction is expected to commence in 2022. It is anticipated that the construction of the scheme will take approximately two years.
- **Springfield:** Planning permission was granted in November 2020. Construction is likely to commence in Q2 2021.
- **Limerick City & Environs:** At tender stage.

The OPW has designed a Project Brief template which can be used by local authorities for individual projects.

Summary Discussion

- Minister O'Donovan thanked the members of the Group for their work and gave a further update on his plans to establish the Group on a statutory basis.
- Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland co-presented on the Shannon Tourism Masterplan which was launched on 2nd March, 2021.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage gave an update on progress with County and City Development Plans and Strategic Flood Risk Assessments.

Attendance

Department/Agency	Representative
Office of Public Works	Maurice Buckley (Chairman). John G Murphy
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage / NPWS	Niall Ó Donnchú. Colin Ryan.
Waterways Ireland	John McDonagh.
City and County Managers Association	Lar Power, Leitrim Co. Co. Pat Dowling, Clare Co. Co.
Irish Water	Eamon Gallen.
Bord na Móna	Ger Breen.
ESB	Pat O'Doherty.
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Bill Callanan.

Representatives in Attendance

Minister of State	Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister of State for the Office of Public Works.
Office of Public Works	John Sydenham, Ciaran Conroy, Jackie Stewart, Melessa Lunney, Brian Higgins, Derek Devaney, Garret Nolan, Michael O'Connor.
Waterways Ireland Fáilte Ireland	Éanna Rowe. Paddy Matthews (presentation on Shannon Tourism Masterplan).
ESB	Tom Browne.
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Jane Gilleran.
Irish Water	Tom Leahy.
Environmental Protection Agency	Dr Michéal Lehane.

Apologies

Environmental Protection Agency	Laura Burke
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