



Report On Project Action A5

Initial Public Engagement

December 2022



Version Control

Date	Version No	Status	Change	Author name	Reviewer name
09/12/2022	D01	Draft		Anne Goggin	Alan Walsh
11/01/2023	F01	Final	Layout and typos	Anne Goggin	

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of Action A5: *initial community engagement regarding concrete actions*, as outlined in the project proposal, was to guide the final selection of demonstration catchments and raise awareness of the project amongst local communities, thereby maximising their participation and assuring the success of the trial measures demonstration.

Due to the timeline and other constraints related to the selection of the demonstration catchments, the selection process was completed before the community engagement took place (for details please see [Demonstration Catchment Selection Report](#)). However, the overall aim of Action A5 in terms of encouraging community participation and support for the project remained unchanged.

Planning and Preparation

The engagement process was planned and organised in close cooperation with staff of the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), in particular, the Communications and Engagement Lead and the Community Water Officers (CWOs) with responsibility for each county with a demonstration catchment. It was decided at an early stage that the engagement would take the form of a public meeting in each of the five demonstration catchments. It was also decided that the meetings should take place after the desk studies for each area had been completed but before the detailed field investigations began. This allowed for a conceptual model of the catchment to be presented to the local community and stakeholders at each meeting but avoided a situation where staff would have a significant presence in the catchments before the community was informed about the project purpose and goals.

A schedule for the meetings was prepared and the relevant CWO undertook to identify and book a suitable meeting venue in each of the five active demonstration catchments. Table 1 below shows the meeting schedule and venue. An actions tracker was set up for each meeting to ensure critical tasks were identified, responsibilities assigned, and completion of tasks recorded.

Table 1: Schedule of public meetings in Demonstration Catchments

Demonstration catchment	Date and Time of meeting	Meeting Venue
Avonmore, Wicklow	7:30pm, 12 th September 2022	Annamoe Community Centre
Island, Galway/Roscommon	7:30pm, 28 th September 2022	Ballymoe Community Centre
Graney, Clare	7:30pm, 3 rd October 2022	Flagmount Community Centre
Shournagh	7:30pm, 10 th October 2022	Blarney Woollen Mills Hotel
Awbeg	7:30pm, 12 th October 2022	Kilbrin Community centre

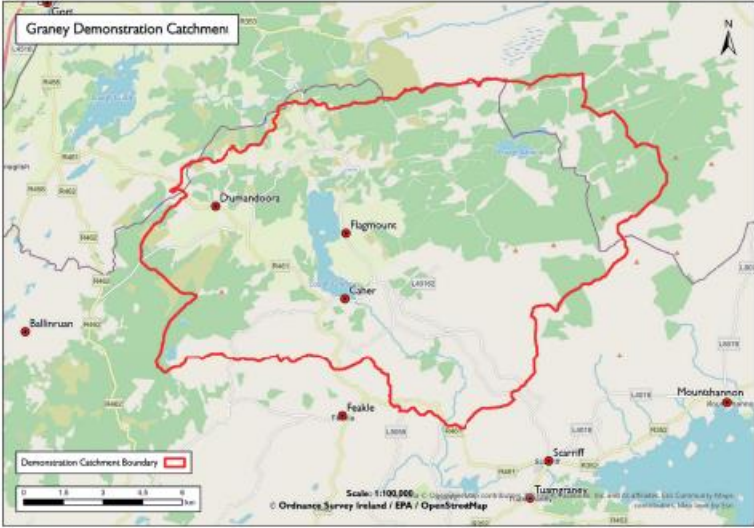
Advertising and Promotion of meetings

The CWOs identified known stakeholders and community interests in each catchment and issued email invitations to all of these on behalf of the project. They also put up posters about the meetings at key locations throughout the catchments. LAWPRO's Communications and Engagement Lead arranged for advertisements to be placed in relevant local press and on radio. An example of a newspaper advertisement is given in Figure 1 and a summary of the media channels used to publicise the meetings is given in Appendix 1. Details of the meetings were also promoted on both the Waters of LIFE and LAWPRO's websites and social media accounts. The relevant local development companies also assisted in publicising the meetings.

