

Note of Meeting

2 November 2010

Venue: Exploris Aquarium, Portaferry

Attendees:

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| 1. | Caroline Nolan | Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership |
| 2. | Aideen Kelly | NIEA – Strangford & Lecale Catchment Management Officer |
| 3. | Claire Vincent | NIEA – Head of Marine Assessment and Licensing Team |
| 4. | Helen Nutt | NIEA – Belfast & Lagan Catchment Management Officer |
| 5. | George Butler | Northern Ireland Water |
| 6. | James Brown | Ulster Farmer's Union & local farmer |
| 7. | Paul Byers | Northern Ireland Water – Wastewater Services Manager |
| 8. | Billy Watson | Dibney River Conservation Trust |
| 9. | Stephen Kennedy | Dibney River Conservation Trust |
| 10. | Kevin McGlynn | NIEA – Water Quality Inspector |
| 11. | Ian Kittle | Inler Angling Club |
| 12. | Ian Kittle (Jnr) | Inler Angling Club |
| 13. | Judith Bankhead | Rivers Agency |
| 14. | Tony Morgan | NIEA – Water Quality Inspector |
| 15. | Kevin McGrady | NIEA – Regional Operations |
| 16. | Brendan Kerr | Natural Living Assets |
| 17. | John Peacocke | Lecale Conservation Society |
| 18. | Jim Haughey | Ulster Angling Federation |
| 19. | Chris Murphy | Lecale Conservation Society |
| 20. | Keith Bradford | Friends of the Earth |

Apologies:

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| 1. | Justin Forsythe | Northern Ireland Pike Society |
| 2. | C McIlwaine | DOE – Planning Service |
| 3. | Michael Lipsett | Down District Council |
| 4. | David Thompson | National Trust |

1. Welcome, outline of agenda and introductions

- 1.1 Claire Vincent (CV) opened the meeting. Round room introductions.

2. Minutes & Update on Matters Arising from last meeting

- 2.1 There was one amendment made to the minutes circulated from the Spring 2010 meeting. The minutes were then agreed and will be published on the

NIEA website.

ACTION: Publish Spring 2010 minutes on website. Aideen Kelly (AK)

2.2 Actions from Spring 2010 meeting:

2.2.1 There was no uptake on the offer to tour Downpatrick STW. This invitation remains open.

2.2.2 There was no uptake on the offer given by NIEA Marine Monitoring Team to host a talk during their monitoring schedule around Gibbs Island. This invitation remains open.

2.2.3 The Autumn 2009 minutes and presentations were published on the Strangford and Lecale Catchment Stakeholder Group (GSC) website.

2.2.4 CV raised unregulated shellfish fishing with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Fisheries. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) have also raised this at the National Stakeholders Forum as an area which needs future regulation. CV emphasised the importance of taking part in the consultation process of the Marine Bill. Caroline Nolan (CN) stated that there were scientific advisors on the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership (SLALP) and with the new management structure in place issues like these would remain high on the agenda. She felt that the Quercus report, which can be accessed via the following link http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/shellfish_harvesting.pdf didn't quantify how damaging this activity has become to the environment and that the report did not put forward any definitive recommendations. John Peacocke (JP) agreed with this and asked if the report detailed the importance of the whelk in the ecosystem. CN said that SLALP have received reports that the activity has changed and is no longer locals 'picking for the pot', however without scientific evidence it is difficult to progress. Jim Haughey (JH) asked if DARD had responsibility for this type of activity. At present there is no responsible body in Northern Ireland (NI) because there are no regulations in place, any regulations, when drafted would define the responsible body. Keith Bradford (KB) said he would like to see a precautionary principle taken.

ACTION: CV to continue to liaise with DARD regarding unregulated shellfish harvesting and provide update at the next meeting.

2.2.5 CV raised the issue of defence of coastal agricultural ground within the Coastal Forum. The approach to coastal defence is not strategic because there isn't a responsible body within NI.

3. What's happening in Strangford?

3.1 Caroline Nolan from Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership gave an overview of the work it has done in the past and looked forward to the new management structure which will be in place in November.

3.2 KB raised concerns about kite surfers disturbing birds and the decline of the

wigeon on the shore of the Lough. CN stated that SLALP had worked with the kite surfers and had come to an agreement that this activity would stop from October to January. It was noted that the RSPB and WWT had observed a change in flight path of the wigeon which meant they weren't coming as far west anymore. Chris Murphy (CM) reported that Down District Council (DDC) had adopted By-laws drafted by Lecale Conservation Society and was concerned that there was no representation from Lecale Conservation Society on SLALP and wanted to know what difference the new management structure would make. CN clarified that the Environment Minister appoints the committee and that the East Down Rural Community Network were represented which would provide a route for the local people of East Down to raise their concerns. The new management structure of SLALP will formally bring together councils and other bodies to work together to implement the management plan for Strangford Lough. KB observed that no-one from DDC was present. CN said this was not from lack of interest because the DDC biodiversity officer has been involved with SLALP in resolving local issues. KB felt that the council was more interested in creating jobs and development than preserving the environment. CN said that the new structure of the SLALP will mean that there is a shared strategy and will aim to look at all issues objectively.

