

Minutes of Meeting

Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group

Venue: Athlone, Westmeath

20th October 2022 at 10.30am

1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed attendees including Mark O'Doherty from Gibney Communications who attended the meeting in respect of some work undertaken for the Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th April, 2022 were approved by the Group.

3. 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.

Summary position:

- 13 flood relief schemes have been completed in the Shannon RBD. Collectively, these schemes are protecting 2,600 properties at a cost of €79m.
- 24 schemes are currently being progressed, which includes 2 schemes at construction in Athlone and in Springfield. When completed, these schemes will protect over 570 properties at a cost of €18m.
- A further 12 schemes are due to be underway during the lifetime of the NDP.
- All new schemes are being built to take account of the impact of climate change to ensure that they are adaptable to continue to provide protection into the future.

4. Correspondence

The Secretary updated the Group on correspondence received since the last meeting.

A range of Parliamentary Questions were received on the following topics:

- Project for the removal of constrictions or 'pinch points' through the Callows region between Athlone and Meelick Weir.
- Water levels on the River Shannon.
- River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020.

5. DHLGH Presentation: Lower River Shannon Roadmap (Fish Passage)

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) gave a presentation on the Lower River Shannon Roadmap (Fish Passage) which identifies actions to improve fish migration and other natural processes in the Lower Shannon catchment at the hydro-electric scheme located at Parteen Basin.

Ministerial approval has been given for the Lower River Shannon Roadmap which is a key project in the National Hydromorphology Programme.

6. DAFM Presentation: Opportunities for Agriculture Arising from Climate Action

Mulkear Innovation project

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) gave presentation on the Agriculture Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) which aims to deliver significant long-term environmental improvement through participation by a significant number of farmers, on the most appropriate land, with each delivering environmental protection and enhancement on their farm. Funding in the order of €1.5bn for this scheme will facilitate the participation of 50,000 participants in ACRES overall.

7. Sub-committee on Work Programme and Measures

7.1.1 Work Programme 2023

The Group's 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 Chair of the Sub-committee on the Work Programme and Measures informed the Group that work is about to commence on the Work Programme for 2023.

7.1.2 Lough Allen Protocol

The ESB has made an application to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for a Section 21 licence to enable to protocol for lowering the lake level on Lough Allen to continue. The NPWS has requested further information and this is currently being addressed.

7.1.3 Study of Lower Channel

The OPW gave an update on work in respect of the Lower Shannon. An earlier study showed that flows are not sufficient to manage silt in the area. A consultant has been appointed to identify options to manage sediment in the area, taking into account the impact from the Mulkear catchment.

The Minister highlighted the scale of the population in the area and the Group discussed the subject of communications on the project.

7.1.4 Programme of Strategic Maintenance

Waterways Ireland confirmed that maintenance work (tree cutting) commenced at three sites earlier in 2022 with some work yet to be completed between the New Cut and Meelick. Survey work for an additional 40 sites has been completed. These are now being vetted to confirm interventions for the purpose of improving navigation. The design and environmental work will be undertaken by the OPW with Waterways Ireland carrying out the work.

7.1.5 Project for Callows Region

The OPW confirmed that a specification for the appointment of a consultant to the project for the removal of 'pinch points' or constrictions through the Callows region is currently being drafted and should be finalised by the end of the year. The Minister requested that DAFM provide an update on initiatives for farming communities at the next meeting of the Group.

8. Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

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

- The OPW has received professional advice on communications for the Group from Gibney Communications.
- The Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement has agreed to the development of a new website for the Group. The website will build on the FAQ document on the work of the Group.

- The OPW referred to earlier discussions on the possibility of changing the name of the Group.
- A draft proposal for a television series on the River Shannon is currently being finalised. The final version will be circulated to the Group for information.

The Group discussed the general communication needs of the Group and possible proposals for a communications strategy.

9. Presentation on Athlone flood relief scheme

The OPW gave a presentation on the status of the Athlone flood relief scheme. The presentation covered the history of flooding in Athlone, an overview of the scheme, and the challenges encountered during construction.

The scheme is being constructed through the direct managed works model which involves the OPW and contractors. The OPW worked closely with Westmeath County Council in respect of the public realm opportunities. The scheme is currently 81% complete and will protect some 545 properties when fully complete. The Minister acknowledged the protection provided by the scheme and he thanked the OPW and Westmeath County Council for their work.

10. Summary discussion with Minister O'Donovan

11. AOB

- **Update on River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020**

The OPW gave an update on the River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020

- **Review of Heavily Modified Waterbodies**

The EPA gave an update on the review of Ireland's Heavily Modified Water Body Designations for the Third Cycle River Basin Management Plan. A draft report summarising the outcomes of the review has been prepared for a Ministerial decision. A presentation will be given at the next meeting of the Group.

- The ESB gave an update on the management of an issue that arose in respect of Turbine no. 4 and its management of water during 2022.

Members in attendance

Department/Agency	Representative
Office of Public Works	Maurice Buckley (Chairman)
Waterways Ireland	John McDonagh
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Francis O Donnell

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	Brian Brogan, Bryan Sheehan, Robert Mooney, Jim Casey, Ciaran Conroy, Jackie Stewart, Garret Nolan, Vincent Hussey, Vincent Rhatigan.
City and County Managers Association	Sean Lenihan, Clare Co. Co. Barry Kehoe, Westmeath Co Co. Nuala Gallagher, Limerick Co Co
ESB	Martin Stronge
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Lisa Egan
Environmental Protection Agency	Mary Gurrie
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	John Muldowney
Irish Water	Michael Goss
Gibney Communications	Mark O'Doherty

Apologies

Bill Callanan, Department of Agriculture

Niall Ó Donnchú, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage / NPWS

Paul Hogan, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Laura Burke, Environmental Protection Agency

Pat Dowling, Clare County Council.

Lar Power, Leitrim Co. Co.

Ger Breen, Bord na Móna