An information leaflet was produced which was available at the public meetings. A copy of the information leaflet is contained in Appendix 2

Waters of LIFE

Working to protect and restore pristine water quality in the Graney in County Clare.



The Graney in County Clare is one of six demonstration catchments in Ireland selected for a European Union funded project. The project, called **Waters of LIFE**, is a Integrated Project under the EU LIFE funding mechanism. It aims to develop, test, and validate measures that will help address the deterioration in water quality in our most pristine and sensitive river catchments, like the Graney in County Clare.

Find out more at a public meeting about the Graney demonstration catchment.

Date: 5th October **Time:** 7:30pm
Venue: Lough Graney Community Hall
(near Flagmount National School) Co. Clare

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED, ALL ARE WELCOME!

If you would like more information on the project and the Graney demonstration catchment visit www.watersoflife.ie or email info@watersoflife.ie



 Co-funded by the European Union  An Rann Tithiúcháin, Rannas Áite agus Oidhreachtas, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Figure 1: The Advertisement the Graney Public Meeting which was Carried in the Clare Champion Newspaper.

Format of Public Meetings

Each meeting was opened by the respective CWO to provide context for the project in the local area. This was followed by two presentations from project staff. However, on one occasion no project staff could attend the meeting because of testing positive for Covid 19. In this case, the presentations were given by LAWPRO staff instead. The first presentation gave an outline of The Water Framework Directive, The River Basin Management Plan, the EU LIFE Programme and the Waters of LIFE project, while the second presentation gave an overview of the desk study findings and the conceptual model

of the catchment. This was followed by a discussion and a question & answer session. A member of LAWPRO staff acted as note taker at each meeting.

Sign-in sheets were provided at each meeting, which most attendees completed and provided contact details in accordance with GDPR requirements. Most attendees also ticked the option on the form to receive updates on project progress.

A summary of the meeting attendance is given in table 2 below and a list of the organisations represented at each of the meetings (as recorded in the sign in sheets) is contained in Appendix 3.

Demonstration Catchment	LAWPRO Reps	Project Reps	No of attendees	No requesting updates
Avonmore	Donal O’Keeffe, Community Water Officer (CWO) Steve Davis, Catchment Scientist (CS)	Anne Goggin, Project Manager (PM) Cormac McConigley, Project Ecologist (PE)	44	34
Islands	Bernie White, Blue Dot Programme Manager (BDPM) Tom Carolan, CWO Conor Ruane, CWO	Comrac McConigley, PE Paul Duffy, GIS, Data Manager (GDM)	38	28
Graney	Ruáirí O Conchuir CWO Bernie White (BDPM) DJ Lane CS	Anne Goggin, PM Cormac McConigley, PE	48	35
Shournagh	Catherine Seale CWO Mairead Shore, CS	Paul Duffy, GDM All other team members had tested positive for Covid 19 and could not attend	29	28
Awbeg (kilbrin)	Alan Walsh, Comms Manager Catherine Seale, CWO Tracey Duffy CS	No project team members available due to positive Covid-19 tests.	10	7

With the exception of the Awbeg (Kilbrin), the meetings were very well attended. The low attendance at the Awbeg (Kilbrin) meeting may reflect the very rural nature of this catchment with no significant centre of population.

In all cases, the project was very well received and there was excellent discussion after the presentations. It was an opportunity for the project team to garner local knowledge on the catchments as well as answering questions from attendees. A summary of the questions and issues raised at each meeting is contained in Appendix 4.



