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Local Authority
Waters Programme
Annual Report 2021



DIRECTOR OF SERVICES STATEMENT

The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is a local government national shared service, working on behalf of all 31 Local Authorities in Ireland, and funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. LAWPRO coordinates efforts to achieve good or high water quality in our rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters, and groundwater, as required by the European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD) which is currently implemented in Ireland through the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 - 2021.

Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils jointly manage LAWPRO, whose staff are based across several local authority locations, within a five-region structure:

- Border
- South East
- West
- Midlands and East
- South West

LAWPRO has a number of core objectives which are:

- Governance and leadership
- Community participation
- Innovation
- Coordination
- Catchment science
- Communications and engagement

A new approach for managing Ireland's natural water assets sees local authorities, state agencies and public bodies collaborating and working with private sector stakeholders and local communities. Coordination on behalf of local authorities and public bodies, is achieved through Regional Water and Environment Management Committees and Regional Operational Committees, which have been established in each of the 5 LAWPRO regions since 2016 and 2017 respectively. Catchment science and management, a new addition to LAWPRO in mid-2018, has become a core part of the overall programme delivery, with the scientific evidence base now being used to inform measures implementation, policy gaps, research needs, and catchment management planning.

Community participation, and specifically increasing community participation in river basin management and planning, has been at the core of LAWPRO's work since the original setting up of the Local Authority Waters and Communities Office in 2016. Through all aspects of its work, LAWPRO advocates for a healthy water environment to deliver benefits for health and wellbeing, biodiversity, climate and local communities. This approach recognises the challenges presented by many crises, including biodiversity loss and climate change.

2021 was a year which saw many sectors of the economy continue to be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite significant disruption during this time, the essential work of LAWPRO continued, including local catchment assessments, funding to communities, support for projects and events during National Heritage Week, and virtual meetings with public bodies, stakeholders, and local communities. I would like to thank all our staff, and the countless others, who have helped us fulfil our obligations during a challenging year.

An important milestone in 2021 was the launch of the public consultation on the draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022 - 2027 by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Submissions, observations, and comments on the draft plan were invited by the public, with a commitment in the Programme for Government, to launching a new strengthened River Basin Management Plan to help Ireland protect, improve, and sustainably manage our water environment to 2027. LAWPRO is now preparing to undertake local public consultation on the draft Plan early in 2022, with the purpose of gathering the local views on what should be in the final plan.

I am delighted to present this fifth annual report on the Local Authority Waters Programme. This report outlines some highlights from the work of LAWPRO in 2021 but is by no means a comprehensive update. I would encourage you to visit our website www.lawaters.ie, to learn more about the work of LAWPRO. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Programme for their continued work and dedication to achieving better water quality environments for all.

Karl Cashen
Director of Services

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1 About LAWPRO



The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is a Local Authority shared service, operating nationwide on behalf of all 31 local authorities, with Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils having responsibility for oversight of the programme. LAWPRO's 60 specialist staff are based in multiple local authority offices across five regions – Border, Midlands and East, South East, South West and West. We coordinate efforts to achieve good or high-status water quality in our rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters, and groundwaters as required by the European Union Water Framework Directive.

LAWPRO is working to identify the issues affecting water quality in every county in Ireland. Where issues are identified, we collaborate with the relevant local authority, public body, and water stakeholder to find a solution. Community engagement is the cornerstone of this approach to combine local and expert knowledge for a better understanding of what's happening in a local catchment and waterbody. Good water quality benefits everybody, it is essential for nature to flourish and our economy to thrive.

The Water Framework Directive places statutory obligations on Member States for the development and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). This is enacted in Irish law by the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations, 2003 as amended, which places responsibilities on local authorities for *regional coordination, public consultation, the development and implementation of river basin management plans and programmes of measures*. LAWPRO is a key Programme, set up by the local authority sector and supported and funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in part response to these responsibilities.

Further information about LAWPRO can be found online at:

[Local Authority Waters Programme - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawwaters.ie\)](http://lawwaters.ie)



Figure 1 Ballyfinboy River walk with Ballyinderry Development Association

② Strategic Objectives



Water management in Ireland continued to evolve during implementation of the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2021, seeking to build collaboration, closer cooperation and working relationships between local authorities, public bodies, stakeholders, and communities. The RBMP’s overall aim is to protect or improve water quality to achieve good or high status in Ireland’s rivers, lakes, estuaries, groundwater, and coastal waters. Achieving that aim requires the active participation of local authorities and other public bodies, water users and local communities.

LAWPRO’s mission and vision as a programme, is firmly aligned with national, regional, and local efforts to achieve positive outcomes for water for the benefit of all.

LAWPRO’s Mission

To engage and support communities, and work with local authorities, public bodies and stakeholders to protect and care for the natural waters of Ireland.

LAWPRO’s Vision

The natural waters of Ireland, including rivers, lakes, wetlands, estuaries, groundwater and coastal waters are recognised for their importance and value for ourselves, for wildlife and for our economy. These waters will be protected, restored and cared for by local authorities, public bodies, stakeholders and communities working together.

LAWPRO has several roles and responsibilities assigned to it as a Programme, with specific actions to be delivered under the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 - 2021. The Programmes roles and responsibilities have increased since 2016, and this has informed the evolution of our strategic planning, and annual work planning. An overview of our core functions is provided in Table 1 below. Our work programme is discussed further in Section 4.

The core functions of LAWPRO include Governance and Leadership, Co-ordination, Catchment Science, Community Participation, and Communication and Awareness.



Objectives	Rationale		Methods	Outcomes
Governance and Leadership Drivers of effective governance for WFD implementation in Ireland	Support the DHLGH and EPA in meeting national obligations for better water quality and implementation of the WFD. Governance of the LAWPRO programme.		LAWPRO as conduits for information flow within the River Basin Management Plan Governance Structure. Participation in relevant regional and national meetings and committees. Leading on the identification of implementation issues and development of guidance. Effective internal senior & operational management committees.	Linking bottom-up concerns to top-down governance. Giving communities a voice in high-level decision making. Ongoing management and development of the programme.
Coordination Supporting governance structures for water quality management and promoting cooperation and knowledge transfer between actors	Local Authorities, State agencies, and public bodies working together for better water quality. Delivering multiple benefits for water, biodiversity, climate action, and local communities.		Regional Management and Operational Committees. Collaborations and knowledge sharing. Supporting local implementation of measures and actions for water quality.	Greater Knowledge transfer. Shared vision and goals. Common purpose to achieve goals. Coordinated approach to implementation of RBMP.
Community Participation Supporting communities and stakeholders to participate in caring for local waterbodies	Bottom-up approach, involving communities and water users in conversations and actions to achieve water quality goals. Better understanding of local issues and concerns.		Local engagements, meetings, and events. Consultations and two-way dialogue. Listening to local communities. Promoting the value of good water quality. Administration and oversight of the Community Water Development Fund.	Community-led water related initiatives and projects. Giving communities a voice in water quality matters. Community resilience and capacity to take local action.
Catchment Science Catchment Management and Science in Priority Areas for Action	Leading the way with innovative catchment science. Identification of issues affecting water quality. Guidance for LA staff, relevant agencies, and stakeholders to find solutions to problems identified.		Desk studies and Local Catchment Assessments. Community Information Meetings. Referrals and tracking of implementation. Identification of gaps in POMs through field assessment. Development of catchment science methodologies.	Detailed assessment in PAAs. Stakeholder and community engagement. Wider understanding of the issues and solutions at multiple scales.
Innovation Continuous learning from experience, evolving, and changing our approach, as necessary	Evolving catchment science and community engagement and consultation. Allowing in-house expertise to develop.		Building on experiences to date. Networking to share knowledge. Harnessing new ideas and developments.	LAWPRO as leaders in catchment science and community engagement in the LA sector. Knowledge transfer across LA sector.
Communication and Engagement	Delivering engaging and accessible public information on water policy and science. Advocating for water quality/ RBMP objectives at local and regional levels, nationwide. Increasing water literacy to build capacity for actions within communities. Promoting LAWPROs mission and vision.		Clear and meaningful messaging grounded in scientific evidence. Local engagements and collaborative working with communities. Collaboration and cooperation with partner organisations and stakeholders. LAWPROs mission and values delivered through management and staff. Optimising use of traditional and new media and facilitation techniques to reach and engage with target audiences.	Increased understanding of water quality issues, and challenges. Clear understanding of LAWPRO values, purpose, and goals. Continual growth in public participation and support for RBMP development and implementation. Effective collaboration in pursuit of RBMP objectives. A network of community groups actively participating in caring for local waterbodies.

Figure 2 LAWPROs Strategic Approach and Programme Objectives

3 LAWPRO Structure and Resources

LAWPRO has grown from 18 staff in 2016, with the establishment of the Local Authority Waters & Communities Office (LAWCO), to a current resource of 60 staff after the merger of LAWCO and the Local Authorities Water Support and Advisory Team (LAWSAT) in 2019.