4. Operational Actions

4.1 Kevin McGlynn (NIEA) gave an update on Pollution Response within the Strangford and Lecale catchment.

JP asked for an update on the Fofanny case. It was pointed out that Fofanny is not within the Strangford & Lecale catchment. Further information was required from NI Water which has been received, the file is expected to go the Public Prosecution Service before the end of November. JH pointed out that the word 'prosecution' had been removed from the consultation paper on Guidelines on enforcement action.

ACTION: AK to update group with status of the Enforcement guidelines.

JH asked why warning letters were issued in so many cases. CV stated that NIEA responded proportionately to each confirmed incident and that warning letters are effective enforcement tools. Brendan Kerr suggested a 'carrot and stick' approach should be used. CV explained that 'Better Regulation' is a national policy to make everyone environmentally responsible. JB said that NI is leading the way on nitrates because total territory designation was sought which enabled farms to apply for derogation. Derogated farms have a more efficient use of nutrients because a nutrient budget is calculated which prevents the over application of nutrients to land.

JP highlighted the role local partnerships played in protecting the water environment. He cited the Dibney River Conservation Trust as an excellent example of local initiative.

KB asked why NI Water did not use tertiary treatment methods such as UV tubes and why pollution incidents still occur. George Butler (GB) explained that UV tubes consumed a lot of power which made them expensive to run.

All works >15,000pe are compliant. However, there are a lot of intermittent discharges and combined storm overflows. The root cause of pollution incidents is due to people putting inappropriate material down the toilet which also puts considerable strain on the sewage infrastructure. This poor practice continues despite NI Water's ongoing 'Bag it and Bin it' campaign which travels around schools.

5. Progress of Strangford Local Management Area Plan

5.1 AK thanked everyone for their input at the Spring CSG meeting and gave a presentation on the Strangford Local Management Area Action Plan. The plan is expected to be published on the NIEA website by the end of November.

NIEA has launched a new series of awards for groups who recognise the importance of our water environment and want to motivate others to care for this important resource. There are nine awards and each recipient will receive £1000 to help implement their project. Further information can be found at http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/events/digital_discoveries/water_environment_community_awards.htm

ACTION: Any group that is considering becoming a river trust under the umbrella of the Association of River Trusts can contact AK for an application pack.

5.2 **ACTION:** If anyone wishes to have input into the location of Water Pollution Signage contact AK with details.

6. AOB

6.1 Judith Bankhead updated the group on the work carried out by Rivers Agency and the National Trust at Kilnatierney which has seen the return of a rare snail, *Hydrobia acuta* also known as the Spire or Mud Snail in the lagoon.

6.2 KB stated that the Lecale Conservation Society had commissioned a student to study the Quoile. Doris Noe has been in contact with NIEA to organise a presentation of the project findings to the Quoile Working Group.

6.3 In 2011 the Quoile Local Management Area (LMA) Plan will be formulated. It was agreed that the workshop format worked well at the Spring 2010 CSG meeting and that it should be repeated for the Quoile LMA.

6.4 The group asked that an update be given on the Quoile hydro-electric proposals.

ACTION: CV to update group on Quoile hydroelectric proposals at the next CSG meeting.

Summary of actions from the meeting:

Ref	Action	Update
2.1	AK to Publish Spring 2010 minutes on website.	The minutes were published to the NIEA website on 3 December 2010
2.2.4	CV to continue to liaise with DARD regarding unregulated shellfish harvesting and provide update at the next meeting.	CV is continuing to liaise with DARD and has reported the Group's concerns that shellfish harvesting is on the increase. CV has also been in contact with NIEA, Natural Heritage regarding the harvesting within an ASSI.
4.1	AK to update group with status of the Enforcement guidelines.	The Enforcement policy has been published and can be accessed via the following link: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/niea_enforcement_policy.pdf
5.1	Any group that is considering becoming a river trust under the umbrella of the Association of River Trusts can contact AK for an application pack.	No response received, however any group can contact AK at any time.
5.2	If anyone wishes to have input into the location of Water Pollution Signage contact AK with details.	Response received from 1 stakeholder group
6.4	CV to update group on Quoile hydroelectric proposals at the next CSG meeting.	WMU are currently developing guidelines for hydroelectric proposals. CV will update at the Autumn CSG meeting.

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