There were a number of recurring themes in the issues raised by those in attendance, these in general related to the detail of the Results Based Payments Scheme, whether the project would have enforcement powers, how sectors other than agriculture would be dealt with,

Photographs from each of the meetings are provided in Figures 2 to 6

Figure 2: Donal O'Keeffe, Community Water Officer, LAWPRO opening the Avonmore Public Meeting



Figure 3: Project Ecologist, Cormac McConigley Presenting at the Islands Public Meeting



Figure 4: Project Manager, Anne Goggin, Presenting to the Graney Public Meeting



Figure 5: LAWPRO Community Waters Officer, Catherine Seale, Presenting to the Shournagh Public Meeting.



Figure 6: LAWPRO Community Waters Officer, Catherine Seale, Presenting at the Awbeg (Kilbrin) Public Meeting.

Media Interest

The public meetings generated considerable media interest in the project, both before and after. Examples of press coverage are given in Appendix 5. As a result of this coverage, the project came to the attention of the national press and a two page article on the project was carried in the Farming Independent on 6th Dec 2022, thus further increasing awareness of the project. A copy of this coverage is also included in Appendix 5.

Conclusion

The initial public engagement exercise in the demonstration catchments successfully achieved its core objectives of raising awareness of the project amongst local communities and stakeholders. It also succeeded in creating a positive image for the project and engendering significant local interest and support.

The process provided valuable learnings and also highlighted some significant issues to be addressed by the project in the demonstration catchments. These include land drainage, flooding, legacy forestry issues, and the allocation of the project budget between catchments.

Appendix 1 : Media Channels used to Advertise Public Meetings

Catchment	Date	County	Press Advert & Press Release	Newspaper Circulation	Newspaper Readership	Radio	Weekly Listenership
Avonmore	12/09/2022	Wicklow	Wicklow People	10,050 (weekly)	33,726 (weekly)	East Caost Radio	260,040
Island	28/09/2022	Galway/ Roscommon	Galway Advertiser	22,000 (weekly)	60,558 (weekly)	Galway Bay FM	154,834
Island	28/09/2022	Galway/ Roscommon	Roscommon Herald	8,324 (weekly)	27,558 (weekly)	Ocean FM	149,625
Graney	05/10/2022	Clare	Clare champion	15,742 (weekly)	54,068 (weekly)	Clare FM	66,624
Shournagh	10/10/2022	Cork	Irish Examiner	35,519 (daily)	158,800 (daily)	Cork 96/103	260,040
Awbeg	12/10/2022	Cork	Irish Examiner	35,519 (daily)	158,800 (daily)	cork 96/103	260,040


Appendix 2 : Waters of LIFE IP Information Leaflet

Waters of LIFE

Waters of LIFE is a European Union funded Life Integrated Project to help reverse the ongoing deterioration in water quality in Ireland's most pristine rivers.

High status waterbodies provide important services to society: they support tourism and salmon and trout fishing, they provide sources of clean drinking water and a refuge for rare species and sensitive species.

This ongoing loss of high-status waters is a worrying trend for overall water quality in Ireland. The protection and restoration of these waters is a key principle underpinning the EU Water Framework Directive and will have benefits for us all.

 Co-funded by the European Union





Photo: Peter Mitchell

Waters of LIFE

protect restore respect sustain



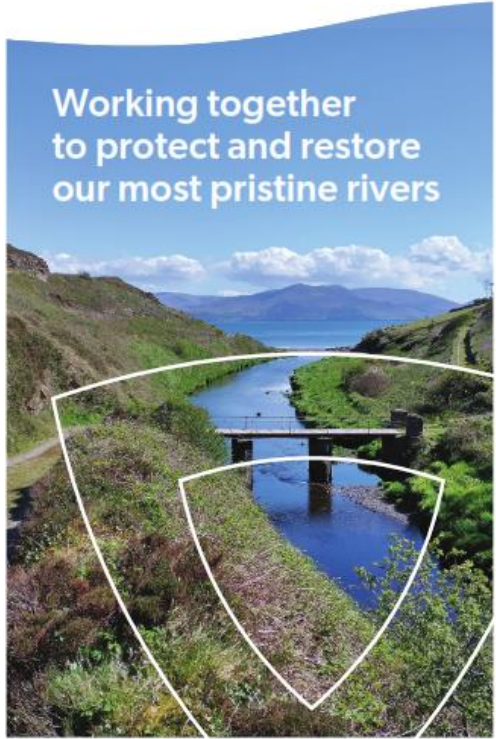
Waters of LIFE


Waters of LIFE Project Office
Croom Enterprise Park, Croom,
Co. Limerick, V35 WF77.


