

Strangford and Lecale Catchment Stakeholder Group

Minutes

23 April 2008



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Strangford and Lecale Catchment Stakeholder Group (CSG)

7pm Wednesday 23rd April 2008
Down County Museum, Downpatrick

Attendees:

Claire Vincent	Head of Marine Assessment and Licensing Team, EHS (Chair)
Helen Nutt	North Eastern Catchment Officer, EHS (Minute-taker)
Angus McRobert	River Basin Planning Management Team, EHS
Kevin McGlynn	Area 5 Water Quality Inspector, EHS
Wesley Rowley	Area 5 Regional Manager, EHS
Tony Morgan	Area 5 Water Quality Inspector, EHS
Heather Armstrong	CES Quarry Products
Irwin Armstrong	CES Quarry Products
Judith Bankhead	Conservation Officer, Rivers Agency, DARD
Keith Bradfield	Friends of the Earth
James Brown	Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
Joanne Gaffney	Cross Border Aquaculture Initiative (CBAIT)
Dymphna Gallagher	NI Water
Larry Gibb	Lough Cowey
Rebecca Henderson	Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
Martin Johnston	Environmental Crime, EHS
James Kennedy	Sandycove Holiday Homes
John Kennedy	Sandycove Holiday Homes
Brendan Kerr	Natural Living Assets
Ken Legge	Lough Cowey
Peter Lynch	DCAL Fisheries
Michael Mann	Lecale Conservation Society
Mark McCaughan	DARD Fisheries
Ann McCullough	Planning Service, DOE
James McKervey	Environmental Crime, EHS
Jim McNamara	Rivers Agency, DARD
John Peacocke	Lecale Conservation Society
Eddie Rea	Down District Council
Nick Rogers	North Down Borough Council
Paul Sibley	Ards and Down Salmonid Enhancement Association (ADSEA)
David Thompson	National Trust
Mert Thompson	Blackhead Angling Club
Billy Watson	Dibney River Conservation Trust
John Watson	Forest Service, DARD
Ian Watts	Shimna Angling Club

1. Welcome and introductions

Claire Vincent opened the meeting and welcomed all.

Those in attendance invited to introduce themselves to group. Round room introductions.

Claire Vincent, Head of Marine Assessment and Licensing Team, Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) presentation; "Strangford and Lecale Catchment Stakeholder Group – Welcome and Introductions"

Floor opened for questions/comments.

2. The role and functioning of the group and EHS

2.1 Eddie Rea asked whether the group had any statutory powers and how problems raised at the meetings would be resolved.

Claire Vincent said that although the Catchment Stakeholder Group (CSG) itself had no statutory powers that there were Government Department and Agencies represented on the group to whom people could raise issues. She said that as per the terms of reference of the group, those in attendance were expected to raise issues discussed with the organisations they represent and channel advice back to the group. She asked that where incidents of pollution were seen that people should contact the EHS Pollution Hotline (0800 807060) so that the event could be investigated. EHS hope to increase the public's awareness of the Hotline so that more water pollution problems can be reported, investigated and resolved. Under the NI Water Order EHS can prosecute polluters of our waters.

2.2 Dymphna Gallagher said that the group can be used as a forum for different organisations and stakeholders to work together so that a solution to problems can be found. Claire Vincent added that the group had an advisory role where knowledge should be shared to come to a resolution.

3. Newcastle WWTW and Bathing Water

3.1 Eddie Rea said that at a recent Down District Council meeting proposals to upgrade the beach at Newcastle had been discussed. He said that problems with the Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTWs) in the area had prevented the beach from being able to meet Blue Flag status and asked how this group would be able to help. Claire Vincent said that there was already pressure from within EHS to improve the Newcastle WWTW but that perhaps NI Water could be asked to give an update through their representative on the group.

ACTION: Dymphna Gallagher to request an update from NIW colleagues on the Newcastle WWTWs issues and forward to Eddie Rea.

4. Significant Water Management Issues Update

4.1 *Angus McRobert, River Basin Planning Management Team, EHS presentation; "Water Matters "Your say" – SWMI Reports and Next Steps"*
Floor opened for questions/comments.

