

Agriculture Water Quality Working Group

Minutes 10th Meeting

Date: 5th December 2023, 2:30pm

Venue: The Maldron 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. As Louise was standing in for Bill Callanan as Chair, there was tour de table of introductions.

Requests for suggested changes to the Minutes from the 27th of September had not been provided to agwatergroup@agriculture.gov.ie as requested at the meeting on the 17th of November. However, certain stakeholders repeated their request that the minutes re Agenda Item 4 of 27th September be clarified to better reflect the views expressed during that meeting.

It was noted the Minutes of the meeting with Commissioner would be corrected to refer to the 9th meeting of the Group. In response to a Stakeholder's request, there will also be an amendment to third paragraph in those minutes regarding Commissioner's reference to 'stable' not 'improving' water quality.

Action: Suggested changes to the draft minutes of the recent meetings to be submitted by stakeholders to agwatergroup@agriculture.gov.ie by the end of week (8th December)

Action: The Secretariat will update the draft Minutes and circulate in advance of the next meeting.

2. Reflections on meeting with European Commissioner

Group member's reflections on the meeting with the Commissioner included the following: appreciation for the messaging that all are working together to improve water quality, need for further engagement with the Commission to ensure an adequate practical understanding of Irish agriculture, need to repeat communication regarding the various impacts if Ireland were to lose derogation, a further invitation should issue to Commission Officials to visit Ireland, the need for significant engagement with the Commission before the next derogation decision, the need for all to work together to maintain the maximum stocking rate under the derogation.

The Commissioner's point about the need for stable water quality compared to the point made previously by Commission Officials about water quality having to be good and improving for a future derogation to be granted was noted. The difference between these positions and the need for data to show what Ireland is working towards was also raised.

In conclusion, the Group agreed the need to work towards improving water quality.

3. Group's Suggestions for measures to improve water quality under the Interim Review

DAFM outlined that Minister McConalogue requests the Group's views on measures to improve water quality now that there was no ambiguity on the direction needed following the Commissioner's visit. Measures to improve water quality discussed at the Group's workshop in July and at a meeting in August would be discussed fully at next meeting of the Group with a view to finalising these as the agreed views of the Group on measures to improve water quality.

There was criticism among the Group that they had not received a copy of the Nitrates Expert Group's recommendations. DAFM committed to providing a copy of the report subject to agreement from DHLGH. There was also criticism that measures had been discussed in depth at the workshop in July and at the subsequent meeting in August, where the main messages were summarised for further consideration.

DAFM acknowledged the frustrations, however, it also pointed out that at the time those measures were being discussed, there may have been a perception that such measures were being contemplated as an alternative to moving to 220 kg N/ha.

The Group requested that the summary report of the workshop in July is provided to them in advance of the next meeting.

There were some suggestions from the Group regarding the need for improved slurry management, umbilical slurry spreading systems, and work to develop nutrient use efficiency figures at farm level. The Group are to reflect further in preparation for the next meeting.

Action: Subject to agreement with DHLGH, the Secretariat are to circulate the Nitrates Expert Group recommendations report.

Action: The Secretariat will circulate a summary report for the Working Group's workshop held in July and follow-on points discussed during the Group's meeting in August.

Action: Group members are to reflect further on possible measures to improve water quality under the Interim Review so the matter can be discussed fully at the next meeting.

4. DAFM requests to Teagasc - presentation and discussion on research findings

Laurence Shalloo of Teagasc joined for this item and presented the Group with Teagasc research findings on three asks as follows:

(I) To provide information on the impact of reducing the maximum crude protein content of concentrates fed to dairy cows at summer grazing and how it would impact what nutrient excretion rates across the dairy bands.

From the modelled findings presented, the Group felt there is scope to reduce excretion rates by feeding a reduced crude protein (CP) concentrate in Summer. The Group discussed possible methods to credit farmers who move to a lower CP rate. A number spoke about the benefits of an opt-in option rather than a regulatory approach. Certain Group members emphasised the need to keep things simple. The Group are to further consider practical issues from a feed formulation and practical implementation perspective.

Action: DAFM to consider suggestions by the Group and to engage with ICBF re possible implementation.