Email: info@watersoflife.ie
www.watersoflife.ie

Waters of LIFE

Working together to protect and restore our most pristine rivers



 An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialaithe Ábha agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

 Co-funded by the European Union

www.watersoflife.ie

Waters of LIFE

The Waters of LIFE project aims to develop, test, and validate measures to address the deterioration in water quality in most

pristine and sensitive river catchments and reverse the declining trend. Six demonstration catchments have been selected for the project, five test catchments and one control. These are:

1. The Avonmore, Co. Wicklow
2. The Awbeg (Kilbrin), Co. Cork
3. The Graney, Co. Clare
4. The Sheen, Co. Kerry (Control)
5. The Island, Galway/Roscommon
6. The Shournagh, Co. Cork

The locations of the demonstration catchments can be seen on the map below.

● Active
● Control



The project's primary aim is to protect and restore high status objective river waterbodies, which are also known as Blue Dot rivers. These waterbodies are frequently in remote and lightly populated areas. Measures implemented through this project can also deliver multiple benefits for climate action and biodiversity.

The project will include a 'Results Based Agri-environmental Payment Scheme' (RBAPS) for participating landowners. But the project will look at pressures from all sectors including forestry and wastewater.

Engaging and communicating with stakeholders and the public will be an important element of the project. The project plans to co-design measures in consultation with the implementing stakeholders such as farmers.

A project team has been established which will work in close cooperation with the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and the Blue Dots Catchments Programme (www.lawaters.ie) along with other River Basin Management Plan projects and implementation bodies.

The project is expected to run until March 2028.



Photo: Michael Sheridan



Photo: Breda Moriarty

An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialaithe Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Ria agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

epa
Environmental Protection Agency

COILLTE
Irish Forestry

Forest Service

Local Authority
Waters
Programme

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is the lead authority for the project and there are a number of different project partners, including: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc, The Environmental Protection Agency, Coillte, The Forest Service, the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and several local development companies.

The total project budget is €20,206,605 and the project is programmed to run until March 2028. The project was officially launched by Malcolm Noonan, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage on 29th April 2022 at an event in Kilmallock, County Limerick.

Further information can be found on the project website at www.watersoflife.ie or email: info@watersoflife.ie

Appendix 3: Organisations and Groups Represented at Public Meetings
(in addition to farmers, other landowners and individuals)

Avonmore	Awbeg	Graney	Island	Shournagh
Annamoe Trout Fishery Church Coillte County Wicklow Partnership Dunlaoighre Rathdown Co Co East Wicklow Rivers Trust Glendaloughlaragh Tidy town Government Deputy Group Irish Farmers Association Luggala NPWS Quinn Design Associates Rathdrum Anglers Rivers Trust Roundwood Biodiversity Seal Rescue Ireland Teagasc Trinity College Dublin University College Dublin Wicklow Sheepowners Wicklow Uplands Council Wicklow CoCo	Cork County Council ICMSA IRD Dunhallow Kilbrin Community Teagasc	Inland Fisheries Ireland Irish Farmers Association LGNS LGNS Loughpatrick Catchment Mgt Assoc NPWS The Woodland League	ASSAP Badge Galway CoCo Galway Rural Development Glinsk Creggs Group Water Scheme GRA Inland Fisheries Ireland LAWPRO N East Galway Bay Suck Valley Way Teagasc WD Compress	National Parks and Wildlife Service Dairygold Teagasc WaterboeRenewal Group WaterboeRenewal Group