The senior management team comprises of a Director of Service, three Regional Coordinators and a Catchments Team Manager. This team is responsible for strategic direction and overall programme delivery.

Programme administration is a central function in support of the Senior Management Team and effective Programme delivery, and is delivered from our Head Office, Ballingarrane, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

3.1 Senior Management

LAWPRO's Senior Management Team consists of a Director of Service, three Regional Coordinators and a Catchments Team Programme lead, at Senior Engineer/Scientist grade.

Name	Role
Karl Cashen	Director of Service
Carol McCarthy	Catchments Team Programme Lead
Bernie O'Flaherty (retired December 2021)	Regional Co-ordinator – Border and West Regions
Fran Igoe	Regional Co-ordinator – South East and South West Regions
Ray Spain (retired December 2021)	Regional Co-ordinator – Midlands and Eastern Region & Head Office Operations Manager

Table 1 – Senior Management Team

The Regional Co-ordinators and Catchments Team Manager have specific sectoral expertise and coordinate and facilitate multi-agency collaboration at regional and national level. The Head Office Operations Manager oversees and directs the work of the LAWPRO head office team, which provides financial operations support, communications and marketing services, community funding services, HR, Health & Safety, and information technology support. The Catchments Team Manager oversees the work of the Catchment Assessment Team to ensure that work programmes in the Priority Areas for Action (PAA) are delivered across the Country.

Retirements

In December 2021, Ray Spain and Bernie O'Flaherty, Regional Co-ordinators, retired from LAWPRO after dedicating their careers to Local Government service. LAWPRO would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank both Ray and Bernie for their dedicated work and commitment to LAWPRO, for the efforts in setting up LAWCO in 2016, and for their continued support to the Programme in their retirement. A recruitment campaign was run in December 2021, with Margaret Keegan taking up the role of Regional Co-ordinator Midlands and Eastern Region, and Head Office Operations Manager, and Bernadette White taking up the role as Regional Co-ordinator for the Border and Western Regions. Both positions are effective as of 1st February 2022.

3.2 Head Office

LAWPRO's Head Office operations provide the corporate services necessary for the Programme, to enable efficient and effective support to the wider Programme so that the strategic objectives, and annual work plans can be achieved. Head Office provides financial operations support, communications and marketing services, community funding services, HR, Health & Safety, and information technology support for the Programme. Head Office also supports the Senior Management Team with human resources and recruitment functions.

The Programme is 100% funded by DHLGH through a Memorandum of Funding Agreement. This agreement allows for recoupment on certified expenditure. LAWPRO's expenditure in 2021 was €6,435,277 against a budget of €7,840,249, an underspend of €1,404,972. These figures are derived from Tipperary County Council's financial management system.

The specialist staff based in Ballingarrane, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary have responsibilities in the following areas:

Finance and HR – The programme costs are recouped monthly. All purchasing is monitored to ensure compliance with public procurement practices. These functions are managed by an office administration team, comprising a Senior Staff Officer and two Clerical Officers.

Information Technology – As well as providing continuous IT support for all the staff of the programme, there were several projects that were completed in 2021. Development completed on the new lawwaters.ie website which went live in February to coincide with World Wetlands Day. Several internal systems were updated, including our Time and Attendance module which was updated to include a training module and our IT security and backup systems were enhanced. New systems were developed for reporting referrals in catchment assessment work to ASSAP. In advance of the RBMP consultation, a system was developed to manage all internal operations, such as meeting organisation, advertisements and meeting notes. The online portal for the Communities Caring for Water Conference was upgraded where all the talks and discussions were livestreamed to 233 people.

Communications and Marketing – Communications are central to LAWPRO achieving its goals and objectives. Key to this is ensuring relevant and meaningful information on science, policy, and engagement activities reaches target audiences in the public, private, and community & voluntary sectors. In this way, we can continually raise awareness of the role of LAWPRO and the collaborative efforts with public bodies, stakeholders, and local communities towards achieving the objectives of the national river basin management plan and EU Water Framework Directive. LAWPRO's greatest communication asset is its nationwide network of staff, who are committed advocates for better water quality and delivering messaging, grounded in science and policy, through national, regional, and local structures and fora.

Community Funding – LAWPRO helps communities access funding to deliver local water projects and initiatives. In this way, communities build capacity and become more involved in the care of local water bodies. A specialist Funding Lead advises staff, local authorities, public bodies, and community groups on available funding streams.

The Funding Lead administered a dedicated Community Water Development Fund of €380,000 in 2021, to drive community participation in caring for local water bodies.

The Community Water Development Fund is discussed further under Section 5 below.

Environmental Health and Safety management system – 2021 saw the continued evolution, development and implementation for the Environmental Management System for the Local Authority Waters Programme. The certification to both ISO14001 and ISO 45001 was retained. In 2021 Covid 19 still impacted elements of LAWPRO's work and the use of online and virtual meetings continued during the early part of the year.

The system covers the work of the Local Authority Waters Programme and An Fóram Uisce. The EHS management systems central document is its safety statement and in 2021 LAWPRO worked with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to get this document awarded the Plain English mark.

In 2021, a survey of all staff was carried out to help inform a safety profile for the organisation. This provides a benchmark of understanding and attitudes towards Health & Safety in the organisation.

LAWPRO has begun to implement ISO 45003, a guidance document on physio-social risk factors and the development of a physio-social risk assessment and control measures for the organisation.

3.3 Catchments Team

LAWPRO has a team of five Catchment Managers at Senior Executive Scientist grade, and 30 Catchment Scientists at Assistant Scientist Grade. The Catchments Team scientists come from a range of disciplines, including environmental science, agricultural science, aquatic ecology, hydrogeology and hydrology.

Name	Role
Gary O'Connell	Border Region
Margaret Keegan	Midlands and Eastern Region
Ruth Hennessy	South East Region
Maeve Ryan	South West Region
Bernadette White	West Region & Blue Dot Catchments Programme Manager

Table 2 – Catchment Managers

The Catchments Team carries out scientific assessments or Local Catchment Assessments, in Priority Areas for Action (PAAs) across the country. These PAAs were selected because the waterbodies in these areas were 'At Risk' of not meeting water quality objectives under the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD – 2000/60/EC). This targeted approach aims to restore water quality in these 'At Risk' waterbodies, thereby helping to meet national objectives for compliance with the WFD.

The Local Catchment Assessments very often identify highly complex issues affecting water quality across a range of sectors. LAWPRO then issues referrals on the problems identified to the relevant implementing bodies such as the Local Authority, EPA, and Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), where related to agriculture.

More information on our Catchment Work can be found on www.lawaters.ie.

Progress updates, case study presentations, updates on referrals, progress reports from implementing bodies and ASSAP, collaborative projects with others are provided to the five Regional Operational Committees and discussed at the associated Regional Water & Environment Management Committees. This promotes collaboration between the respective Local Authorities, WFD implementing public bodies and other stakeholders.

Where potential solutions are not readily available to allow measures be put in place by the implementation body or landowner, the WFD three-tiered governance structures are utilised. This structure progresses technical or scientific issues to the National Technical Implementation Group (NTIG) for further consideration. From there, matters can be escalated to the Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC) to help inform revisions to national policy and legislation where identified, based on science and evidence.

The Catchment Assessment Team, however, is one cog in the bigger wheel of ongoing effort to protect and restore good water quality in Ireland. The success of this collaborative approach is dependent on the continued efforts of Local Authorities and various other national and regional agencies, and sectoral stakeholders.



Figure 3 LAWPRO works in collaboration with Irish Water, Teagasc ASSAP and Local Authorities on grassland herbicide issues

3.4 Communities Team

A core aim of LAWPRO is to engage communities in caring for local water bodies through active involvement and stewardship of local streams, rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. To achieve this, we work with a broad range of community groups, including Tidy Towns, Heritage Groups, Catchment Associations, Rivers Trusts, and new groups wishing to take on water quality as a thematic area of interest. By supporting capacity building in existing community groups and assisting new groups to grow, LAWPRO is enabling local communities to take action for water quality.

LAWPRO has a team of 13 Community Water Officers, at Staff Officer grade, who operate at a local level across the country. Community Water Officers focus on community engagement to raise awareness of water quality issues and activities, both at water body and wider catchment scales in all areas. By providing support and advice to community groups for projects and initiatives that enhance local waterbodies, LAWPRO is building capacity for community actions for water quality.

Community Water Officers maintain regular and ongoing engagement with local communities, providing information and education on water quality issues, policy and science. This approach promotes trust and fosters participation and active involvement in water matters at a local level.

The Communities Team is also involved in designing and delivering bespoke training courses and citizen science initiatives, which fosters linkages between public bodies, funding providers and local communities.

