

## **Minutes of Meeting**

### **Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group**

27<sup>th</sup> April 2022 at 11.00am

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#### **1. Introduction**

The Chair welcomed attendees and introduced Robert Mooney and Jim Casey, OPW, to the Group. The Chair also acknowledged the retirements of John Curtin, Director of Flood Risk Management and Commissioner John Sydenham.

#### **2. Opening Comments from Minister**

The Minister also welcomed attendees back to in-person meetings and congratulated Jim Casey and Robert Mooney on their recent appointments. The Minister stated the importance of the messaging around the Group's purpose in relation to communities along the River Shannon. The Minister suggested that an in-person meeting of CEOs take place at the end of June.

#### **3. Minutes of Last Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 were approved by the Group.

#### **4. Update on Flood Risk Management Plans for the Shannon Region**

The OPW gave a presentation on progress with the delivery of the flood relief schemes for the Shannon River Basin District (RBD) which are being funded under the Government's €1.3 billion investment in flood relief measures over the lifetime of the National Development Plan (NDP) to 2030.

Work by the OPW is complete or underway to protect 80% of properties under this significant investment programme.

#### *Summary position:*

- 13 flood relief schemes have been completed in the Shannon RBD. Collectively, these schemes are protecting 2,600 properties.
- 24 schemes are currently being progressed, which includes 2 schemes at construction. When completed, these will protect over 570 properties.
- A further 12 schemes will be underway during the lifetime of the NDP.

*Schemes under construction:*

- **Springfield, Co. Clare:** Construction commenced in Q3 2021 and is likely to be complete in 2023.
- **Athlone, Co. Westmeath:** Construction is ongoing with an expected completion date in 2023.

Good progress has been made and Steering Groups comprising the OPW and the Local Authorities have been established to oversee the implementation of projects.

## **5. Correspondence and Matters arising**

The Secretary updated the Group on correspondence received since the last meeting. A small number of Parliamentary Questions relating to water levels and the removal of constrictions or 'pinch points' in the Callows region were received. Responses were coordinated with input from the relevant agencies.

## **6. Review of Winter 2021/22**

The OPW presented statistical information on cumulative rainfall at Mount Dillion during winter 2021/22 and historical river flows at Banagher. Conditions were reasonably dry particularly in the early part of 2022 which resulted in low flow conditions.

## **7. Sub-committee on the Work Programme and Measures**

The OPW gave an update on progress on the work of the Sub-committee on the Work Programme and Measures.

7.1.1 The annual Work Programme sets out the extensive range of activities planned by members of the Group that may contribute to managing flood risk along the River Shannon. The Work Programme for 2022 was circulated to the Group in advance of the meeting and the Group agreed to its publication, subject to any final additions. A discussion took place on broadening the input to the Work Programme. The County and City Management Association suggested that a presentation to the Strategic Policy Committees may be useful.

7.1.2 The ESB obtained a Section 21 licence under the Wildlife Acts from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to continue with the temporary operation of the protocol for reducing the lake levels on Lough Allen. Reduced levels were achieved for a brief period in late January 2022. The ESB proposed a bilateral meeting between ESB, OPW and Waterways Ireland to review the protocol in the context of lessons learned from its operation. The ESB is preparing a Section 21 license application for next winter and it is continuing with the ecological monitoring and surveying agreed with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Inland Fisheries Ireland confirmed that the issue of spawning Pollan will form part of the licence application.

7.1.3 The OPW gave a presentation on the Study of the Lower Shannon. A hydro-geomorphological study of the area which examined the cause, rate and degree of restriction over time identified that the Mulkear is the primary source of sediment supply to the lower Shannon. A consultant has now been appointed to progress Stage I of the project which aims to develop a series of measures, preliminary costings and designs for the area. The Minister commented on the importance of communications around the proposed solutions for this area.

7.1.4 Waterways Ireland gave an update on the project for Strategic Maintenance Programme for the River Shannon. Waterways Ireland is working through a preliminary listing of sites to develop a programme of maintenance activities. Tender documents for a consultant to undertake work in relation to the necessary environmental assessments are currently being prepared.

Waterways Ireland, on behalf of the Group, commenced maintenance activities at a small number of locations along the Shannon early in 2022. These works will be completed during the next environmental season which begins in September.

7.1.5 Waterways Ireland gave an update on the project for the removal of constrictions or 'pinch points' through the Callows region. There are 5 stages involved with this project. Stage 1 will define the project and this will inform subsequent stages. The estimated timeline to progress through Stages 1-3 is 2 – 3 years, following which construction can commence. The OPW is currently finalising a brief for a consultant to work on Stage 1.

7.2 As there are no longer any implications due to Covid-19, it was agreed that this item can be removed from the agenda.

## **8. Communications**

The OPW gave an update on the work of Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.

- The sub-committee has reviewed a proposal for the development of a Communications Strategy and discussed the approach to communications generally. The sub-committee has agreed that professional advice should be sought to review the proposal having regard to the work of the Group and to outline how best to approach communications generally. The Chair of the sub-committee undertook to avail of the services of a company currently engaged by the OPW.
- The sub-committee has identified content for a television series on the River Shannon. It is anticipated that this will involve 4-6 programmes covering a

range of aspects relating to the Shannon. Filming is expected to commence during the summer months with the series being aired in 2023.

- The sub-committee has also agreed to the development of a website for the Group. Funding has been approved for this project.

A discussion took place on the importance of managing expectations and communicating what is/not achievable in terms of flooding along the River Shannon.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) commented on the opportunities for agriculture arising from climate action and the reduction of emissions which will support the vulnerability of lands to flooding. DAFM also referred to the Mulkear Innovation Project which will reduce nutrient load into the water and provide bank protection and a reduction of silt. The Chair asked DAFM to give a presentation on these topics at the next meeting of the Group.

### **9. Minister's Closing Comments**

Minister O'Donovan thanked the Group for a positive meeting and suggested that the Group consider inviting other organisations to the meeting from time to time to obtain other perspectives on the River Shannon. There should also be a focus on the capabilities of the Group and communicating what is realistic/achievable in terms of protecting lands from flooding.

### **10.AOB**

- Clare Co Co mentioned that the maps for the Ennis South scheme will be revised in the coming weeks. A quick turnaround by OPW will help to ensure that the maps are available for consideration in the County Development Plan.
- The EPA thanked the Group for its input to the National Hydrometric Monitoring Programme 2022-2027 which has now been published.
- The EPA has published a draft Review of Heavily Modified Waterbodies under the Water Framework Directive for public consultation.

### Members in attendance

Department/Agency	Representative
Office of Public Works	Maurice Buckley (Chairman)
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage / NPWS	Niall Ó Donnchú
County and City Management Association	Lar Power, Leitrim Co. Co.
Bord na Móna	Ger Breen
Environmental Protection Agency	Laura Burke
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Bill Callanan

### Others in attendance

Minister of State	Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister of State for the Office of Public Works
Minister's Advisor	Michael O'Connor
Office of Public Works	Robert Mooney, Jim Casey, Ciaran Conroy, Jackie Stewart, Melessa Lunney, Fiach O'Keeffe, Fiona Smyth, Garret Nolan.
City and County Managers Association	Carmel Kirby, Clare Co. Co.
Waterways Ireland	Éanna Rowe
ESB	Martin Stronge
Irish Water	Tom Leahy
Inland Fisheries Ireland	David McInerney

### Apologies

John McDonagh, Waterways Ireland.

Pat Dowling, Clare County Council.

Paddy Hayes, ESB.

Colin Ryan, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.