Appendix 4: Summary of Questions/Issues Raised from Public Meetings

	AVO	AWB	GRA	ISL	SHO
Recurring Themes					
Drainage					
General as a problem in the Catchment, Queries regarding who is responsible for cleaning the river	X			X	X
Flooding, Water Levels Rising and Falling Quicker than they used to	X				X
Will the project carry out dredging the catchment				X	X
Will the Project object to Dredging of the Rivers in the Catchment or the creation of New Drains by landowners / foresters	X			X	
Forestry					
General Questions about impacts of Forestry	X		X		
High Status Objective Waterbodies					
Why are only certain waterbodies HSO waterbodies, and not others in the catchment			X		X
Septic tanks					
Septic tanks - Many within the catchment. Will they be addressed / helped by the project?				X	X
RBAPS					
General Queries about how it will operate, has it been used before	X			X	X
Will Project be reporting Issues to DAFM to penalise farmers			X	X	X
Monitoring					
General Queries about Monitoring Locations, Frequency, Landowner Permissions etc.	X		X	X	
Project Plan					
Why was this catchment selected?		X			X
How will budget be allocated between catchments	X		X		
How will project decide where to put measures		X			
Questions regarding further community engagement		X			
Project Data					
Will Data collected by the project be made available		X		X	X

	AVO	AWB	GRA	ISL	SHO
Angling / Fish					
General comments that fish numbers have declined				X	X
Does the project plan to improve fishing / habitats for fish?				X	X
Catchment-specific Questions					
Deer - as an Issue in the catchment	X				
Walkers - Do they have an effect on Rivers	X				
Burning - As a serious issue in the catchment	X				
Will the project know populations and measure sewage, housing, forestry area?	X				
What are the natural causes of poor water quality?	X				
Need for more interaction with farmers		X			
Does the project have enforcement powers			X		
How do we contact the project			X		
Question re. Coillte replanting on blanket peat					
Water quality - Issues caused by Urban Wastewater treatment plant				X	
Water quality - Will the project improve water quality to drinking water standards				X	
Will the project be tied in to ACRES or separate? Will farmers get paid for actions under ACRES and WOL?				X	
This catchment is a predominantly agricultural area. Water quality is a serious issue for farmers in the catchment.					
Where is the information from the WOL being fed into and what will the implications be for farmers? They have invested a lot in their farmers and want to see their investment protected. They want assurances that they will still be able to make a profitable living				X	
Recreation - Will project look at improving access to the river					X
How do we identify pressures from agriculture vs urban wastewater? Can the invertebrates tell us about the source of pollution?					X

Appendix 5: Media Coverage



Deputy Whitmore with Cormac McConigley, Project Team Lead, Anne Goggin and Dónal O'Keefe, all of Waters of Life Project (LAWPRO).

Deputy Whitmore welcomes work being carried out on Avonmore catchment

DEPUTY Jennifer Whitmore attended a Waters of Life event in the Annamoe Centre to discuss what environmental improvements can be made to the Avonmore catchment area over the coming years.

The public meeting was organised by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO).

The group collaborates with the relevant local authority, public body, and water stakeholder to find a solution where water issues are found.

The Avonmore is one of six demonstration catchments in Ireland selected for the European Union funded project.

Speaking after the event, Deputy Whitmore, Climate Spokesperson for the Social Democrats, said: "As a founding member of the East Wicklow Rivers Trust it was great to see so many people turn out on to this public meeting, on such an important issue such as the quality of our waters in Wicklow. The Avonmore catchment area is an incredibly

important one for the local community and also our local biodiversity. It's vital that it's protected, and I welcome the work being carried out as part of the Waters of Life project.

"The Blue Dot rivers in Avonmore have both fallen to good status and are considered to be at risk of not meeting their objective under the River Basin Management Plan. Waters of Life project is supporting works to improve the Blue Dot Catchments Programme to restore the area for the benefit of local biodiversity, tourism and local communities dependent on the water source.

"Through my work with the East Wicklow Rivers trust it's clear that more actions are needed to protect pristine waters. Many of these waters are small, upland streams.