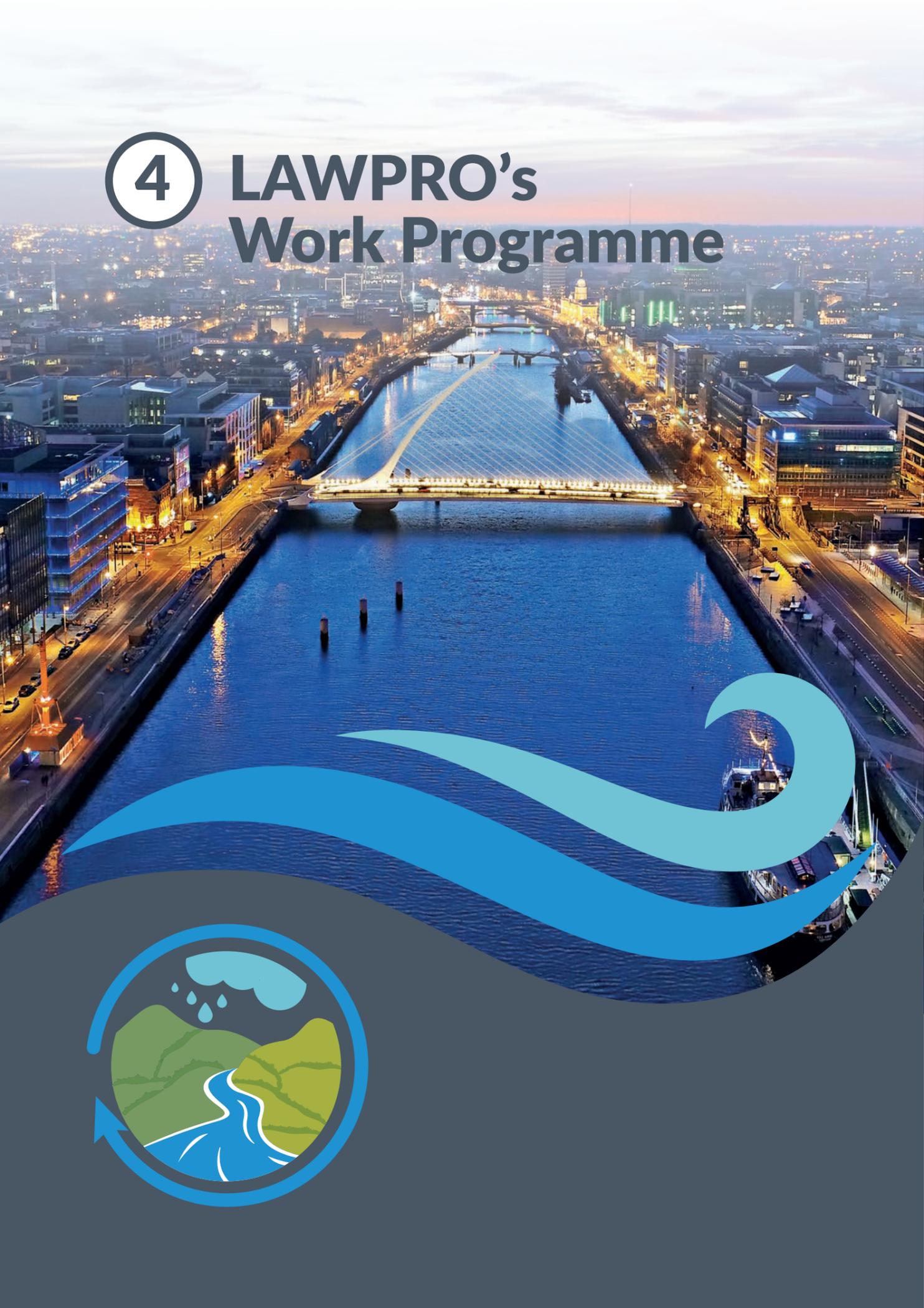
Our Communities Team leads on the delivery of several key elements of LAWPRO's work programme, including:

- The Community Water Development Fund, which supports community groups to enhance the quality of local streams, rivers, lakes and coastal areas. The fund is in place since 2017, with a growing interest from new groups each year. More information can be found in Section 5 below.
- We partner with the Heritage Council for National Heritage Week. We encourage and provide financial support to local community groups to run events during heritage week, linked to the annual theme for the week and linked to water. We also sponsor a Water Heritage Day Award. Further information is provided in Section 5 below.
- We are working in partnership with academia and others to devise citizen science water quality assessment tools. To develop a consensus on the most suitable approach for citizen science in Ireland, LAWPRO supported by the EPA, has engaged with the practitioners, agencies, trainers and community groups interested in citizen science. A new scheme has been developed – a Citizen Science Stream Index (CSSI), which is suitable for beginners and the adoption of the Small Stream Impact Score (SSIS) used by scientists for the more advanced practitioners. Training was rolled out in 2021 and more information can be found here: [Citizen Science - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](http://Citizen Science - Local Authority Water Programme (lawaters.ie))

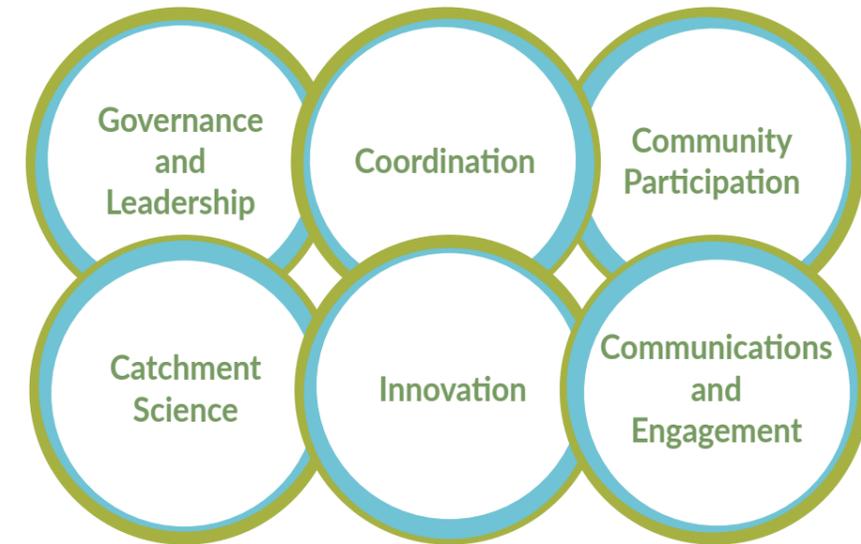


Figure 4 Communities Water Officers meeting in Cabragh Wetlands, Thurles, Co. Tipperary

4 LAWPRO's Work Programme



LAWPROs work programme in 2021 concentrated on our six core areas of:



4.1 Governance and Leadership

As a local authority shared service, LAWPRO supports the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Environmental Protection Agency in the development and implementation of national river basin management plans for better water quality, as required under the Water Framework Directive.

LAWPRO acts as a conduit for information flow between the three Tiers of the WFD Governance Structure – Tier 3 Regional Committees, to Tier 2 National Technical Implementation Group, and Tier 1 the National Coordination and Management Committee and the Water Policy Advisory Group.

LAWPRO's participation and contribution at all three tiers supports a coordinated approach towards the achievement of national, regional and local targets for water quality, while advocating for change to policy, legislation, guidance and resourcing to support water management activities in Ireland.



