

Minutes of Meeting

Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group

Venue: OPW Offices, 1 George's Quay, Dublin 2.

26th April 2023 at 11.30am

1. Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 20th October, 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th October, 2022 were approved by the Group subject to a small amendment at the request of the ESB.

3. 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.
- Progress on the River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020.

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. This investment will provide protection for approximately 23,000 properties in threatened communities from river and coastal flood risk.

Summary Position

There are 13 completed flood relief schemes in the Shannon RBD and these are providing protection to over 2,600 properties.

24 schemes are currently being progressed:

- 2 schemes, Athlone and Springfield, which are currently at construction. The scheme in Springfield is expected to reach substantial completion later in 2023 and Athlone is expected to reach substantial completion in 2024.
- A further 13 schemes for which engineering consultants have been appointed.
- 9 other small schemes, 8 of which will be progressed directly by the relevant Local Authorities, with full funding from the OPW, and one scheme, Rahan which is being progressed by the OPW Design Section.

A further 12 schemes are planned for Tranche II which will commence during the lifetime of the NDP.

Other Developments

- The OPW has recently engaged with local authority representatives in Dublin, Cork and Carrick on Shannon to discuss scheme delivery, challenges and opportunities, maintenance and planning for future schemes.
- A small new team has been set up in the OPW to address operational matters including the development of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for the operation and maintenance of completed flood relief schemes. A pilot SLA for the scheme in Mallow is being progressed in collaboration with Cork Co. Co.

5. Review of Winter 2022/23

The OPW gave a short presentation which included an overview of rainfall during the winter past.

Clare County Council informed the Group about the significant flooding of lands in the Springfield area in January. Temporary pumps were in operation at the time and no homes or roads were flooded.

6. Update from Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

DAFM gave a presentation on the following schemes/initiatives available to the farming community.

- **Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)** which is €1.5 billion flagship agri-environment scheme to help address biodiversity decline while delivering an income support for farm families in Ireland. 46,000 applicants were approved in Tranche 1 which will be followed by a second tranche in late summer.
- **European Innovation Partnership (EIP)** which provides funding for collaborative projects that develop new practices that are environmentally friendly and economically sustainable. DAFM will shortly be opening a public consultation to gather new themes for potential EIPs during the CAP Strategic Plan programming period from 2023 to 2027.
- **TAMS 3 - Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme** which provides funding for capital investment on farms such as for farm buildings and facilities, farm machinery and equipment. A budget of €370m has been allocated for this scheme which will be in place for five years.

The Minister led a discussion on the impact of flooding on farmlands along the River Shannon and the need for specific investment in agricultural schemes to support those affected by flooding.

DAFM shared the Minister's view for a vibrant agriculture community and noted the need to balance environmental considerations with food production. DAFM further noted the support provided through the last CAP whereby areas affected by flooding continue to be eligible for payments if they are flooded temporarily.

The Minister emphasised the need for a scheme for Farmyard Relocation for those farms worst affected by flooding.

7. Environmental issues in relation to the work of the group

The Chair opened discussions on this new agenda item by stating that the Group will be consulted to identify how best to engage with different stakeholders such as the farming community and environmental groups.

The Minister informed the Group about his trip Belgium and Germany which experienced exceptional flooding in 2021, resulting in the loss of life. The visit highlighted the importance of prioritising the protection of life, properties and livelihoods, and the significance of preparedness.

The EPA commented that it is supportive of the work produced by the CFRAM study and acknowledged that the protection of life is the highest priority in managing flood risk.

The OPW stated that learnings from the visit highlighted the importance of all pillars of the flood policy framework and the need for extensive investment in preparedness. A report to Government on progress on the work of the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Working Group is currently being drafted and this will be critical to identifying work underway and any changes needed taking into account the potential for more extreme flooding arising from climate change.

Further discussions took place on challenges around Special Areas of Conservation, emergency planning (local and national level) and statutory obligations.

The OPW asked the members of the Group to revert with feedback and ideas on this agenda item.