"Attending this public meeting was a priority for me to offer support for these projects that will have a huge benefit on the area and it's important that locals are made aware of these initiatives," she said.

Article carried in the Bray People Newspaper after the Avonmore Public Meeting



Island River upstream of Ballymoe.

Pic. Francis Deery, LAWPRO.

Ballymoe meeting to discuss project for Island River

The Island River is one of six catchments in the country selected for a new European Union funded project. The project, called Waters of LIFE, aims to address the decline in water quality in the most pristine and sensitive river catchments, like the Island. This catchment drains land in counties Galway and Roscommon, which includes areas west of Williamstown, south of

Ballinlough, west of Ballymoe and north of the townlands Keelages (East & West).

A public information meeting about the project and what it means for the Island River will take place on Wednesday, September 28th at 7.30 p.m. in Ballymoe Community Centre, all are welcome to attend.

Pristine, or near pristine rivers, are called 'high-status objective

waterbodies' and assigned a Blue Dot to distinguish them as 'the best of the best' among Irish rivers.

Blue Dot rivers are mainly located in remote and lightly populated areas, with many in upland catchments.

Commenting on the aims of the project, Anne Goggin, Project Manager, said: "High-status waterbodies provide valuable ecosystem services to all

of us. They are sources of clean drinking water and habitat for rare and sensitive wildlife species, mainly because they are not as heavily impacted by pollution and other pressures that we find in lowland and urban catchments."

The project will include a 'Results Based Agri-environmental Payment Scheme' (RBAPS) for participating landowners and farmers.

Article in the Roscommon Herald prior to the Islands Public Meeting

Public meeting on €20m EU water project in Flagmount

Fiona McGarry

A COMMUNITY information meeting will take place in North East Clare to highlight the work of an important water quality initiative.

The event, which will focus on the catchment of Lough Graney, will be held at Lough Graney Community Hall in Flagmount at 7.30pm on Wednesday, October 5.

The Graney Catchment is one of six pilot catchments in Ireland which have been selected for inclusion in a new €20 million European Union funded project called 'Waters of LIFE'.

The initiative aims to address the decline in water quality in Ireland's most pristine and sensitive river catchments, like the Graney Catchment, which covers East Clare and part of South East Galway.

Pristine, or near pristine waterbodies (rivers and lakes), are called 'high-status objective waterbodies' and are assigned a 'Blue Dot' to distinguish them as 'the best of the best' among Irish waterbodies.

Blue Dot waterbodies are mainly located in remote and lightly populated areas, with many of them found in upland catchments. There has been a significant decline in the number

of high-status objective waterbodies in the Graney Catchment.

The Flagmount meeting will be the first public engagement for the Graney catchment. Representatives of the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and the Waters of LIFE Project Team will be in attendance.

The meeting will include an overview of the Waters of LIFE project and why the Graney Catchment has been selected as a demonstration catchment.

The meeting is for all those who are interested in the Graney Catchment, including local residents, community representatives, farmers, local land owners, forestry owners, local community groups, etc.

The Waters of LIFE project will run until March 2028, with a total budget of €20,206,605. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is the lead authority, with a number of collaborating project partners, including: The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Teagasc, Environmental Protection Agency, Coillte, Forest Service and others.

LAWPRO is one of many public bodies working for better water quality in our rivers, lakes, and coastal waters.

next six years," said Ruairi Ó Conchúir, Community Water Officer for Clare.

The project team will outline how they propose to work with stakeholders in all sectors, including agriculture, forestry and wastewater management, to identify the pressures on water quality.

Local measures will be implemented through consultation with local landowners and the relevant public bodies. The community information meeting will also include a questions and answer session and there will be an opportunity for informal discussions during tea and coffee after the meeting.

For further queries please contact Ruairi Ó Conchúir by phone to 085-808 3715 or email roconchuir@lawaters.ie. Alternatively, visit Lawaters.ie. More information on the Waters of LIFE projects is available on Watersoflife.ie.