Figure 5 High level implementation structures

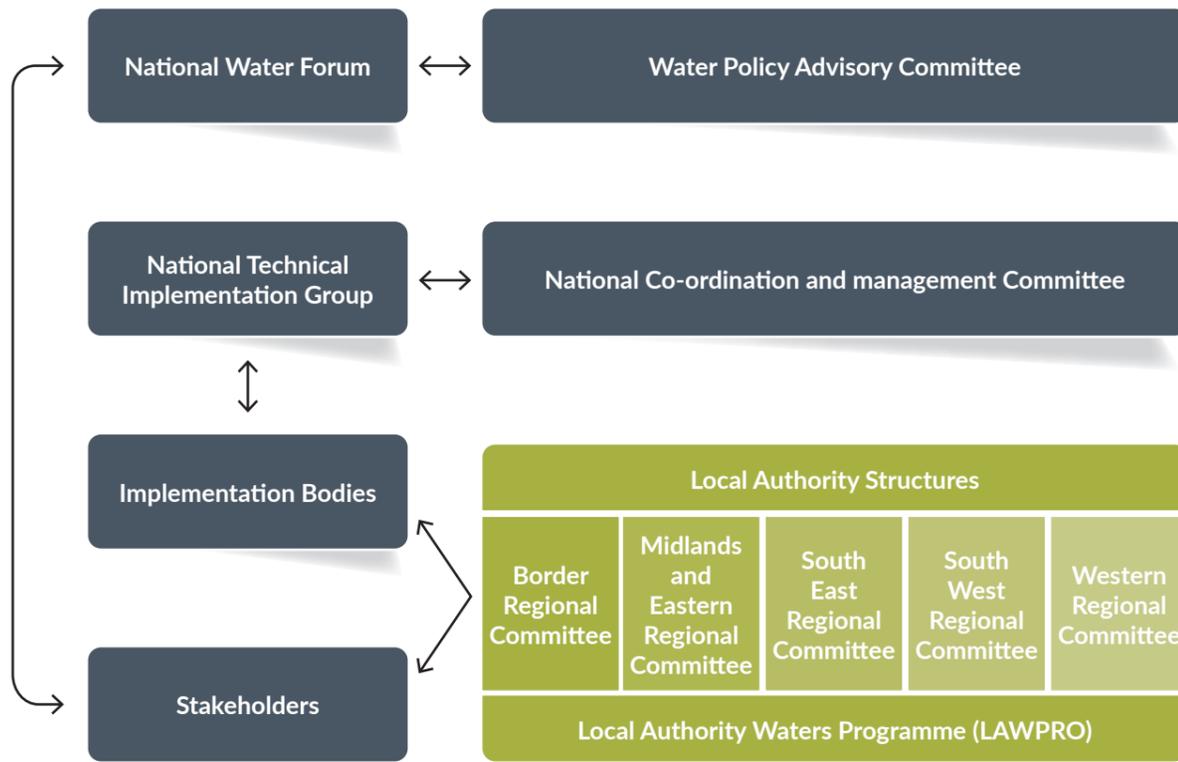


Figure 6 WFD implementation structures and their interactions

LAWPRO staff also participate in relevant national and regional committees and project steering groups, where advice and support are provided. Examples include;

- DHLGH Programme of Measures Group
- National Hydromorphology Working Group
- NIECE Steering Committee
- National Pesticides & Drinking Water Action Group
- National Federation of Group Water Schemes Source Pilot Protection Project Steering Group
- Local Authority Services National Training Group: Environmental Services Training Group
- Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme (AECM) Co-operation Projects – Technical Working Group
- Farming for Nature Technical Working Group
- WFD and Planning Guidance Working Group
- Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) Group Oversight Committee
- ASSAP Farmer Organisation Consultative Group
- ASSAP Coordination Group
- DHLGH Water Research Group

- Project Steering Group example: Pearl Mussel Project European Innovation Partnership Steering Committee
- Project Steering Group example: Specific Management and Robust Targeting of Riparian Buffer Zones – Smarter BufferZ Steering Committee

As LAWPRO has grown as a Programme, and in terms of staff numbers, Programme Management has become a significant body of work. Annual work plans, PMDS, budget and financial oversight management, staff management, recruitment, IT and data management, and training and capacity building of the team, are significant elements of the work undertaken by the Senior Management Team supported by Head Office, which enables efficient operation of the Programme.

4.2 Coordination

LAWPRO's Regional Coordinators are responsible for coordination of the Programme, supporting the WFD Governance structures for water quality management, and promoting cooperation and knowledge exchange between water management actors. At the core of Programme delivery is support to implementing bodies and community stakeholders towards achieving water quality objectives.

Five local authority regional committees known as Regional Water and Environment Management Committees (Tier 3), are managed by the Regional Coordinators with support from the LAWPRO teams. These committees have responsibility for the co-ordinated delivery of measures at regional and local levels and ensuring a consistency of approach across the regions. The five regional committees are chaired by a local authority Chief Executive, with active participation and technical advice from the EPA. Each committee is supported by a Regional Operational Committee with membership drawn from all the relevant public and implementing bodies and chaired at Director of Service level.



These local authority structures are central to tracking the evolution of the local catchment assessment approach throughout the 2nd cycle implementation of the WFD, largely undertaken by LAWPRO, and a number of Local Authorities. A central part of the Operational Committee has also been the examination of water management issues arising e.g. local authority resourcing constraints, policy gaps for preventing water pollution and river restoration e.g. hydromorphology, supporting working groups to develop guidance and training e.g. evolution of the Catchment Science and Management Training course content, development of grant schemes e.g. for domestic waste water, informing synergies between operational group organisations work programmes etc.

However, focus for the 3rd cycle implementation of the River Basin Management Plan will be on the tracking and effectiveness of implemented measures by local authorities and other implementing bodies, and the data management systems required to facilitate this tracking. Resourcing and capacity building in local authorities is key to delivering workplans and implementation of statutory functions, and this was strongly highlighted in all Regional Operational Management Committees by committee members. As a result, LAWPRO in partnership with the CCMA engaged with DHLGH to lay the groundwork for a review of local authority's role in the natural water function area (Note: natural water is used to distinguish this area of work from drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment). A project board was established in September 2021 under the chairmanship of John Mulholland, Chief Executive Laois County Council to carry out this review. The project board prepared a Project Initiation Document (PID) and submitted it to the Public Service Reform and Oversight Group in November 2021. This document was approved in January 2022 at which point the Project Board established a project team with the aid of funding by DHLGH.

Due to the scale of the proposed review the board decided to split the project into 3 phases.

- Phase 1 to look at Water Framework Directive, Agriculture, Blue Dot Catchments, Freshwater Peral Mussel and Drainage Districts
- Phase 2 – Bathing Waters, Shellfish Waters and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- Phase 3 – Drinking Water Safety Plans, Private Water Supplies, abstractions and urban areas.

The local authority structures also have a vital role in supporting national policy development and implementation through their participation in the WPAC and the NCMC, and the chairs of the Regional Management Committees sit on NCMC and report on the activities of the Regional Committees and issues arising.

The coordination role also includes informing and embedding water quality protection approaches such as the development and promotion of integrated nature-based solutions and water sensitive urban design to address rainwater management and surface water management in urban areas. Coordination of the capacity building of local authority staff and implementing body staff through the provision of Catchment Science and Management training, is also a priority for the Programme. Engaging citizen scientists, and provision of training is another example of new functions which LAWPRO is now supporting and leading on methodology development in collaboration with others.

4.3 Community Participation and Catchment Science

Figures 4 and 5 provide an overview of metrics across various elements of LAWPRO's work in 2021. While these do not cover the full extent of the programme, they present an overview of achievements and core activities at a glance. Additional detail is provided for selected highlights in section 5 below.

