

Minutes of 15th Meeting

Northern Ireland Water Framework Directive Stakeholder Forum

River House, Belfast

3rd March 2009

Attendance:

William Caldwell	DOE - PEPG
Claire Cockerill	Freshwater Task Force (WWF)
Anthony Courtney	DOE (PEPG)
Andrew Frazer	British Hydropower Association
Maureen Green	DOE NIEA
Angela Halpenny	NI Water
Uel Irwin	AES Kilroot
David Knott	Port of Belfast
Aileen Lawson	Ulster Farmers Union
Linda McGoldrick	DARD
Bob McMillen	NI Tourist Board
Philip McMurray	DOE (PEPG)
Brian Murphy	CNCC
Emma Neill	DOE (PEPG)
Gabriel Nelson	DOE (NIEA)
Jennifer Robinson	General Consumer Council
Roy Simpson	UAF
Julian Smyth	DRD Water Policy

Apologies:

Peter Archdale	CNCC
Gordon Best	Quarry Products Association
Dick James	NI Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Fergal Kearney	NI Tourist Board
Robbie Marshall	UAF
John Martin	Freshwater Task Force(RSPB)
Karen Smyth	NILGA
Ann McGregor	NICCI
James Robinson	RSPB
Alex Scullin	NI Agricultural Producers Association
Paul Simpson	DOE
Andrew Sloan	NI Sports Council
David Wright	DCAL Fisheries
Trevor Wright	Port of Larne

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 14th meeting on 16th December 2008 were approved. William Caldwell (WC) welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that Paul Simpson would be retiring at the end of March and had asked him to pass on his thanks and farewells to the group. WC also discussed the change in personnel in the DOE WFD Policy Group, with Anthony Courtney joining the team and Brenda Cunning leaving the team.

2. Matters arising from minutes & updates paper

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved with one matter arising- Brian Murphy(BM) asked about the status of the action from item number 7 of the previous meeting re a request from Peter Archdale for an update on an ongoing NIEA septic tanks project from Gabriel Nelson(GN). GN explained that the NIEA are currently at Phase 3 in their analysis of septic tanks in Northern Ireland and discussed the issues and difficulties that arose from the first two phases. GN stated that he would organise and update on the issue for the forum meeting in the autumn.

There were 2 matters arising with regard to the updates paper- Aileen Lawson (AL) talked about the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, stating that £200 million had been spent so far and that over 3900 farmers had completed their FNMS projects. AL also discussed the Countryside Management Scheme stating that 1300 applications had been accepted out of around 4500.

Secondly, Claire Cockerill (CC) enquired about the Floods Directive. WC stated that this was the responsibility of the Rivers Agency.

Action: WC suggested that an update on the Floods Directive should be included in the next forum updates paper.

3. SuDS Update

Maureen Green(MG) gave a brief description of this approach towards managing storm waters explaining that SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) is a key target under the NI Sustainable Development Strategy, hence there is a need for training and awareness raising re SuDS. MG explained that the implementation of these systems could help to reduce flooding and naturally treat storm water, citing the Toome bypass as an example of the system in action.

MG highlighted that a report had been made on SuDS in the previous year, which had formed the basis of a strategy document and subsequently a consultation document which will be given to the minister. MG indicated that this document should be available online by the end of May.

BM enquired as to whether the implementation of the systems is mandatory. MG confirmed that SuDS is recommended where applicable within the planning process but is not mandatory at present.

Aileen Lawson (AL) asked about the length of the consultation period. MG confirmed that this would be three months. Uel Irwin (UI) enquired who would be responsible for the maintenance of the systems. MG confirmed that different agencies would be involved depending on the type of SuDS used. The SuDS strategy will go out to consultation for a period of 3 months from May 2009.