4.2 Keith Bradfield asked how comments that were raised by respondents to the SWMI consultation that were well meant, but misconceptions, had been dealt with. Angus McRobert said that people are quick to point fingers to attribute blame and responsibility for problems where in fact there may be many agencies that cover management of the issue. In responding to comments raised there has been a lot going on to straighten out roles and responsibilities. A certain amount of interpreting of peoples comments has to be carried out because although they may not be completely accurate they are people's conceptions and represent what is a priority to them. He said that some respondents did appear to want monopolies on the water environment e.g. "only for recreation" and that these sentiments had tried to be reflected in the digest.

5. Integrated Coastal Zone Management & River Basin Management Plans

5.1 Nick Rogers asked if the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) would take on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). Claire Vincent said that the Planning and Environmental Policy Group (PEPG) of the Department of Environment (DOE) lead ICZM and that at a Permanent Secretary level the work was trying to be integrated and linkages made. Claire Vincent said that she works closely with Andrew Cooper who is the chair of the Coastal Forum to ensure the issues raised by the Forum are addressed by EHS.

6. Downpatrick WWTW

- 6.1 Keith Bradfield said that the overloading of the WWTW in Downpatrick had been raised more than 3 years ago during the EHS and Planning Service "hotspots" debate and was still a problem. Claire Vincent said that the "hotspots" debate had centred on new development in areas where the infrastructure was already under pressure. The Minister at the time, Dermot Nesbitt, had concluded that it would be OK to allow developments so long as the WWTWs would be upgraded within a certain time scale. Dymphna Gallagher said that WWTW could only be built where resources were available and that the problem of "hotspots" had not gone away. She said that as it stood the sewage infrastructure could not take any more pressure from new developments. She said that EHS and NIW were working well together to prevent planning going ahead in areas where there were problems.

7. Independent Environmental Protection Agency

- 7.1 Keith Bradfield asked what effect an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would have on Planning Service and this scenario. Angus McRobert said that the EHS do not have an issue with openness and that the Freedom of Information Act ensures that the public have access to information held by the organisation. The same statutory functions will still have to be delivered so delivery will not change with the creation of an EPA.
- 7.2 Keith Bradfield said that going back a number of years that EHS had the reputation of being "gamekeeper and poacher". Kevin McGlynn said that that comment was no longer accurate and came from the time when Water Service and EHS were both part of the DOE and that since then Water Service has been part of DRD and as of 1 April 2007 is now a Government owned company (NIW). Claire Vincent added that NIW are now subject to prosecution like any other industry so EHS are no longer in the "gamekeeper and poacher" situation. EHS have successfully prosecuted NIW for breaches of the NI Water Order since the 1 April 2007 when Crown immunity was lost. A member of the group said that development is happening quicker in Northern Ireland than in England and Scotland and that a resolution of Planning Service issues may be more open with an independent EPA. James Brown said that with the openness of meetings like this that there would not be any advantage in having an independent EPA.

8. Local Issues

8.1 *Kevin McGlynn, Area 5 Water Quality Inspector, EHS presentation; "Area 5 – Water Quality Team"*

Floor opened for questions/comments.

- 8.2 John Peacocke said that at Crossgar there is a Kingfisher which flies up and down the river. He said that grey water is entering the river continuously at a bridge in the area where fish are rising and that nothing has been done to stop this happening. Kevin McGlynn said that he was aware of the problem and that the grey water is likely to be entering the water course due to misconnections of private waste water pipes from a washing machine or a kitchen sink. The problem with the discharging of grey water is tracing it back to source and it is an expensive and resource intensive process. Claire Vincent said that dye tracing has been carried out in areas where there are known problems with misconnections. Helen Nutt said that EHS have set up a working group to look into the feasibility of tackling areas where grey water, "sullage", from misconnected pipes is causing problems and that priority areas where there are known problems are being identified by regional staff. In England there have been awareness raising campaigns targeted at problem areas and this is something that is being considered by the group.

9. The Role of the Catchment Officer and the Way Forward for the Group

9.1 *Helen Nutt, North Eastern Catchment Officer, EHS presentation;*

“The role of the Catchment Officer and the way forward for the group”

Floor opened for questions/comments.