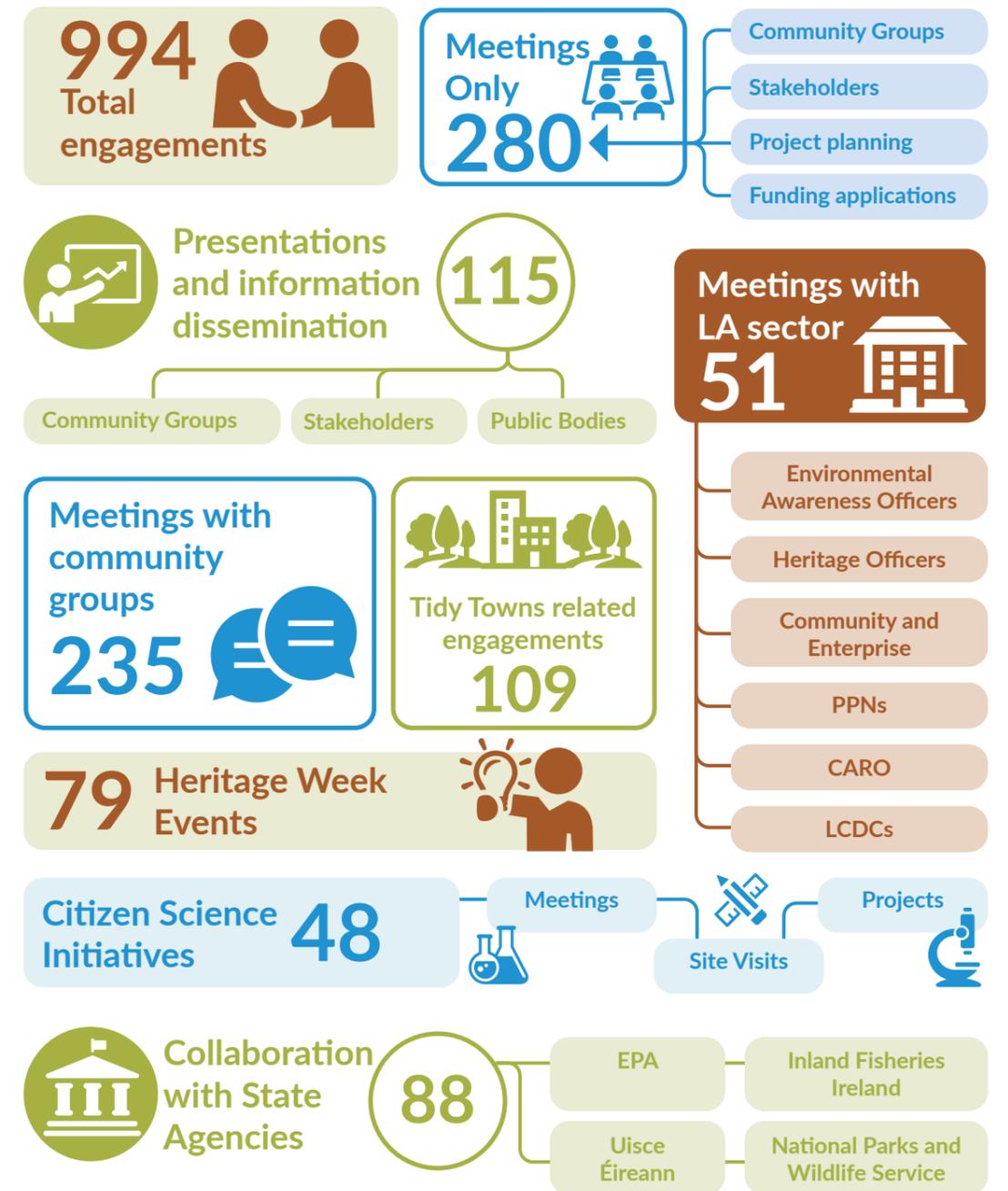
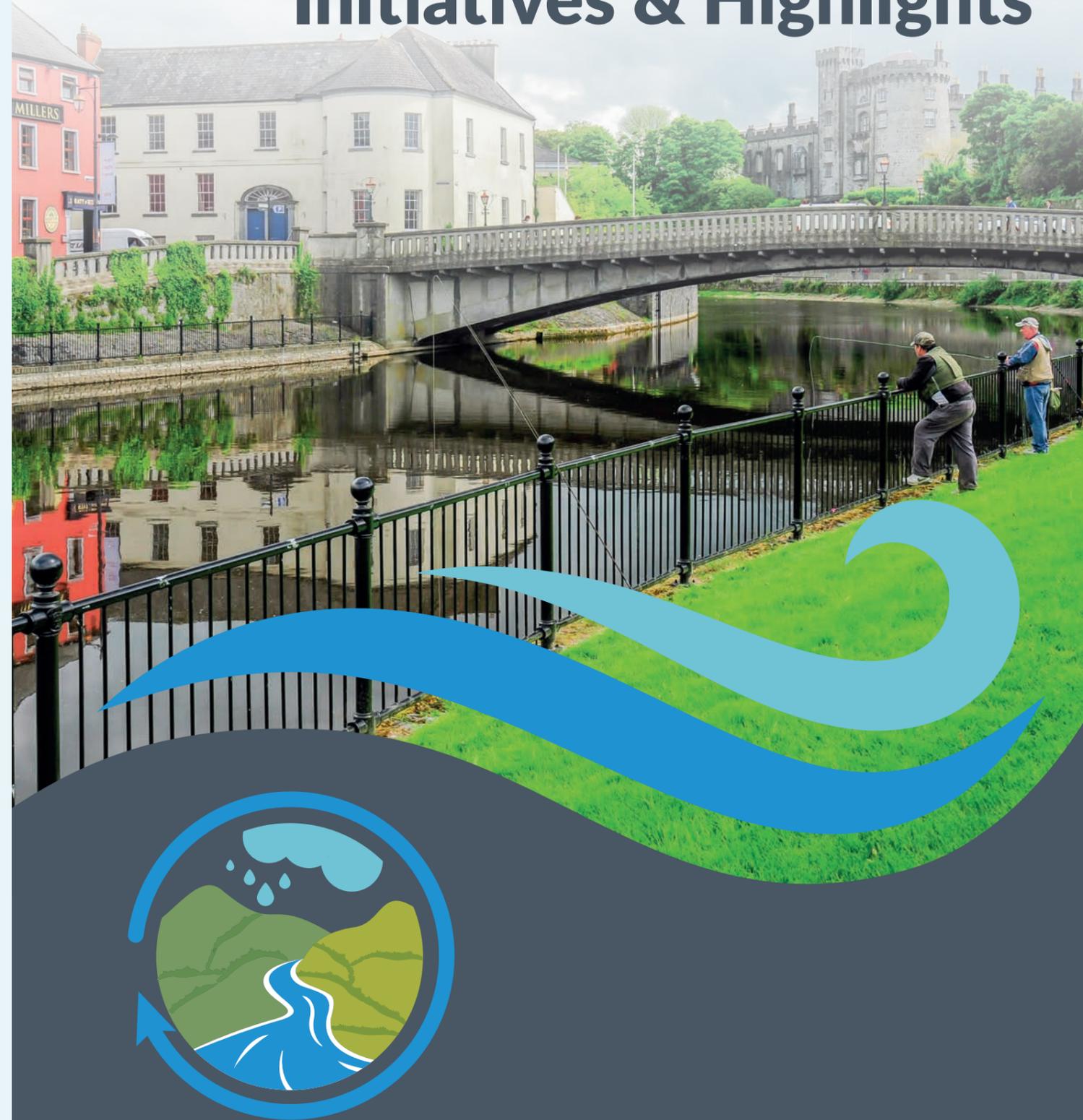


Figure 7 Core engagement activities for 2021



Figure 8 Core catchment science and management activities for 2021

5 Innovations, Initiatives & Highlights



5.1 Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027

The Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 was published in September 2020 for a six-month public consultation up to March 2021. LAWPRO delivered a local level public consultation process to engage communities on the draft Plan and increase public knowledge of water policy implementation structures.

Underpinning this approach was the delivery of background information to promote informed discussions at local meetings in every county and the opportunity for submissions.

Covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings affected the opportunity to host in-person public meetings. In response, LAWPRO adopted online and digital technologies to provide public access to relevant information and opportunities for local communities to participate in the consultation process.

Consultation Process

Online and digital methods

LAWPRO developed a Virtual Consultation Room (VCR) to exhibit key contents from the Draft RBMP in bite-sized format using videos, maps, and information boards. The room also had links to the Draft RBMP and a local submission survey form, which posed five questions. This facilitated 24-7 access to information and involvement in the consultation process, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The VCR went live on 28th October 2021 and remained live up to the close of the consultation period.

LAWPRO utilised video conferencing technologies to host online public meetings in every county. Evening meetings were facilitated by LAWPRO staff and promoted widely at local and national levels to raise awareness of local water quality issues and the opportunity to participate in the consultation process. Two different meeting formats were provided:

- **County level:** 30 meetings in collaboration with the Public Participation Networks targeted both the Environmental and Community & Voluntary pillars. This resulted in well-informed discussions on local water quality issues and potential solutions. LAWPRO staff documented the meeting discussions to ensure issues discussed were brought forward for consideration in the decision-making process.
- **Municipal District level:** 63 public meetings at a local level were planned by LAWPRO for January to March 2022, up to the close of the consultation period.

Media and digital marketing

LAWPRO ran a media campaign across local and regional press and radio to disseminate information and promote the local public meetings. Emails and phone calls to elected representatives, local stakeholders, and community groups strengthened that approach. Messaging was informed by science and evidence in the Draft RBMP. For example, county and MD scale maps showing waterbodies 'At Risk' were used to make national messaging relevant and meaningful to local communities.

Two separate social media campaigns were delivered: one to promote the VCR, and one to promote the local public meetings. This involved a combination of LAWPRO generated content and 'paid for' promoted content. Both campaigns achieved objectives for raising awareness of the consultation process and specific ways through which people could get involved. Analytics and insights from the campaigns show that LAWPRO reached a wide and varied audience across all counties.

A dedicated page on LAWPRO's website provided a schedule of online public meetings in all counties, with links to registration pages. It also provided a link to the VCR and local submission survey form, and the Draft RBMP document and submission form on gov.ie. Thus, ensuring multiple ways for public participation in the consultation process.

Attendances and submissions

LAWPRO successfully achieved its objective to engage local communities in the public consultation process. This is evidenced by 6,100 unique attendees in the Virtual Consultation Room. A summary report on the LAWPRO public consultation and local engagement on the Draft RBMP will comprise of the consultation process in Q3 2021 and Q1 2022.



Figure 9 cover slide for public meeting Figure 9 – cover slide for public meeting

5.2 Community Water Development Fund

LAWPRO administers the Community Water Development fund on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage. The 2021 Open Call was launched at the Communities Caring for Waters annual conference held virtually in November 2020.

The fund supports communities to deliver local projects and initiatives to help address the major issues of water quality, biodiversity loss, and factors contributing to climate change.

Each year, communities and local champions play a vital role in the protection and enhancement of local waterbodies and the environment. The Community Water Development Fund supports this effort and in 2021, over €380,000 in grant aid was awarded to groups nationwide. The Call was over-subscribed as 195 applications were received, almost reaching €2m in total project costs and €1.08m in grant aid sought.