4. Draft RBMP Consultation- Input from Forum members

GN gave a brief overview of comments received to date and ongoing work in relation to the Draft RBMP. GN then asked for any comments/feedback from the forum members on any aspect of the plans, in particular, concentrating on the accessibility of the plans and the content. David Knott (DK), Andrew Frazer (AF) and AL all raised points about the online maps, stating that they had found them slow, difficult to access and had experienced firewall problems too. Regarding firewall difficulties, GN acknowledged that there was no easy fix, but that the system had been tested on many different systems. He also stated that NIEA had implemented measures to speed up the access in the week prior to the meeting.

AF suggested that perhaps the maps could be made simpler. GN said that NIEA have attempted to keep the online information as simple as possible, whilst still maintaining the necessary detail.

CC put forward the point that it may be difficult for the user to find what they are looking for on the maps and suggested that the appendices style approach adopted by DEFRA may be superior for this purpose. GN responded by saying that NIEA specifically didn't follow DEFRA's approach as they wanted to make the maps more readable but would take this feedback into consideration.

AL also stated that the maps are very good, and it is helpful that you can click on a river where e.g. the water quality is failing and find out why, however conveyed that the language used is not very user friendly. GN acknowledged that it is important to use common language but still maintain scientific integrity, and said that consideration would be given to e.g. having a link to the glossary.

BM stated that PA had a number of points to raise about the draft plans. GN stated that he had had frequent communications with PA about his thoughts and that this process was ongoing.

WC reminded the group that draft plans are out for consultation until 22nd June, and encouraged them to give any further feedback during that time. He also informed the group that DOE and DRD committees are interested in the views of stakeholders and that the committees are going to extend an invitation to an event in parliament buildings at 1pm on April 1st to hear feedback on the draft plans.

5. Participation 2009

GN outlined that NIEA had put in place plans to hold six information days, in which stakeholders and the general public could:

- speak with NIEA staff about draft River Basin Plan proposals to improve the water environment

- search interactive web maps to find out more about their local river, lake, coastal waters and groundwater
- identify insects and see how they can be used as indicators of water pollution

Discussion took place on other events at which to highlight and publicise the draft RBMPs, such as the Balmoral Show.

Following on from the previous Stakeholder Forum meeting, Linda McGoldrick stated that at present the agricultural contractors trade association is not operating.

DK enquired about the status of the previously proposed workshop for representatives from Ports and Harbours, which would involve DRD and DOE. GN said that David McCullough (DRD) was pursuing the issue and that it was hoped a date could be arranged

GN affirmed that NIEA will continue to work on how they communicate the River Basin Management Plans and that this will continue throughout 2009 and onwards.

Action: Details of the information days to be emailed to the stakeholders.

Philip McMurray (PMcM) advised the Forum of an upcoming European Water Conference (Brussels 2-3 April 2009), which would focus on participation and initial feedback on the draft plans and the WFD process. He explained that PEPG are organising an event in Greenmount to stream in the conference onto a big screen, which all the stakeholders would be invited to attend. He also explained the format of the days and distributed information leaflets about the conference.

PMcM mentioned that group members could alternatively take part in the online participation at the Brussels conference on their own PCs.

Julian Smith (JS) stated that DRD intended sending participants to the event.

Action: Philip McMurray to send out booking forms by email which would explain the timetable of the two days, and allow the stakeholders to indicate which parts of the conference they intend to watch at Greenmount.

6. AOB and Date of next meeting

JS talked about a consultation document on Environmental and Social Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services 2010-2013, which concentrated on sustainability and improving services. JS explained that the final guidance will be laid before the assembly in the autumn. JS stated that the document was also available on DRD website at http://www.drdni.gov.uk/draft_principal_social_environmental_guidance_-_march_2009.pdf

UI advised of a Conference that was being held in Dublin over 2 days, which would include WFD content. Emma Neill (EN) agreed to circulate information regarding the conference to all of the Forum members.

Action: EN to circulate information about Dublin Conference

It was proposed that the next meeting take place on Tuesday 9th June 2009 at 2pm.