

Welcome to our first Waters Of LIFE newsletter of 2024.

We'll look forward to keeping you up-to-date in new and exciting ways this year.

This newsletter will offer a brief recap of some of our work over the past 12 months.

First up we'll hear from Project Manager Anne Goggin and Senior Scientist Tom Drinan, chatting about where the project is at and where it's headed.

As always, you'll be able to find much more information through our website www.watersoflife.ie.

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Fresh Focus On Water Quality



The launch of the €60 million “Farming for Water” European Innovation Partnership (EIP) has sharpened the focus on water quality in Ireland.

That’s already proving helpful for the Waters of LIFE IP with its focus on High Status Objective Water Bodies, says project manager **Anne Goggin**.

“It’s another move towards paying landowners for ecosystem services other than food production. That to me is very exciting,” she says. “The big thing for us this year is the development of our agri-environmental scheme.”

The Limerick native has been building capacity for Waters of LIFE since she took the helm in 2021. There’s now a core team of data, communications and administration specialists supporting agricultural and catchment scientists in the protection and improvement of high-status waters.

“We’ve been working with key decision makers and experts to look at previous schemes and adapt them specifically for water quality,” Anne continues.

“So what we’re looking at now is a hybrid scheme that can be locally adapted. Every catchment has its own pressures that need to be addressed.”

Tom Drinan joined the project as senior scientist in August 2023.

“The co-design element is really important,” says Tom. “It has to be workable for landowners and that won’t work without their input. That’s the basis for delivering on improved and protected water quality.”

“We want the project to be win-win.”

“The measures we’re looking at aren’t hard engineering bespoke measures. It’s very much evidence based and nature based solutions. Working with nature and co-designing with landowners means longevity and workable farms.”

“The effectiveness of measures like planted riparian buffers can actually improve over time, where we’re planting vegetation along river banks. We want the project to be win-win.”

The project’s agri-environment scheme will be informed by a Framework of Measures and Best Practice Guidance for High Status Objective River Water Bodies, first published in August 2023.

“What was new about this document,” says Anne Goggin, “was how it ranked the measures by effectiveness against particular issues and scenarios.”

“For example, it might give you a measure for phosphorous or sediment in a poorly draining area or nitrate in a free draining area. Those measures are then ranked as low, medium, high or not effective in each scenario.”

“It’s about filling the gaps rather than reinventing the wheel.”

Farming for Water is measures-based and co-funded through the Rural Development Component of the Common Agricultural Policy. Waters of LIFE has a results-based element and is funded through EU LIFE, the EU’s funding mechanism for environment and climate action.

So, how can these types of schemes work together?

“We’re very mindful of the types of measures included in Farming for Water as well as the likes of ACRES. For us it’s about filling the gaps rather than reinventing the wheel.”

“Under Farming for Water, a farmer might be paid to put in a pond or a woodland. We can add to that by paying out for the quality and effectiveness of that environmental feature in how it serves water quality.”

The tributaries are coming together for the Waters of LIFE project. Catchment assessments and co-designed development of payment schemes all builds toward communities protecting their catchments with the right measures in the right place.

The project’s agri-environment scheme is due for roll out in the spring of 2025.



Waters of LIFE is an EU LIFE Integrated Project co-funded by the European Union.

EPA Restore Project



Progress is being made on the development of a monitoring programme for water quality in Waters of LIFE demonstration catchments.

Initiated in November 2023, the RESTORE project will detect change and assess the effectiveness of measures to protect and restore high status objective water bodies.

The project will build on current state-of-the-art approaches to look at biological factors such as fish, insects and water-based plants. Phosphates and nitrates will be considered in addition to the flow, form and function of the waterbodies themselves.

The RESTORE project is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency Research Programme 2021–2030 and features a leadership team of Dr Fiona Kelly, Inland Fisheries Ireland; Professor Mary Kelly-Quinn, UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science; Dr Jonathan Turner, UCD School of Geography; Associate Professor John O’Sullivan, UCD School of Civil Engineering; Dr Md Salauddin, UCD School of Civil Engineering.

Milestones for the project in 2024 include a literature review and the collection of data across monitored catchments.

There will be ongoing knowledge transfer to the Waters of LIFE project team while a baseline is established and preliminary data gaps are filled.

The multi-year programme will be customised for each demonstration catchment while still informing the rollout of a wider programme for high status objective waterbodies.







The development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will ultimately feed into measures of effectiveness under the Waters of LIFE project’s agri-scheme.

To raise awareness and keep stakeholders up to date, regular project blogs will be published in addition to a series of workshops, open-access peer-reviewed journal papers and twice-yearly newsletters.

More information about the project will feature on watersoflife.ie in the coming months.

[Click Here To Learn More About EPA Restore Project on Inland Fisheries Ireland Website.](#)

Desk Studies Of Our Catchments

	<p>Avonmore Wicklow Avonmore Desk Study</p>		<p>Islands Galway & Roscommon Islands Desk Study</p>
	<p>Awbeg (Kilbrin) Cork Awbeg Desk Study</p>		<p>Shournagh Cork Shournagh Desk Study</p>
	<p>Graney Clare & Galway Graney Desk Study</p>		<p>Sheen [Control] Kerry Sheen Desk Study</p>

Desk studies for each catchment were published in the spring of 2023. These studies were prepared by Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) catchment scientists and represent an initial investigation of each project.