No. applications received	No. grants offered	Max grant aid sought	Grant aid awarded
195	155	€1,095,429	€383,358.87

Average grant offered €1,949

Table 3 Community Water Development Fund summary details 2021

The Fund is a very useful engagement tool to help promote water quality actions and improve water literacy. It enables communities to get more involved in the management of their local water environment, delivering multiple benefits for present and future generations.

Projects approved for funding vary and include:

- Awareness raising initiatives such as river clean ups, biodiversity information boards, citizen science workshops, outdoor classrooms, rainwater harvesting and development of wetlands.
- Drafting of plans such as feasibility studies, habitat management plans, ecological survey and biodiversity action plans.
- River and habitat enhancement works such as tree, native hedgerow and pollinator planting, bank stabilisation, fencing and buffer zones.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1z36rWtC245ZDSANcNZHuCSc-wVV2cCDi&usp=sharing>

As in previous years, awareness and education remained the most popular type of project applied for under the funding call. Some projects span more than one category and every project funded will help to promote a fundamental objective of LAWPRO – to support local communities to get involved in the care of their local waters.

Community Water Development Fund Applications received by Project Type 2021



Figure 10 CWDF applications received in 2021 by project type

Applications received by group type in 2021 shows that Tidy Towns, environmental groups and development/residents associations are the most active applicants.

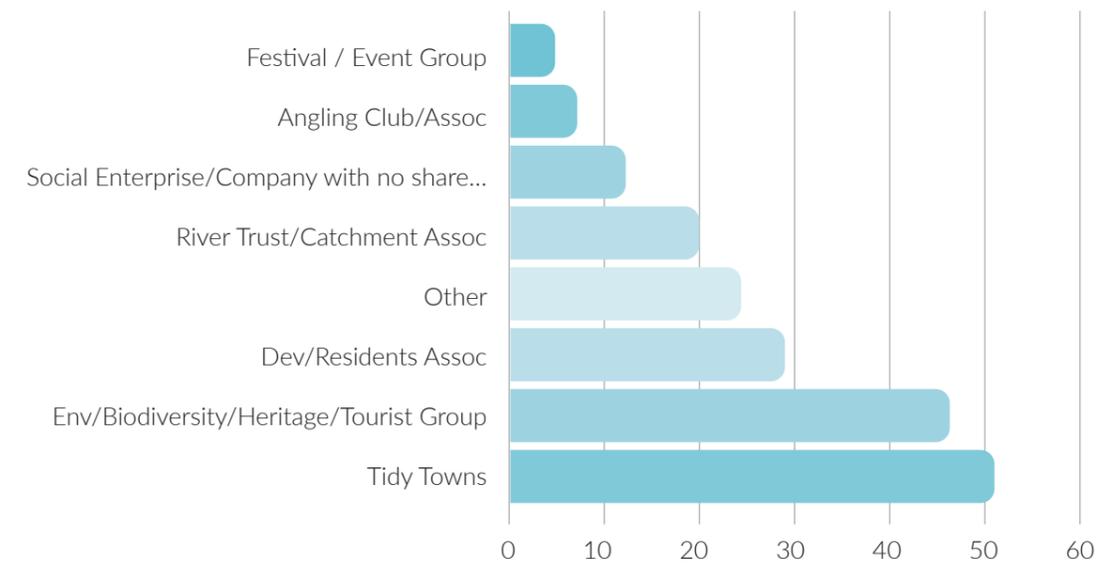


Figure 11 CWDF applications by group type

Full details of grants awarded in 2021 can be viewed online [Here](#)

5.3 Local Awareness Initiatives

Since 2016, LAWPRO's Community Water Officers have been on the ground and working with communities in all counties. This has resulted in a valuable network of approximately 650 community groups actively caring for the quality of their local rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. In a bid to encourage and financially support groups outside of the Open Call timeframes, a Local Awareness Initiatives fund is available to Community Water Officers. This can be used to financially assist small awareness events, development of dissemination tools, jointly sponsored water related initiatives, etc.

5.4 Capacity Building

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage looked to the UK model of Rivers Trusts as a vehicle for facilitating community involvement in protecting and restoring local rivers and lakes. Since 2016, LAWPRO has collaborated with The Rivers Trust, the umbrella body for volunteer led organisations, with direct support to rivers trusts and catchment associations in the following ways:

Supporting emerging Rivers Trusts / Catchment Associations

LAWPRO invites emerging and existing River Trusts / Catchment Associations or other identified bodies to apply for the recoupment of ongoing operational costs such as insurance and audit fees. In 2021, grants were awarded to 18 organisations with a total award of €23,860.

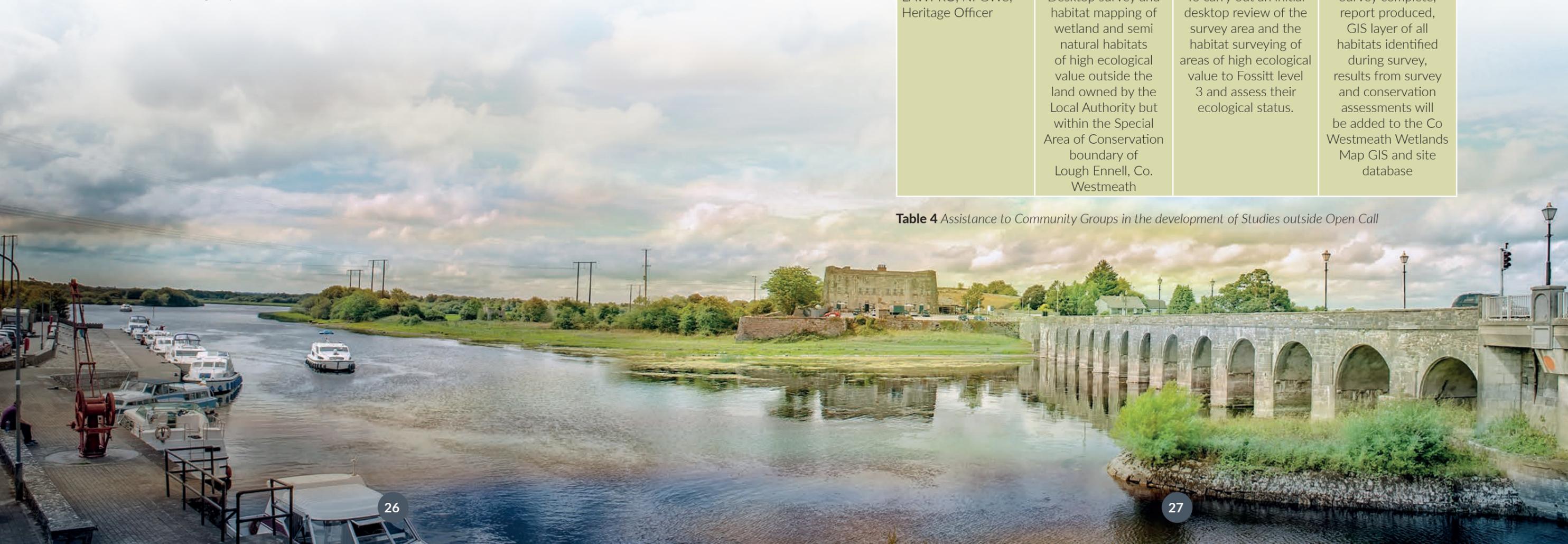
LAWPRO committed €10,000 to The River Trust to help them develop the iCatch Network which had been rolled out by the Maigne Rivers Trust and Inishowen Rivers Trust on receipt of funding from The Wheel and match funding from LAWPRO in 2020. The purpose of the network is to enable member groups to network and learn from each other.

Collaborative Projects

In 2021, LAWPRO partnered with the NFGWS and Erne Valley Group Water Scheme and provided funding of €5,000 towards the 'Let it Bee' Campaign. The aim of the initiative was to promote the links between biodiversity and good water quality. Five farmers from within a PAA were selected and given beehives and associated equipment, mentoring and training on bee keeping. The intention was to change behavioural habits on the use of pesticides. It was also to encourage the development and protection of riparian zones that act as a habitat for bees and as protection of water courses by participating farmers.