Action: Members of the Group who represent or who have contact with feed mills are to consult on the lowest practical CP for cows at grass, i.e., possibly 12% fresh weight.

Action: Issue to be considered further at the next meeting.

(II) To provide information setting out how the current nutrient excretion rates for dairy cows was calculated and the process used to determine the nutrient content of cattle slurry.

From the presented modelled figures regarding the banding of dairy cow excretion rates and the updated research relating to nutrient content of cattle slurry, it appeared that there was potential to increase the total N content of cattle slurry from 2.4 to possibly ~2.7 kg N/m³ of

slurry. However, it was evident that the slurry storage volume figure of 0.33m³ slurry per week for dairy cows likely also requires updating. The Group were informed that there is an on-going Teagasc research on soiled water and slurry production being funded by DAFM. This will provide more data on the volumes and nutrient content of slurry.

Action: The Group are to consider if changing the Regulations from 2.4 to 2.7 kg N/m³ of cattle slurry is merited or if changes should await the interim results coming from Teagasc's current slurry and soiled water research.

(III) To provide information on possible amendments to the livestock extraction rates in Table 6 of SI 113 of 2022, in particular, 0 – 1 year old bovines.

From the figures presented, it was evident that there was some scope to separate out animals in the 0–1-year-old bovine category. Suggestions within the Group were to assign a low rate of 1kg N or even 0kg N for calves in the 0-3 months period with calves aged 4 to 12 months being assigned the remainder of the excretion value (20 kg N) applicable for that portion of the year. DAFM advised that a 0kg N rate for 3 months as proposed was not scientifically justifiable, but the research findings should be considered.

Teagasc also presented the monthly nutrient excretion rates for bovines aged 1-2 years. Laurence Shalloo noted gender and weight may have a significant impact on these values. He agreed to conduct some further research to look at this. DAFM said it would present these findings as soon as they become available.

In conclusion, the Group found the presentation beneficial in identifying flexibility for farmers to reduce excretion rates within the regulatory framework while avoiding negative impacts on water quality. To allow farmers to plan and adapt, the Group noted that communication of such potential changes must take place soon.

Action: The Secretariat will circulate a copy of the Teagasc presentation. The issues will be discussed further at the next meeting of the Group.

5. AOB and date of next meeting

Minor non-compliances for derogation farmers.

Stakeholders raised the matter of farmers being excluded from the Derogation for 2 years for what are perceived as minor issues. DAFM stated Derogation Applicants must comply with the requirements in the Commission Decision and the associate Terms and Conditions. DAFM committed to reviewing any case where a farmer felt aggrieved.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting is proposed for the morning of the 15th December with the aim that it will be held in Portlaoise/Tullamore. Details will follow once venue is confirmed.

Appendix 1: Agriculture Water Quality Working Group Attendance List 5th December 2023.

Organisation	Representative in Attendance
IFA	Tadhg Buckley
IFA	Aine O'Connell
ICMSA	John Enright
ICMSA	Denis Drennan
MACRA	Maria Snell
MACRA	Liam Hanrahan
ICSA	Daniel Lynam
INHFA	Vincent Roddy
Irish Grain Growers	James Kelly
ICOS	Ray Doyle
ACORN Group of Private Merchants	Barry Larkin
Meat Industry Ireland	Dale Crammond
Carbery	Liam Bohane
Dairygold	Billy Cronin

Tirlan	Thomas Ryan
Teagasc	Edward Burgess
DHLGH	Lisa Egan
LAWPRO	Ruth Hennessy
LAWPRO	Anthony Coleman
Tirlan	Thomas Ryan
DAFM	Louise Byrne
DAFM	Ted Massey
DAFM	Noeleen McDonald
DAFM	Joanne Purcell
Apologies	
DAFM	Bill Callanan
IFA	Paul O'Brien
ICSA	Eddie Punch
Irish Grain Growers	Clive Carter
ICOS	Eamonn Farrell
Dairy Industry Ireland	Conor Mulvihill
Teagasc	David Wall
DHLGH	Maire Archbold
ACA	Tom Canning
LAWPRO	Eoin McAleer
An Forum Uisce	Matt Crowe
EPA	Jenny Deakin