The [Avonmore catchment](#) runs from the northeast of the Wicklow Mountains through to Annamoe and Laragh Villages.

The [Awbeg \(Kilbrin\) catchment](#) sits within the Kanturk-Mallow Municipal District of Cork.

The [Graney catchment](#) includes Lough Graney in East Clare as well as the headwaters of the Bleach river in South East Galway.

The [Islands catchment](#) straddles counties Galway and Roscommon and feeds into the larger River Suck.

The [Shournagh catchment](#) is also located in Cork. The river rises in the foothills of the Boggeragh mountains northwest of Cork City and flows towards Blarney to meet the river Lee.

The [Sheen catchment](#) on the Beara peninsula in Co. Kerry is just south of Kenmare. It is our control catchment.

The studies were based on a range of data sources including OSi mapping and orthophotography, EPA status, risk assessment and pressure datasets, CORINE land cover mapping, Forest Service and Coillte data on forest activities and Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) data on Soils and geology.

Each report details current conditions within the catchments, listing any potential pressures and threats to water quality within them.

Recommendations for Agri-Environment Payment Scheme



Work to develop a results based payments scheme in the summer of 2023 delivered a comprehensive report of key agreements, models and options for piloting.

Experts from 18 different organisations participated in a series of workshops ranging from community based organisations to national authorities.

The summary of findings outlined 15 recommendations based on the importance of any scheme being ‘locally-led and locally adapted using a hybrid payments system, with payments for both outcomes and supporting actions (non-productive investments).’

Additional recommendations included:

- An integrated land management based approach
- On-the ground and face-to-face engagement strategies.
- Training and guidance for advisors and other stakeholders
- Objectives tailored to local environmental conditions that are achievable, impactful and measurable.
- A series of simple scorecards that work for varying metrics and environmental conditions.
- Support for landowners to score their own land from project team and advisors
- Support and advice for non-compliant participants
- Guidance from representative Steering Group and Advisory Groups
- Transparency and fairness with mechanisms for feedback, review, dispute resolution and knowledge transfer
- Collaboration with other stakeholders including project learnings for scalable solutions

[Click Here To Read the final Facilitator’s Report in full.](#)

Insight and Guidance on Water Quality Solutions



A key report on measures to reverse the decline of water quality in our catchments was published in August.

Commenting at the time, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform Malcolm Noonan said the report:

“Highlights new and valuable insights into our highest status waters, and we hope to see this knowledge put to good use, not just through the Waters of LIFE project but by farm advisors, landowners and all of the stakeholders working to improve water quality.”

The report looks at ways to address pressures on water quality from a range of sectors and includes dedicated annexes for:

- Agriculture
- Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems
- Forestry
- Peat Extraction
- Quarrying

[Click here to read the full framework document and annexes.](#)

Additional Resource:

An additional resource was also published in December to rate the effectiveness of possible measures in practical terms.

Scores were given across a range of issues of soil type and drainage type looking at:

- Source reduction and control
- Mobilisation control
- Pathway interception
- Instream works



[Click here for additional resources for framework of best practice measures and guidelines.](#)

Seminar on Natural Capital and Environmental Funding



More than 30 people attended our seminar on natural capital and environmental funding over two days in March.

The event was held in partnership with Natural Course LIFE Integrated Project, the Wild Atlantic Nature Integrated Project and LIFE on Machair at our offices in Croom Community Enterprise Centre in Limerick.

Day 1 focused on natural capital in both Ireland and the UK with further case studies on building capacity, ecological network tools and natural flood management.

The second day looked at stakeholder engagement as well as an overview of complementary funding.

Attendees:

Attendees included representatives of LAWPRO, Lough Carra LIFE Project, Mulkear EIP, Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Environmental Protection Agency, Maigne Rivers Trust, Corrib Beo Catchment Partnership, Ballyhoura Development, An Fóram Uisce, Mayo County Council, Bord na Móna, University of Limerick, Teagasc, Inishowen Uplands EIP and Natural Capital Ireland



[Click here for more information and access to seminar presentations.](#)

Other Events

Natural Course LIFE IP Workshop

In April 2023, Project team members were in Manchester for a Natural Course LIFE IP conference. The conference theme was “Trialling a Natural Capital approach to fund and deliver environmental benefits”.

[Click here to read more about the Natural Course LIFE IP Workshop](#)



European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) Study Trip

In October, Project staff were able to study ecosystem services provided by French farmers and their herds as part of a European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism field trip.

The event in La Crau, France looked at how seasonal movement of livestock can help with biodiversity and how irrigation of hay meadows can help provide clean drinking water.

[Click here to read more about the EFNCP Study Trip](#)



Teagasc Signpost Series

Catchment scientist Philip Murphy featured on a Teagasc Signpost Series webinar in December.

Philip was joined by Project Manager Anne Goggin to discuss on the role of agricultural measures & results based payment schemes in delivering for water quality.

[Click Here To Watch This Teagasc Signpost Series Webinar](#)



Citizen Science for Connacht Kids

Kick sampling and creepy crawlies are great ways to learn about blue dot water quality. That’s according to Connacht school children who tried catchment science for the first time.

[Click Here For The Full Reports](#)



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[Click here for full profiles of our team.](#)

Newsletter Sign-Up

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