

Agriculture Water Quality Working Group

Minutes 6th Meeting

Date: 27th September 2023

9:45am to 12:30pm

Venue: Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore

1. Welcome by the Chair and minutes of last Meeting

The Chair (Ted Massey) opened the meeting by welcoming the various stakeholders. He conveyed Bill Callanan's apologies. The draft minutes of the previous meeting were approved with any comments to be submitted by email to agwatergroup@agriculture.gov.ie before the end of the week.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

The outstanding report regarding the workshop was noted. It will follow.

3. Update on engagement with the European Commission

Ted Massey gave an outline of developments since the last meeting. The Commissioner met the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on 4th September. The Commissioner was very clear that there would be no reopening of Ireland's derogation decision but there was some scope for interpretation of the results of the two-year water quality review. A meeting then took place on 6th September with the Commission Services to explore exactly what the Commission was saying. It was clear any interpretation of the results had to be scientifically justified and was constrained by the fact the Commission Implementing Decision would not be reopened. Once this was clear the Minister was keen to communicate this to farmers, hence the Press Release issued on 6th September.

Some of the farming organisations outlined their frustration and disappointment at the outcome of the engagement with the Commission. They also outlined that some commentary in the media relating to the water quality group was inaccurate as the Group was kept in the dark on developments regarding the engagement with the Commission. In particular, failing to inform the Group of the outcome of the engagement prior to informing the media was considered unacceptable and should not be repeated. DAFM noted these views and apologised for not informing the Group before the Press Release issued.

The Group were advised the Commission asked for maps showing the areas that had failed each of the four tests. These were presented to the Group and discussed.

The Group were also advised that in light of what the Commission have said the interpretation issue is focussed on areas that failed solely due to an increase in Nitrate concentration, but where water quality is still good. The Group were also advised that the implementation map arising from the interpretation exercise is not yet finalised and there needs to be some further engagement with the Commission on this issue.

It was agreed to potentially meet again at the end of the week when the implementation map was finalised. Ted Massey confirmed it was DAFM's intention to publish the implementation map once finalised so farmers could see where they stand.

The Group was advised the Minister has invited the Commissioner to visit, it was uncertain whether the Taoiseach has also issued an invitation yet, but either way the date for a visit was not yet confirmed. The Minister's invitation was included in his letter to Commissioner that issued in August. The Group requested to see the letter that was sent to the Commission.

Action: Implementation map to be finalised. Group to then meet, if necessary, at short notice.

Action: DAFM to consider Group's request to see Minister's letter that was sent to the Commission.

4. Communication with Farmers regarding the reduction to 220 and the advantages and disadvantages of different ways to address holdings with land in both the 220 and 250 catchment zones

Ted Massey outlined that the Minister was keen to get the Working Group's views on this matter and in particular how the Department should deal with holdings that have land remaining at 250 and land moving to 220.

There was a discussion around the 6 options outlined in the non-paper setting out options for implementing stocking rate limits on holdings that contain land in catchments that passed and land in catchments that failed the two-year water quality review. Some members of the Group were deeply disappointed regarding the move to 220. Certain members of the Group expressed strong views in relation to the options to deal with holdings that have land remaining at 250 and land moving to 220. The advantages and disadvantages of the options were teased out; however, there was no agreement on a preferred option. The Group were asked to reflect further and submit any views by email by the end of the week.

Ted Massey also outlined the need to write to individual farmers on this issue. He sought the Working Group's views regarding which group(s) of farmers should be written to - only derogation farmers or certain others. The Group felt ideally every farmer should be written but they accepted the need to prioritise. DAFM said it would take those views back.

Action: Group members to come forward with any further views on how best to deal with holdings that have land remaining at 250 and land moving to 220.

5. AOB and date of next meeting

National Fertiliser Database

Clarity was sought regarding the timing for closing stock. Ted Massey confirmed closing stock was the fertiliser physically present on farm at 23:59 on 14th September. It has to be declared on the National Fertiliser Database by 15th October. There were requests for a simpler product catalogue and an option for advisors to search the database by name. DAFM agreed to communicate these points to colleagues working on the Database.

Ted Massey outlined that the Terms and Conditions for the 2024 Nitrate's Derogation may require a farmer to be registered on the National Fertiliser Database, however a robust database could avoid the need for farmers to submit fertiliser records to DAFM thereby reducing the burden being placed on farmers.

Additional measures under the Nitrates Action Programme

Stakeholders sought an update on progress regarding additional measures under the Nitrates Action Programme. The Group was advised the Nitrates Expert Group had prepared a report outlining a number of recommendations. Clarity was provided that this was a separate group to the Agriculture Water Quality Working Group and the report was not a report from this Working Group, however both groups had discussed similar issues.

Marie Archbold outlined the process that must be undertaken before the measures for the Interim Review are finalised. It was confirmed that Ireland will not be ready to send the list of additional measures to the Commission this week and that this was a separate review to the water quality review leading to 220. The measures for the Interim Review and the associated environmental assessment must go to public consultation. It was confirmed that the proposed measures will be brought to the Working Group for their views before the public consultation. The proposed measures will be future agenda item for this Group.

Action: Proposed measures for Interim Review of the Nitrates Action Programme to be brought to the Group for discussion in advance of public consultation.

Date of next meeting: Possible Webex meeting later this week if a stable implementation map is available.

Appendix 1: Agriculture Water Quality Working Group Attendance List 27th September 2023

Organisation	Representative in Attendance
IFA	Tadhg Buckley
IFA	Aine O'Connell
ICMSA	Denis Drennan
ICMSA	John Enright
MACRA	Maria Snell
Irish Grain Growers	James Kelly
ICOS	John Brosnan
ACORN	Michael Burke
Dairygold	Billy Cronin
Tirlán	Matthew Moylan
Teagasc	Edward Burgess
DHLGH	Marie Archbold
LAWPRO	Anthony Coleman
INHFA	Thomas O'Toole
Dairy Industry Ireland	Conor Mulvihill
ACA	Tom Canning
DAFM	Ted Massey
DAFM	Noeleen McDonald
DAFM	Joanne Purcell
Apologies	
ICOS	Eamonn Farrell
ACORN	Barry Larkin
EPA	Jenny Deakin
IFA	Paul O'Brien
DAFM	Bill Callanan
An Uisce Forum	Matt Crowe
Teagasc	David Wall
LAWPRO	Ruth Hennessy
LAWPRO	Eoin McAleer
Meat Industry Ireland	Dale Crammond
ICSA	Eddie Punch