

Agriculture Water Quality Working Group
Minutes 9th Meeting – meeting with the European Commissioner

Date: 23rd November 2023, 2:00pm

Vene: Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.

Attendance list: see Appendix 1.

1. Welcome

Brendan Gleeson (Chair) opened and welcomed all to the meeting.

Minister McConalogue thanked the Commissioner and his officials for attending. He signified the importance of improving water quality and appreciated the engagement.

Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius then addressed the Group, with the main message that as Ireland is one of only three Member States with a nitrates derogation, being granted a derogation is preferential treatment and the way to keep that derogation is to have stable water quality. He also spoke of his recognition of the importance of the farming sector.

2. Presentation by DAFM

Bill Callanan gave a presentation outlining the justification for Ireland's nitrates derogation, the importance of the derogation to Ireland's grass-based system and family-farm model. Irish water quality and the work through regulation and outside regulation by the sector to improve water quality was also covered.

3. Stakeholders Views

The Chair then opened the meeting to the floor.

Leading representatives spoke. Their statements included their organization's concerns, Ireland's grass-based system and family-farm model, efforts being made to improve water quality as well as what stakeholders are seeking in terms of Ireland's current and future status regarding a nitrate's derogation.

4. Commissioner Sinkevičius' Response

Commissioner Sinkevičius provided the following key messages in response to the Group member's statements:

- There is no change in the timeframe for the move to 220. The decision taken in 2022 can't be reopened. The process of granting a derogation is based on the Commission collecting

the evidence from the Member States' scientific bodies. The final decision on a derogation must go to the European Nitrates Committee where the Member States then vote.

- Flexibility was given in the exclusion of the area that failed the water quality review tests, but still maintained good water quality status.
- Culling cows is not the only option to adjust to the move to 220. Slurry exports should be utilised as far as possible. Given the 3-month period when slurries are stored in Ireland, there should be potential to move slurry off farms to adjust to a 12% reduction in the limit for application of organic manure on impacted derogation farms.
- If water quality is at least stable and there is political will to grant a derogation, then Ireland has a basis to obtain a derogation post-2025.
- The Commission considers the three sustainability pillars social, economic and environmental in its assessment before putting forward a Member State for a vote regarding a derogation request.
- The Nitrates Directive is over 30 years old and there will soon be an evaluation of the Directive. This stakeholder consultation will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to outline their views. He is seeking stakeholder engagement in the consultation.

5. Close

Minister McConalogue thanked all for attending and pointed to the significance of the visit and how it was unprecedented for a Commissioner to meet stakeholders as he had today. In closing he re-emphasised the importance of Ireland's derogation given Ireland's unique system. He also outlined the clear emphasis being placed on improving water quality with all stakeholders working together to achieve this.

Appendix 1: Attendance list for Agriculture Water Quality Working Group Meeting with Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on 23rd November 2023.

Representative	Organisation
Tim Cullinan	Irish Farmers Association
Tadhg Buckley	Irish Farmers Association
Paul O'Brien	Irish Farmers Association
Pat McCormack	Irish Creamery Milk Supplies Association
Denis Drennan	Irish Creamery Milk Supplies Association
John Enright	Irish Creamery Milk Supplies Association
Elaine Houlihan	Macra na Feirme
Liam Hanrahan	Macra na Feirme
Maria Snell	Macra na Feirme
Eddie Punch	Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association
Vincent Roddy	Irish Natura & Hill Farmers Association
Tomas O'Toole	Irish Natura & Hill Farmers Association
James Kelly	Irish Grain Growers
Edward Carr	Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society
Eamonn Farrell	Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society
Barry Larkin	ACORN Group of private merchants

Conor Ryan	Dairy Industry Ireland
Jim Bergin	Tirlán
Thomas Ryan	Tirlán
Enda Buckley	Carbery
Billy Cronin	Dairygold
Sile Sweeney	Meat Industry Ireland
Frank O'Mara	Teagasc
David Wall	Teagasc
Edward Burgess	Teagasc
Tom Canning	Agricultural Consultants Association
Margaret Keegan	Local Authority Waters Programme
Eoin McAleer	Local Authority Waters Programme
Karen Ciesielski	Environmental Pillar
Elaine McGoff	An Taisce
Sinéad O'Brien	Sustainable Water Network
Marie Archbold	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius	European Commission
Barbara Nolan	European Commission
Agne Razmislavičiūtė	European Commission
Dovile Sandaraite	European Commission
Jeanne De Jaegher	European Commission
Minister McConalogue	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Breandan Gleeson	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Bill Callanan	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Edward Massey	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Noeleen McDonald	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Joanne Purcell	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine