

Agriculture Water Quality Working Group

Minutes 11th Meeting

Date: 15th December 2023, 10:00am

Venue: The Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise

Attendance list: see Appendix 1.

1. Welcome by the Chair and Minutes of the recent meetings.

The Chair (Louise Byrne) opened the meeting by welcoming the various stakeholders. There was tour de table of introductions.

Some comments in respect of the amended draft minutes for the meeting on 27th September were submitted by email that morning. They are to be reviewed by the Secretariat and updated draft minutes circulated for agreement.

The minutes of the meeting on 5th December will be updated to include a point raised under AOB.

Action: Secretariat to review comments/submissions, update the draft Minutes and circulate.

2. Groups Recommendations to support the transition to 220

Ted Massey gave a brief overview of the matters arising from Teagasc's presentation at the last meeting. Teagasc are further developing their research on excretion rates for young cattle following the last meeting. They have agreed to their research being shared with UCD for peer review. Once that has happened the final material will be shared with this Group.

On reducing **Crude Protein** in concentrates fed to dairy cows, the Group favoured an "opt-in" optional approach for farmers to be facilitated through an amendment to the current Regulations. They suggested once the system is established the average crude protein fed in the previous calendar year could be used to determine the excretion rate for the current year.

DAFM outlined that since the previous meeting it had some discussions with ICBF. They are confident they can adapt the dairy banding IT system to accommodate further options for farmers who wish to feed a lower crude protein. The Group were also keen to explore the possibility of feeding less than a 12% crude protein concentrate at grass in Summer. DAFM agreed to speak to Teagasc and Industry regarding the practicality and effect of feeding such a concentrate. The need for industry to consider incentives to reduce crude protein as well as

the need to raise farmer awareness that feed should not just be purchased based on crude protein value were also discussed. The need for a feed database was also raised. In response DAFM said it would set-up a working group in early 2024 to scope this out.

With respect to **young bovine nutrient excretion rates**, the Group confirmed its support for amending the 0-1 year old rate into extraction rates for 0-3 months and 4-12 months in the GAP Regulations. Excretion rates for 1-2 year old bovines split by gender are awaited from Teagasc.

DAFM advised on the process for amending the GAP Regulations including getting both Minister's agreement and the requirement for at least an Appropriate Assessment screening on new measures to ensure no negative impacts on water quality. Stakeholders asked that these changes should be accommodated and communicated as soon as possible to allow farmers to plan and adapt. The need for early communication to give farmers clarity regarding calves and the crude protein issue was agreed.

With respect to cattle **slurry's nutrient content**, David Wall, Teagasc provided additional background and context on the values arising from slurry analysis. The Group agreed to await the interim outcomes (due in Spring 2024) of the current Teagasc research on slurry and soiled water production as well as nutrient content before there would be any regulatory changes regarding the nutrient content of cattle slurry.

Action: DAFM to engage with IGFA and Teagasc regarding the possibility of feeding <12% crude protein concentrate.

Action: DAFM to engage with DHLGH with a view to seeking a regulatory change regarding crude protein and the nutrient excretion rate for young cattle.

Action: DAFM to circulate updated Teagasc report once peer reviewed by UCD.

Action: DAFM to communicate with farmers once there is clarity regarding calves and crude protein.

Action: Industry to consider incentives and how to raise awareness regarding reducing crude protein in animal feed.

Action: DAFM to set up a working group to scope out development of a feed database.

3. Group's Recommendations to improve water quality under the Interim Review

In advance of the meeting the Group received the Nitrates Experts Group recommendations and a summary report from the workshop held by the Group in July as well as subsequent discussions in August. The Group agreed the summary document is an accurate summary of those discussions.

The Chair outlined that the Minister is seeking the Group's recommendations rather than a discussion on the merits or otherwise of the Nitrates Expert Group (NEG) Recommendations.

Ted Massey presented a document breaking down the Group's workshop summary and the NEG recommendations under five themes. Theme 1: Reducing nutrient load/losses was discussed with key points and the Group's recommendations being added to the working discussion document. That updated document along with a Table showing the impact of the discussed reduction in chemical fertiliser allowances is to be circulated to the Group.

The significant regulatory changes applicable to farmers over recent years was raised along with the need to strike the correct balance between a regulatory approach and optional/advisory based approaches. The need to do all possible to improve water quality while keeping farmers on board was also discussed.

Discussions on the other four themes will continue at the next meeting. Written comments will be taken in advance of that meeting

Action: DAFM to provide Table showing the impact of the discussed reduction in chemical fertiliser allowances. (Completed, Circulated post-meeting 15th December 2023)

Action: DAFM to circulate the updated draft discussion document. (Completed, Circulated post-meeting 15th December 2023).

Action: Group to consider points raised and drafted recommendations within the discussion document and the table, to inform their thoughts in advance of meeting on the 20th of December. Written comments to be submitted by lunchtime on 19/12/23.

4. AOB and date of next meeting

Minor non-compliances with derogation conditions

The issue of minor non-compliances resulting in exclusion from derogation for two years was raised. Some members of the Group raised concerns that the conditions placed on derogation applicants since 2022 have resulted in huge pressures on advisors working with derogation clients.

DAFM committed to reviewing the Terms and Conditions for 2024 Derogation applicants with this in mind. It also outlined plans to develop its IT systems to help flag and mitigate the risk of advisor clerical errors.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting is proposed for the morning of the 20th December with the aim that it will be held in Portlaoise/Horse and Jockey. Details will follow once venue is confirmed.

Appendix 1: Agriculture Water Quality Working Group Attendance List 15th December 2023.

Stakeholder	Representative in attendance
IFA	Tadhg Buckley
IFA	Paul O'Brien
ICMSA	John Enright
ICMSA	Eamonn Carroll
MACRA	Maria Snell
ICSA	Daniel Lynam
Irish Grain Growers	James Kelly
ICOS	Eamonn Farrell
Dairy Industry Ireland	Conor Mulvihill
ACORN Group of Private Merchants	Barry Larkin
Meat Industry Ireland	Dale Crammond
Carbery	Liam Bohane
Dairygold	Billy Cronin
Tirlan	TJ Phelan

ACA	Martin Crowe
Teagasc	David Wall
LAWPRO	Ruth Hennessy
An Forum Uisce	Matt Crowe
DAFM	Louise Byrne
DAFM	Ted Massey
DAFM	Joanne Purcell
Apologies	
DAFM	Bill Callanan
DAFM	Noeleen McDonald
ACA	Tom Canning
MACRA	Liam Hanrahan
INHFA	Vincent Roddy
LAWPRO	Anthony Coleman
Teagasc	Edward Burgess
DHLGH	Marie Archbold

Ends.