'The community information meeting in Flagmount will give the local community in the Graney Catchment an opportunity to learn more about the Waters of LIFE project and find out about what is planned for the next six years.'

Article in the Clare Champion prior to the Graney Public Meeting

Incentivising farmers to protect our cleanest rivers

€20m project aims to reverse deterioration in water quality and includes voluntary pilot results-based scheme for farmers that will link payments to environmental improvements

Claire Mc Cormack

Reversing the deterioration of Ireland's most pristine waters that are under pressure from agriculture is "definitely doable" and may provide "a new market" for farmers.

That's the view of the head of a major national project on protecting high-status catchments.

Anne Goggin, manager of the €20m Waters of Life project, funded by the EU and Ireland, says "there is enough evidence" from similar EU Life Integrated Projects (including the Pearl Mussel Project) to suggest that "when the right solution is applied in the right location" these small, mainly upland streams "can be restored and enhanced".

It comes as pressure mounts on Member States to achieve a minimum of "good status" for all water bodies by 2027 and "no deterioration" on river bodies that have recently held a "high status" objective as required under the EU's

Water Framework Directive.

But with just 138 of Ireland's 319 high status waters achieving the top rank on a consistent basis, Ms Goggin, alongside experts at Department of Housing, Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Teagasc, EPA, Local Authorities Water Programme, and Coillte, is set to raise the bar at six demonstration catchments spread across the country.

Five of the catchments — the Avonmore, Co Wicklow; the Awbeg, Co Cork; the Graney, Co Clare; the Islands on the Galway-Roscommon border; and the Shournagh, Co Cork — have been identified as "at risk" of failing to meet the high-status objective set out for them under the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027.

The sixth catchment, the Sheen in Co Kerry, which has consistently achieved high status for many years, will act as a "control catchment" to better understand how high-status waters can be maintained over time.

After identifying the individual issues driving status decline in these catchments, a key follow-up for the long-term project, which will run until 2028, is to implement locally tailored "best practice" measures.

For farmers in the demonstration

catchments, this will mean the establishment of a voluntary pilot results-based payment scheme that will link payments to the environmental quality of their farm (both private and commonage), resulting in a higher payment level calculated via a whole-farm assessment.

Though still at a very early stage, with limited information on payment rates, some features expected to determine the environmental quality of a farm include farmyard management, nutrient balance, and condition/management of watercourses with the aim of "creating a new market for the environmental services landowners provide through their land management".

Speaking to the Farming Independent Ms Goggin said: "The overall objective of the Waters of Life Integrated Project is to support the implementation of measures to protect and enhance our high-status waters and to reverse the ongoing decline we've seen over a number of years."

"Although we still have probably the most high-status water bodies in the EU, our aim is to identify the causes of the deterioration by

characterising the catchments in three dimensions — geology, soil topography and land use — to see what is driving this drop in status.

"Then we will be designing measures to address that across all sectors that are seen to be impacting and by working with local farming communities to develop a results-based payment scheme."

While the project, which has been hampered by delays due to Covid-19, is still at the planning phase, fresh desk studies on the catchments have already thrown up some interesting findings.

Ms Goggin said: "The Avonmore is an upland catchment where there is forestry and worked-out peat areas, so the main pressures identified include bank erosion — deer may be an issue — and acidification in one of the streams."

"These pressures are bringing the status down and impacting on the biology — basically the communities of worms, molluscs, all kinds of creepy crawlies that inhabit the riverbed, with species of fly quite sensitive to pollution absent from the site."

"So the measures on the Avonmore will probably focus on forestry, with a secondary focus on agricultural practices on the commonages there, and there's some indications domestic wastewater might be a pressure in parts too."

Ms Goggin said the initial results from the Shournagh, a tributary of the River Lee in a dairy catchment near Tower, Co Cork, have also proved compelling.

"For the Shournagh to be free-draining and in a dairy region is quite unusual in terms of a high status objective water body," she said.