8. Sub-committee on Work Programme and Measures

8.1.1 Work Programme 2023

The Group's annual Work Programmes set out the extensive range of activities planned by members of the Group that may contribute to managing flood risk along the River Shannon.

The Group agreed the draft Work Programme for 2023 which was circulated in advance of the meeting. The approved Work Programme will be published on www.gov.ie after the meeting.

8.1.2 Lough Allen Protocol

The ESB advised that it received a Section 21 licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to enable to protocol for lowering the lake level on Lough Allen to continue during the winter. The protocol was operated for a short period of time with no downstream issues emerging.

8.1.3 Study of Lower Channel

The OPW gave an update on work underway to identify options to manage sediment in the Lower Shannon, taking into account the impact from the Mulkear catchment. This work is on-going and is due to be completed this year.

8.1.4 Programme of Strategic Maintenance

Waterways Ireland advised that site investigations and surveys are now complete in respect of areas identified for maintenance activities. The next step involves the completion of environmental studies.

8.1.5 Project for Callows region

Waterways Ireland advised that the tender for environmental surveys in respect of the project for the Callows region is currently being prepared.

9. Sub-Committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

The OPW gave a presentation which outlined the approach to communications as part of the work of the Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.

The main points of the presentation included:

- Initial focus on prioritised initiatives.
- Stakeholder mapping and target audience identification.
- Television series on the River Shannon.
- Progressing the rollout of a dedicated website for the Group.
- Development of a communications strategy.

The OPW has engaged professional expertise to assist with the development of a communications strategy for the Group.

10. Summary discussion with Minister O'Donovan

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and noted the opportunities for co-ordination within the Group.

The Minister acknowledged the work of the Group and emphasised the value of communications.

11. AOB

- The ESB gave an update on the management of an issue in respect of Turbine no. 4 at Ardnacrusha which will be back in operation from 2nd June.
- The OPW gave an update on the River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020.

12. Next Meeting

The Chair advised that the next meeting will take place in October, 2023.

Attendees

Department/Agency	Main Representative
Office of Public Works	<p>Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister of State.</p> <p>Maurice Buckley, Chairman.</p> <p>Jackie Stewart, Secretary to the Group.</p> <p>Jim Casey, Head of Flood Risk Management Services.</p> <p>Robert Mooney, Assistant Secretary.</p> <p>Vincent Hussey, Chair, Sub-committee on Work Programme and Measures.</p> <p>Ciaran Conroy, Chair Sub-committee on Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.</p>
County and City Management Association	Lar Power , Chief Executive, Leitrim County Council.
Clare County Council	Sean Lenihan , Director of Services.
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Francis O Donnell , Chief Executive.
Environmental Protection Agency	Matthew Craig , Senior Scientific Officer
ESB	Martin Stronge , Hydro Manager.
Waterways Ireland	Eanna Rowe , Operations Controller.
Bord Na Móna	Enda McDonagh , Environmental Manager.
Uisce Éireann	<p>Mairead Conlan, Regional Water Resources Strategy Lead.</p> <p>Michael Goss, Wastewater Networks Asset Planning Lead</p>
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Bill Callanan , Assistant Secretary.

Others in attendance

Minister's Adviser	Michael O'Connor.
Office of Public Works	Ann Devlin, Bryan Sheehan, , Eavan O'Brien, Karen Higgins, Lorna Dempsey, Miriam Mulligan, Melessa Lunney, Stephen Manning.
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Michael O'Donoghue.
Gibney Communications	Mark O'Doherty.

Apologies

Waterways Ireland	John McDonagh, Chief Executive.
Environmental Protection Agency	Laura Burke, Director General.
County and City Management Association	Pat Dowling, Chief Executive, Clare County Council.
ESB	Paddy Hayes, Chief Executive.
Uisce Éireann	Eamonn Gallen, Chief Operations Officer.
Bord na Móna	Ger Breen, Head of Land and Habitats.