Project Partners	Project name	Project aims & Objectives	Project outcomes
LAWPRO, CBEC Eco Engineering and Waterloo Renewable Group, Cork	T21-67 River Martin Bank Stabilisation Options Assessment	To scope high-level bank stabilisation options assessment at River Martin, Waterloo Road, Blarney. Focus on natural solutions rather than hard engineering. Also look at 'nature based' measures to reinstate some degree of improved physical diversity to the channel corridor.	To identify and evaluate site appropriate options for sustainable bank protection and habitat enhancement measures.
LAWPRO, NFGWS, Heritage Officer	Desktop survey and habitat mapping of wetland and semi natural habitats of high ecological value outside the land owned by the Local Authority but within the Special Area of Conservation boundary of Lough Ennell, Co. Westmeath	To carry out an initial desktop review of the survey area and the habitat surveying of areas of high ecological value to Fossitt level 3 and assess their ecological status.	Survey complete, report produced, GIS layer of all habitats identified during survey, results from survey and conservation assessments will be added to the Co Westmeath Wetlands Map GIS and site database

Table 4 Assistance to Community Groups in the development of Studies outside Open Call



5.5 GAA Green Club Programme



Figure 12 GAA Green Clubs illustration of club grounds

Figure 8 Water theme club graphic

The GAA Green Club Programme is a partnership between the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association and local authorities across Ireland. This partnership has its origins in the Sustainable Development Goals Champions Programme launched by the Department of Communication, Climate Action, and Environment in September 2019. Both the GAA and Carlow County Council were among the twelve inaugural SDG Champions and their initial collaboration led to the signing of a Green Club Memorandum of Understanding between the Local Authority County and City Management Association (CCMA) and the Gaelic Games organisations and an ongoing-working relationship between the GAA and the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs).

The Green Club Programme was established to support Gaelic Games clubs in taking simple and effective sustainability action in their grounds and activities. The Programme is structured around the themes of Water, Biodiversity, Waste, Energy and Travel & Transport and is designed to promote sustainability awareness and action in GAA clubs and communities.

Phase 1 of the Green Club Programme will run from 2021 to 2023 with the participation of over 30 clubs from across Ireland. In 2021, these trail-blazing Green Clubs established Green Teams, carried out club audits and engaged in exciting sustainability partnerships and projects.

LAWPRO is an expert partner to provide guidance and expertise on the water and biodiversity themes. Our Communities Team has engaged with a number of clubs in order to help them on

their journey, and we continue to visit and advise clubs, and to guide clubs in taking water and biodiversity actions in and around their grounds. The goal of Phase 1 is to develop the GAAs first ever Green Clubs Toolkit.

In Phase 2 an additional 75 Clubs representing all 32 counties will be selected to participate in a structured Green Club Programme in 2023 and 2024. The Green Club initiative will roll out to all clubs beyond Phase 2.

LAWPRO participates in the GAA Green Clubs Steering Committee; has developed and supported the content for the water section of the toolkit which is in development; and is supporting Phase 1 clubs with support and advice, and seed funding via a Water Action Fund, administered by the GAA.

5.6 Communications and Engagement

Information on water quality science and policy is continually improving and evolving. Thus, LAWPRO must continually update and revise its messaging to ensure it remains meaningful and relevant in engagements with collaborative agencies, water stakeholders and communities.

The LAWPRO Communications Working Group developed a revised Catchment Illustration and 17 associated community actions. These were developed into a suite of marketing assets for outreach and engagement activities in 2021, including the public consultation on the Draft River Basin Management plan for Ireland 2022-2027....



Figure 13 Main catchment illustration 2021

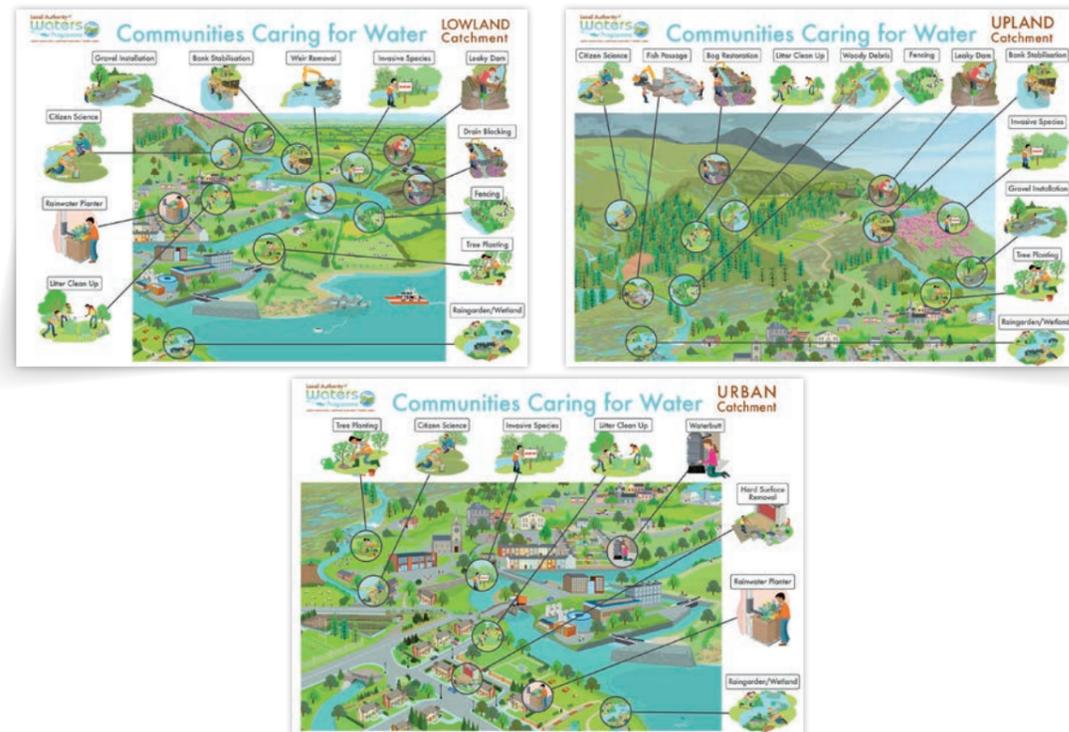


Figure 14 Upland, Lowland, and Urban catchments with community actions

5.7 Communities Caring for Water Conference



Figure 16 Conference online portal

The Communities Caring for Water Conference 2021 was held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The conference was attended by over 233 people and was live streamed online and afterwards a recording was made available on Communities Caring for Water 2021 Conference

The theme of the conference this year was 'River Trusts and Catchment Communities' and this provided an opportunity to hear from communities across the country caring for their local waters and sharing their experience and learnings. Their personal stories, enthusiasm, passion and creativity was inspiring, and the conference participants demonstrated the ground swell of interest in our rivers and wildlife. Local champions described the catalyst or spark that led them to work with their river, how they harnessed local interest, the challenges they faced and what worked well for them. The water and biodiversity theme is one that has been adopted by Tidy Towns groups with many wonderful projects now underway.

5.8 World Wetlands Day – Stories from the Waterside

Stories from the Waterside is a unique collection of short stories celebrating peoples' connections with Ireland's rivers, lakes and beaches. This initiative was a partnership between LAWPRO, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Heritage Council, and the Heritage Officers Programme and was established during the first Covid 19 lockdown in 2020. A book featuring the winning stories of this national story writing competition, with a focus on water, was published during Heritage Week last year. In response to the high volume of requests from the story writers to publish all of the stories, LAWPRO have now published all of these stories in a dedicated website which is available at www.storiesfromthewaterside.ie. All stories can be searched by county, folklore, wildlife, waterbody type or waterbody name.

To coincide with World Wetlands Day 2021, an evening of story reading from Stories from the Waterside repertoire was held. This event, hosted by popular radio presenter Jim Finn and a panel from LAWPRO proved extremely popular with over 100 people attending on the night.