"The key issue is nutrients — very high levels of both phosphorus and nitrates. Again it's unusual to have phosphorus as an issue in a free-draining catchment, but it's because of the geology and soil types in the area."

Failing

"While the catchment is achieving its high status from a biological point of view, it's failing on the

nutrients, so that's what we'll be trying to work on there."

"It is a dairy area so it provides a great opportunity for farmers because quite often agri-environmental schemes aren't focused on dairy, they tend to be more attractive to less intensive farms such as beef and suckler herds."

"So it will be really interesting to work with the farmers in the area to meet their needs and attempt to meet the needs of the water courses in the area."

With regards to the Islands catchment, located in a primarily beef region along the Galway-Roscommon border, Ms Goggin said: "It is not achieving its high status now, it's at good status."

"It's more poorly drained, more peaty soils, so the nutrients tend to be pretty good, but sedimentation is a real issue emerging in that catchment. We think urban wastewater is a problem too, plus agricultural pressures higher up in the catchment."

Ms Goggin said the main pressures emerging at the Awbeg (Kilbrin) in Co Cork are livestock farming, tillage farming and several small wastewater treatment plants; while "legacy forestry" is one of the main problems for the Graney catchment on the Clare-Galway border.

Asked about the next steps of the project, Ms Goggin said they will be looking to work with the local farmers to develop the results-based payment scheme which they intend to roll out.

"We held introductory meetings in September and October. There was a lot of positivity towards the project and the farmers were very engaged, interested and receptive to what we are doing," she said.

"We had lots of questions and very little negativity. The important thing was that farmers realised this is purely voluntary, we have no role in enforcement or compliance checking... this is purely a voluntary programme to help us look at what can be done to protect and restore these water bodies."

"We want the project's farmers to feel they've had an input into the

scheme.

"Waters of Life is an integrated project that ultimately aims to influence policy, so we hope that, if our results based payment scheme proves successful in protecting and enhancing these high-status objective water bodies, the elements of it that work will inform the next agri-environmental measure under the CAP."

"Achieving consistent high status on our water bodies is definitely doable, we have evidence to support that view, so I'm very optimistic about the future of this project."



Collecting data: Paul O'Callaghan, blue dot scientist at the Waters of Life programme, testing the quality of the water in the Awbeg River

Article in Farming Independent, 6th December 2022

Did abolition of milk quotas contribute to decline in water quality, project could ask

Claire Mc Cormack

Ireland has more high-status-objective water bodies than most other countries in the European Union, according to Anne Goggin.

"We're pretty good, we have more high-status-objective water bodies than most member states, other than maybe Austria," says the Department of Housing official.

"But about half of our surface waters are in less than good status, which isn't great, but again we compare relatively favourably to other EU countries and that is encouraging.

Awareness

"There definitely is a growing awareness of the importance of these issues, even to protect our agricultural produce so that it is seen as a green product."

Asked if the available data suggests that the abolition of milk quotas in 2015 has had a negative impact on the status of the country's pristine waters in some catchments, Ms Goggin replies: "I suppose the water quality was improving up to about 2010, it plateaued and there has been some decline.

"So whether correlation is causation is a question I suppose we need to look at."



Getting results:

Anne and her colleagues Paul Duffy and Paul O'Callaghan

Following the success of the voluntary-based Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) and Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Ms Goggin believes incentivising farmers to protect high-status waters can work.

"Under ASSAP and LAWPRO all measures undertaken in priority areas for action — and there were a lot of measures — were done voluntarily by the farming community," she said.

"There was no payment, no incentive, other than the problem was explained to

them, the solutions laid out and they were asked to implement them.

"What was found was that the rate of improvement in water bodies within those areas of action was greater than outside, so that's really promising and a real example of best practice.

"So I think the fact that we will be able to compensate farmers and incentivise farmers through a results-based payment scheme under the Waters of Life Integrated Project will strengthen our hand in building on the achievements of LAWPRO and ASSAP."

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