

## Minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting

### Northern Ireland Water Framework Directive Stakeholder Forum

Malone House

30 June 2005

Attendance: Forum Members

Wesley Aston	UFU
Sean Convery	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
Andrew Frazer	Harperstown Power
Sinead Furey	General Consumer Council NI
Joanne Gaffney	Aquaculture Initiative
Alistair Gardiner	Port of Larne
James Robinson	RSPB
Stephen Peover	DOE
Judena Goldring	DOE (EPG)
Peter Barbour	DRD
David Small	DARD
Marcus McAuley	DCAL
Angus McRobert	EHS

Secretariat: Claire Vincent DOE (EPG)

Apologies:

Samuel Irwin	AES Kilroot
Gordon Best	Quarry Products Association
Geoff McCormick	Arena Network
Michael Bell	NI Food and Drink Association
Karen McCambley	NILGA
Stephen Bill	NI Tourist Board

Presentations:

Tim Irwin	DOE (EPG)
Greg McConnell	OFMDFM
David Small	DARD
Mike Thompson	DRD

Stephen Peover (SP) opened the first meeting with introductions. He outlined the structures that have been established within government to implement the Water Framework Directive (WFD); primarily an Interdepartmental Board supported by an Implementation Working Group. He also explained that this group now forms one of many WFD stakeholder groups within the UK and Ireland. The stakeholder group would have an important role to play in deciding how to take WFD forward in Northern Ireland. SP then outlined that the purpose of today's meeting is to set the context for WFD implementation examining synergies and interactions with other government policies.

**Presentation 1.** Tim Irwin – EPG (for copy of presentation see).

**The NI Sustainable Development Strategy**

The 20 year vision for Sustainable Development was outlined and how this might be delivered in Northern Ireland. A sixth guiding principle to underpin the NI Strategy could be 'opportunity and innovation'. Possible linkages with WFD were outlined. SP emphasised that SD requires a change in thinking for all individuals, but that small changes to lifestyle can make a huge difference.

**Questions/Comments:** Wesley Aston (WA) of UFU stated that the farming community are prepared to move to sustainable production systems and to use new innovations. However, he stated that there is little lead from government and that it is difficult for farmers as individuals to lead with innovative technologies. SP accepted this and the need to work with the farming community.

James Robinson (JR) of Freshwater Task Force would like to see the WFD targets directly linked into the SD targets. This was accepted as a good idea to be considered.

**Action: EPG** – Tim Irwin, Claire Vincent

Joanne Gaffney (JG) of Aquaculture Initiative stated that economics will be an important consideration in objective setting.

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**Presentation 2.** Greg McConnell – OFMDFM (for copy of presentation see).

**The Review of Public Administration**

The background to the review of public administration recommended post the Belfast Agreement 1999 was outlined. The underpinning objective is a high quality of service teamed with strong local government (fewer stronger councils) with strong civic leadership. One potential role of the new councils is community planning. The RPA process is examining the potential for co-terminosity (common boundaries) where possible.

**Questions/comments:** Judena Goldring (JGo) queried whether the management of water resources is being considered as part of the review. GMcC replied that this is an area where councils might like an enhanced role. As the new councils will have a planning function, they will have to consider water management issues as part of that.

JR queried if there was the capacity / expertise within councils to make the RPA a success?

Marcus McAuley (MMcA) asked is there was an opportunity to contribute to the council boundaries discussion to see if there could be synergies with the river basin planning process?

**Action EPG:** CV to contact Debbie Donnelly, OFMDFM to examine potential for co-terminosity with river basin areas.

Sean Convery (SC) emphasised the importance of enhancing the civic leadership role. GMcC accepted this comment and pointed out how historical practices like rotating the chairmanship on Councils do not lead to strong leadership.

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**Presentation 3.** Mike Thompson – DRD (for copy of presentation see).

**The Regional Development Strategy**

Mike Thompson presented the background to the Regional Development Strategy, which was published in 2001 with cross party support from the Assembly. It presents a 25 year strategic plan which has legal status. All Departments must 'have regard to' the plan. DRD see a need to link spatial strategies with the ROI. The RDS is to be reviewed next spring and there is an opportunity to examine linkages between the RDS and river basin management planning.

