

Meeting to discuss short and medium term measures to inform the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group

18th November 2016

Present:

OPW:	Vincent Campbell (Chairing), Mark Adamson, John Murphy, Nicola Haran
Waterways Ireland:	Eanna Rowe, Eamon, Michael McKiernan
Inland Fisheries Ireland:	Amanda Mooney
Irish Water:	Michael Goss
D/AHRRGA	Niall Ó Donnchú

Setting the scene

The Chair welcomed the participants to the meeting and said that the goal for the meeting was to discuss what could be done in the short and medium term with a view to informing the discussion of the Working Group at its next meeting on 2nd December.:

Medium Term

Removal of “pinch points”

OPW outlined how the focus of the CFRAM Programme was around benefitting properties rather than agricultural benefits, but had looked at a range of options for the Callows and elsewhere in rural areas along the Shannon. While the costs estimated were high, the option that showed the most promise related to the removal of “pinch points” upstream of Meelick Weir. It is now proposed to undertake a more detailed assessment project for this option which would include:

- More detailed topographical surveys of more localised areas
- Refining and enhancing the hydraulic model
- Reviewing the agricultural benefits
- Reviewing the costing
- More detailed ecological surveys to establish where exactly the qualifying interest are

This analysis would be rolled out during 2017. There was general agreement that surveys and maps that could be shared by WI and IFI would be made available to OPW as soon as possible and that the close involvement of NPWS would also be of benefit. A small steering group comprising OPW, WI, IFI and NPWS is to be established for the project. A formal communication would issue to the various parties to establish the names for the steering group.

There was some discussion about taking a similar approach to looking at other constrictions further down the river and this is to be considered further, noting this would involve different representatives from ESB and Fisheries because of the geographic regional responsibilities.

Development of a Maintenance Programme

There was general consensus that there was merit in developing a systematic maintenance programme for the Shannon which would fundamentally be preventative to avoid future increases in risk. It should have a rolling programme of works that would be visible, around the structures, beds and banks. There was merit in picking some known locations to act as pathfinders to develop the overall programme i.e. to test the process. Walking surveys of the locations could be carried out together by OPW, WI, IFI and NPWS to assist with any screening and the methodology would be worked out. From an Irish Water perspective, awareness around their extraction points would be important.

The responsibility for such a maintenance programme would need to be further explored and may require a Government decision if it would be outside the current statutory remit of the various bodies.

While this maintenance programme would be a medium term measure in terms of development and delivery, a short-term goal could be the agreement of a maintenance strategy and announcement of some pathfinder projects/locations.

Short Term

As part of the discussion around maintenance, the participants discussed whether anything could be done in the short-term on a range of issues including the following:

- Dredging
- Sluices
- Taking out silt
- Cutting back trees and removal of branches
- Cleaning of channels adjacent to callows

Preventative Maintenance action

Some discussion was had around the issue of silt and the opportunity for some preventative maintenance activity around the removal of debris, small trees and other vegetation that might have started rooting on a peat bed. A screening assessment would need to be undertaken for Appropriate Assessment.

Silt can originate from any land close to the Shannon. While there may be some perception that Bord na Mona bogs were for responsible for large quantities of silt deposits, Bord na Móna owns only 2% of the overall land in the Shannon Catchment and less than 20% of the peat lands in the Catchment. For many years Bord na Móna has operated a detailed system of silt control in accordance with its EPA licences. EPA audits have found the Company to be compliant in regard to silt control.

In relation to the sluices at Meelick, there was a consensus that this issue should be re-examined after the “pinch points” project modelling is completed.

The importance of communicating effectively between the various bodies including the local authorities was emphasised to ensure that everyone has a shared understanding about projects underway.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussions and appreciated their openness to seek solutions.

OPW

25/11/16