ACTION: All relevant parties to return PAIRS forms to Helen Nutt.

http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/water/wfd/public_partic/pairs.htm

10. Pollution Issues

10.1 James Kennedy said that he was amazed that there were only 26 high or medium severity incidents reported in the area in the last year. Kevin McGlynn said that 90% of the pollution incidents reported had been classified as low severity. Claire Vincent said that perhaps this was an example of public apathy and that people were not reporting long-running problems or that they were unaware of the EHS Pollution Hotline. EHS are trying to raise awareness of the Hotline (0800 807060) and would like to encourage people to report incidents when they come across them.

10.2 Mike Mann asked if there should be guidance given to the public on how to look after their septic tanks, e.g. not to use thick bleach, and asked whether septic tanks really work. Kevin McGlynn said that a septic tank removes the lumps and that the soak-away really does the work of dispersing the effluent. Mike Mann said that the onus should be on the manufacturers to educate the public on how to use to tank. Kevin McGlynn said that those with a tank must get it de-slugged annually and make sure that it is operating correctly. Mike Mann said that in his experience education of school aged children was the best method of making sure that messages got across to the public.

10.3 Tony Morgan said that reed-beds were a good alternative to treating waste effluent. James Brown said that reed-beds really worked as a swale where nutrients could be used up. He said that he was concerned that rural septic tanks and agriculture were often clumped together under the rural diffuse pollution heading and asked that the distinction between these two issues be made more clear. Keith Bradfield asked if the old brick septic tanks were more effective than the new plastic ones. The group agreed that the old tanks were probably more porous and acted as a soak-away from the walls outward. John Peacocke said that the issue of septic tanks should be raised with a local radio station for discussion. Nick Rogers said that there were a number of positive initiatives e.g. Nitrobar in place aimed at removing nitrates from ground water.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to research the availability of guidance information on septic tank best practice and investigate the production of septic tank care leaflets.

10.4 Keith Bradfield said that there were problems locally in Downpatrick close to the Asda supermarket complex on the Plank Drain. He said that Planning Service had said that the complex should be allowed to go ahead due to public “need” and that the development had been built up to the greenbelt. He said that effluent, sludge and foam from an illegal carwash near the complex was discharging into the marshes. He said that Downpatrick planners have apparently served an enforcement notice on the owner but that the discharge is still continuing as the operation had not ceased. Kevin McGlynn said that he was aware of the problem but as it is currently under investigation that he could not comment on the case. A member of the group said that there had also been incidents of septic tank drainings being emptied to the marshes. Kevin McGlynn said that when he had investigated the incident that the discharge was not going to the waterway. Keith Bradfield said that EHS should be opposing development on marshes and that despite Planning Service already having a case on the carwash that the operation had not been closed and the polluter was still making money from damaging the environment. A representative from EHS’s Environmental Crime Team said that an injunction cannot be passed until all agency powers have been exhausted and that to some extent EHS’s hands are tied.

ACTION: Kevin McGlynn to follow up Plank Drain issues with Keith Bradfield.

10.5 Brendan Kerr said that he thought that EHS were doing its best to work within its resources. He said that Northern Ireland is not unique in that it has statutory agencies but that Northern Irish rivers, habitats and socio-economics are unique. The public sector in Northern Ireland is huge and there is greater scope for better partnering and better links. He asked where these extra resources could be found. Angus McRobert said that advice could be sought from within EHS and that the Association of River Trusts provides models as to how such partnerships and restoration projects can be formed, giving models of examples. He said that anglers are a major source of funding and that a number of projects have been set up to restore rivers from funding they have acquired. Nick Rogers said that as a keen angler he was personally keen to get involved in cleaning up rivers. He asked if the group could be organised to carry this out themselves. Jim McNamara said that Rivers Agency had a remit to prevent flooding and that unless obstructions dumped in rivers were likely to cause flooding to a private property that any waste/obstruction removal within a water course was the responsibility of the local Council. A member of the group said that river clean ups have a number of health and safety complications which needed to be carefully considered before beginning work and that getting appropriate insurance for these can be a problem. Claire Vincent said that there are a number of organised coastal clean-ups that happen within the area of the Strangford and Lecale CSG.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to circulate web-link to the Association of River Trusts.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to circulate web-links to coastal clean-up information.