**Action EPG:** CV to provide information to DRD on where river basin management planning should be considered within the RDS.

Questions / Comments: David Small (DS) Does the RDS apply to public bodies as well as government departments?

Action MT: To examine legislation and provide response.

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**Presentation 4.** David Small – DARD (for copy of presentation see).

**Sustainability and Agriculture**

David Small (DS) outlined the changes in agriculture that have been driven by CAP reform. The biggest change and challenge will be the full implementation of the Nitrates Directive. The Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme uses European and modulated monies to fund agri-environment programmes designed to assist farmers in moving to more environmentally friendly practices. There is a good uptake of these schemes and this is an area that could be investigated as part of WFD implementation.

**Questions / Comments:** TI – agriculture is an area where there are opportunities for innovation e.g. local manufacture of concrete slurry tanks. DS – also aerobic digestion of slurries, combined heat and power plants etc. SC reiterated that these innovations can be difficult for farmers as individuals

and there is a strong need for education and also an appreciation of economics. It is also important that there is equity in how all potential polluters are treated and there is a perception that the farming community is being hit hard through the Nitrates Directive, while other polluters like Water Service are not being tackled.

SP assured all that the improvements are being required across all sectors. Peter Barbour (PB) explained how Water Reform is driving higher regulatory standards for Water Service as Crown immunity will be removed as part of the reform process. The water reform process is also strengthening public debate and increasing awareness of the real cost of water and sewerage services. SC informed the meeting of the catchment sensitive farming trials that are underway in Scotland and how NI could learn from these. JR mentioned the eutrophication strategy and asked how this might be amended to take account of wider diffuse pollution problems. JG was very supportive of this suggestion.

**Action EPG / EHS** to consider how draft eutrophication strategy could be broadened into a strategy to tackle all diffuse pollution problems.

WA requested more information on the upgrading of Water Service waste water treatment works and any changes to the arrangements for emptying septic tanks with the launch of GoCo. PB explained that the current proposals under Water Reform will not include the current annual free emptying of septic tanks of the current regime. There may be issues for water pollution. Currently 17% of the population of NI is connected to a septic tank. This compares to 4% of the UK as a whole and demonstrates the dispersed settlement pattern around NI and the difficulties that this raises with sustainable provision of services.

SP said that there is a real tension between development and environmental issues. However, he emphasised that £300M is being spent on sewerage and sewage treatment works over a five year period and that the capital investment programme is closely aligned with the need to meet environmental directives. In addition, the externalisation of Water Service and the possible externalisation of EHS would lead to improved transparency in these processes. MMcA and PB both remarked on the sustainability of proliferation of new dwellings in the countryside and the recognition of the real costs of dispersed settlement.

**Action:** DRD to do a presentation to the next meeting of the Forum on the water reform process including arrangements for the upgrade of WWTWs.

#### **Wrap-up session.**

JGo gave a short presentation on the potential next steps for the stakeholder forum, emphasising that these were suggestions and that the Stakeholder Forum should be active in driving the agenda of the group. JGo also explained that DOE is happy to facilitate and chair the group, but that the members should consider electing their own chairman. DOE will facilitate this by circulating the e-mail addresses of all Forum members.

**Action:** CV to circulate e-mail addresses / contact details of Forum members.

WA is keen to set targets so that outcomes can be measured. Claire Vincent (CV) explained that the drafting of the work plan, will in effect, enable us to explain how the appropriate environmental objectives will be set. JG again brought up the issue of cost and CV explained that the economics is an important part of the objective setting process, as derogations may be set in water bodies where good status would involve disproportionate expense.

The date of the next meeting will be October 2005 and the suggested presentations are:

- Water Reform Process presentation – focussing on the upgrading of sewerage infrastructure
- Environmental objectives and standard setting
- Scottish stakeholder work
- Progress on the WFD work plan
- Communication strategy
- Significant water management issues

**Action:** All – any other suggestions for presentations / agenda items for the next meeting to be forwarded to the Secretariat (Claire Vincent, Gayle Phillips).

The meeting was closed at 13:00.

Claire Vincent  
30 June 2005