10.6 Claire Vincent asked whether someone from the Dibney River Conservation Trust would be willing to give a presentation on the work that they were planning to carry out in the Killyleagh area. Billy Watson agreed that a presentation could be given at a future meeting. Claire Vincent suggested that the next meeting be held in the Killyleagh area to facilitate the Trust members.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to discuss potential for presentation at the autumn meeting with the Dibney River Trust secretary.

10.7 James Kennedy asked how many blue flag beaches were within the North Eastern River Basin District. He said that Northern Ireland was struggling with achieving Blue Flag status at many of our beaches and that they are needed as they are significant tourism and therefore economic draws. Claire Vincent said that there are 9 Blue Flag beaches within Northern Ireland and that as many beaches again meet the water quality status needed but that the Councils are not meeting the facilities requirements that are needed for the status to be applied. Tidy NI will announce the number of beaches that have achieved Blue Flag status in June this year.

10.8 Nick Rogers said that there was a project where all discharges around the coast have been mapped and that this was helping to identify polluters. Claire Vincent said that within EHS that we did have maps showing all discharge points and the NIW had maps of their sewer networks which also showed all discharges. John Peacocke said that what was needed were a series of riparian walkers who would walk the banks of all rivers and collate information on the problems occurring.

11. Future Meetings

11.1 Helen Nutt asked whether the group wished to have a presentation from the Ballinderry RIPPLE project and how they had formed the Trust and sought funding. The group agreed that this would be useful.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to investigate RIPPLE /funding presentation to be given at future CSG meeting.

11.2 Dymphna Gallagher agreed that she would ask NIW colleagues to give a presentation on proposed and priority works within the area. Joanne Gaffney asked that design and actual Population Equivalents (PE) be included within this.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to discuss potential for presentation at the autumn meeting with Dymphna Gallagher and Dave McCrum (NIW).

11.3 Helen Nutt asked whether the group wished to have a presentation from EHS on the draft waterbody status classifications and draft River Basin Management Plans. She suggested that this might help the group to identify which priorities within the catchment they would like to focus on in future. The group agreed that it would be useful to be kept up to date with EHS's work through the meetings.

ACTION: Helen Nutt to arrange for a presentation to be given at the autumn meeting on classifications and the draft RBMPs.

11.4 Helen Nutt asked that anyone who had not had a chance to raise an issue of importance to them at the meeting contacted her. She said that the next meeting would be held in six months time. Kircubbin and Killyleagh were suggested as potential venues for the autumn meeting. It was agreed that meeting should be spread out around the catchment so that all areas could be covered and travelling times made as fair as possible.

12. Close

Claire Vincent thanked all for attending and said she had found it a useful meeting and that she hoped for continued progress.

Summary of actions from the meeting:

Ref	Action	Update
3.1	Dymphna Gallagher to request an update from NIW colleagues on the Newcastle WWTWs issues and forward to Eddie Rea.	
9.1	All relevant parties to return PAIRS forms http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/water/wfd/public_partic/pairs.htm to Helen Nutt (Helen.Nutt@doeni.gov.uk).	Ongoing: A number of forms have been returned.
10.3	Helen Nutt to research the availability of guidance information on septic tank best practice and investigate the production of septic tank care leaflets.	Update to be given at next meeting. Guidance can be found on http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/ppg04.pdf and on the NI Water website www.niwater.com
10.4	Kevin McGlynn to follow up Plank Drain issues with Keith Bradfield.	
10.5	Helen Nutt to circulate web-link to the Association of River Trusts.	Actioned: www.associationofrivertrusts.org.uk
10.5	Helen Nutt to circulate web-links to coastal clean-up information.	Actioned: http://www.strangfordlough.org/ gives dates of for the Strangford Lough annual Spring Clean (this year it was held on 26.04.08) http://www.mcsuk.org/mcsaction/pollution/adopt-a-beach gives information on the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch and Adopt-a-beach initiatives.
10.6	Helen Nutt to discuss potential for presentation at the autumn meeting with the Dibney River Trust secretary.	
11.1	Helen Nutt to investigate RIPPLE /funding presentation to be given at future CSG meeting.	
11.2	Helen Nutt to discuss potential for presentation at the autumn meeting with Dymphna Gallagher and Dave McCrum (NIW).	
11.3	Helen Nutt to arrange for a presentation to be given at the autumn meeting on classifications and the draft RBMPs.	Actioned: Helen Nutt has raised with RBMP Team.