Figure 15 LAWPRO community leaflet 2021

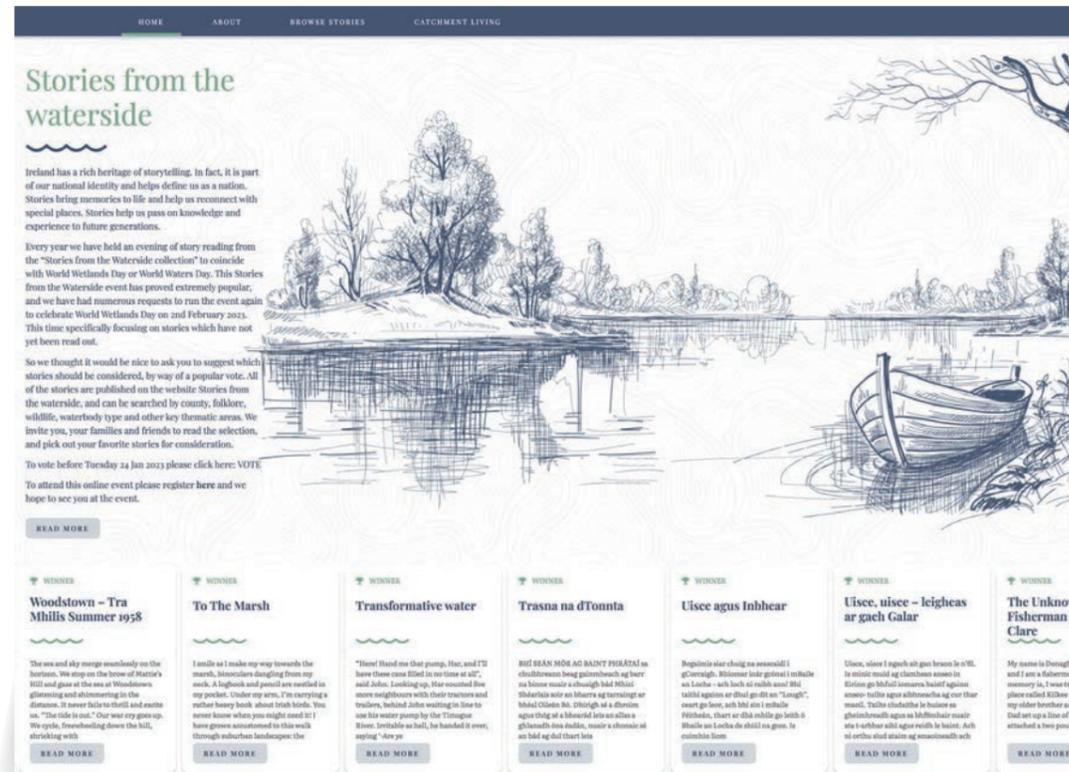


Figure 17 Stories from The Waterside website

5.9 Reimagining Irish Rivers Conference

LAWPRO was a partner with Limerick Co. Council (European Green Leaf) Mary Immaculate College (UL), The Rivers Trust and the Maigue Rivers Trust to deliver this two-day conference to celebrate World Water Day 2021. The central theme was to reimagine Irish rivers through working with nature. The event featured leading experts, practitioners and community groups connected with rivers. There will be opportunities for deeper participation and discussion during Q&A sessions.



Figure 18 Conference main image

The conference looked at how nature can guide us in planning projects to restore rivers and manage the pressures affecting them from human activities. We can also learn from the experiences of societies and civilisations that co-exist with nature rather than against it. This is fundamental if we are to influence the changes to address the causes of the water, biodiversity, and climate crises. Learning, changing, and adapting are all needed for resilient communities to flourish in a sustainable future.

Theme for Day 1: River Restoration, Management, and Biodiversity

The central theme, 'Working with Nature and Natural Places', will set the context for the event.

Day 2: Communities & Rivers

Focused on the work of two Rivers Trusts in Ireland and four locally led water catchment based European Innovation Projects.

To conclude, there will be a focus on developments in Citizen Science, including the launch of the newly developed approach for aquatic invertebrate monitoring.

5.10 Water Heritage Day



Figure 19 Water Heritage Day event with Inland Waterways Association Ireland at the Grand Canal, Dublin.

Water Heritage Day is an intrinsic part LAWPRO's annual calendar of activities. It provides opportunities for Community Water Officers, in collaboration with Heritage Officers, to support local groups deliver events for National Heritage Week that focus on local water heritage. Water Heritage Day places a national focus on the importance of water, reinforcing the message that water is not a commercial product like any other, but a heritage that must be protected for the multiple benefits it provides.

The theme for 2021 was 'Open the door to Heritage', which sought to get as many people as possible to enjoy heritage, especially 'heritage newcomers.' Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions in 2021, the Heritage Council promoted a combination of both online and in-person events.

LAWPRO and the Heritage Council met in March 2021, to discuss arrangements and plans for National Heritage Week. This resulted in an expansion of the agreement, with LAWPRO sponsoring the Water Heritage Award. The award was won by Suircan Environmental from Clonmel, Co. Tipperary for their eDNA Citizen Science project on the River Suir, which saw over forty volunteers take part in a water sampling project.



Figure 20 National Heritage Week Awards 2021 with Water Heritage Winners Suircan

5.11 Tidy Towns Special Awards

There was a high number of entries to the competition in 2021 with 55 applications received from across the country. The standard of application was exceptional, and it was a very difficult assessment process.

All entries were assessed by a panel of judges appointed by Inland Fisheries Ireland, Waterways Ireland and the Local Authority Waters Programme. The judges assessed each application for initiatives undertaken since the start of the pandemic. Based on the following criteria:

1. **Awareness-Raising** about the community group's local water body **(15 Marks)**
2. **Community Involvement** (e.g., by schools, landowners or other groups) **(20 Marks)**
3. **Stakeholder Engagement** with the Local Authority, Local Development Company or any public agencies in developing the project **(15 Marks)**
4. **Project Benefits:** long-term benefits to the environment and local community **(40 Marks)**
5. **Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future** **(10 Marks)**

Delgany Tidy Towns who were announced overall winner of the Waters and Communities Special Award at the SuperValu Tidy Towns awards ceremony held in the RDS. In their application, the group demonstrated a great appreciation for their water environment and water heritage by undertaking innovative initiatives during the Pandemic and were worthy winners.



Figure 22 Young volunteers with Delgany Tidy Towns



Water Heritage Day, Sunday 22nd Aug 2021

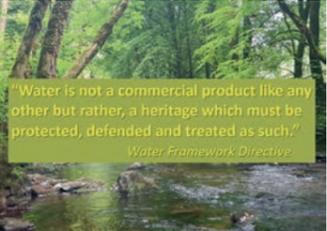
A nationwide celebration of water as heritage

As an island nation, our history and heritage have been shaped by the sea and the great Irish rivers, lakes and wetlands.

Water Heritage Day Sunday, 22nd August is an opportunity to celebrate water and our connections with it. It is a collaboration between the **Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)** and **The Heritage Council**.

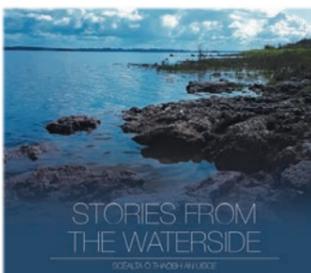
Community Water Officers work with local authority **Heritage Officers** to support local groups deliver activities and events that celebrate local water bodies and our connections with them.

Water Heritage Day focusses on getting as many people as possible involved to celebrate water and enjoy the natural heritage of their localities.



Last year, in response to public health guidelines relating to COVID-19, National Heritage Week moved away from events only, and invited online heritage projects.

LAWPRO and partners delivered a story writing competition called **Stories from the Waterside**. A selection of stories from c500 entries was published in a book and launched to mark **Water Heritage Day 2020**.



To organise an event **contact** your local Community Water Officer [Here](#)

For more information and events visit <https://www.heritageweek.ie/>




Figure 21 Water Heritage Day poster presented at the EPA Water conference online

5.12 LEADER Training

The goals of improving water quality and addressing biodiversity loss are enshrined in EU legislation and programmes, and this includes the EU LEADER programme. To this end LAWPRO has been working with LEADER implementing bodies and the Department of Rural and Community Development to combine expertise and resources to deliver a timely and relevant training programme that will benefit local communities and groups interested in the protection and enhancement of their surrounding natural environment. Building on previous initiatives including the LEADER Biodiversity and Water Guidance, LAWPRO Community Water Development Fund and LEADER funded projects, training modules were developed by LAWPRO focusing on the themes of water quality, biodiversity and climate change.

This template of modules and resource materials was developed through a pilot project with IRD Duhallow drawing from earlier LEADER and LAWPRO training initiatives. The focus was very much on the local context, bringing community participants on a training journey along which they learned about the nature and uniqueness of their local water assets, the challenges and opportunities that community-led water stewardship presents and how communities can go about protecting their local water bodies. This includes increasing knowledge on important catchment characteristics, pressures facing the water quality and health of their local water bodies, agencies involved, networking, the information tools available to communities and how to develop locally focussed restoration and water quality protection projects.

Completion of the training increases understanding and capacity within communities and readies participants to take advantage of the next LEADER funding programme.

LAWPRO has undertaken considerable work in the animation and promotion of these Rural Development themes, working with both the implementing bodies and the Local Community Development Committee Chief Officers. This training initiative can be localised and delivered at the level of each Local Action Group, thereby supporting the delivery of the Rural Development Programme.

The training has two main elements and will continue into 2022:

1. A series of online webinars or training modules
2. A practical element at a local waterbody

Completion of the training modules will provide communities with the knowledge and skills necessary for planning and delivering locally led projects. There is also an emphasis on citizen science and data collection that can help build greater understanding of water quality and biodiversity, both locally and nationally.

This approach will ensure communities are well placed to access funding under the next Rural Development Programme 2022 – 2027, which coincides with the next River Basin Management Plan for Ireland under the EU Water Framework Directive.

In 2021, a total of 20 Local Action Groups have rolled out the training and the Rural and Community Development have been in discussion with LAWPRO with a view to expanding out the training in the next LEADER programme. The training also had a key focus on Blue Dot High Status Objective waterbodies where these occurred with the Local Action Group area.

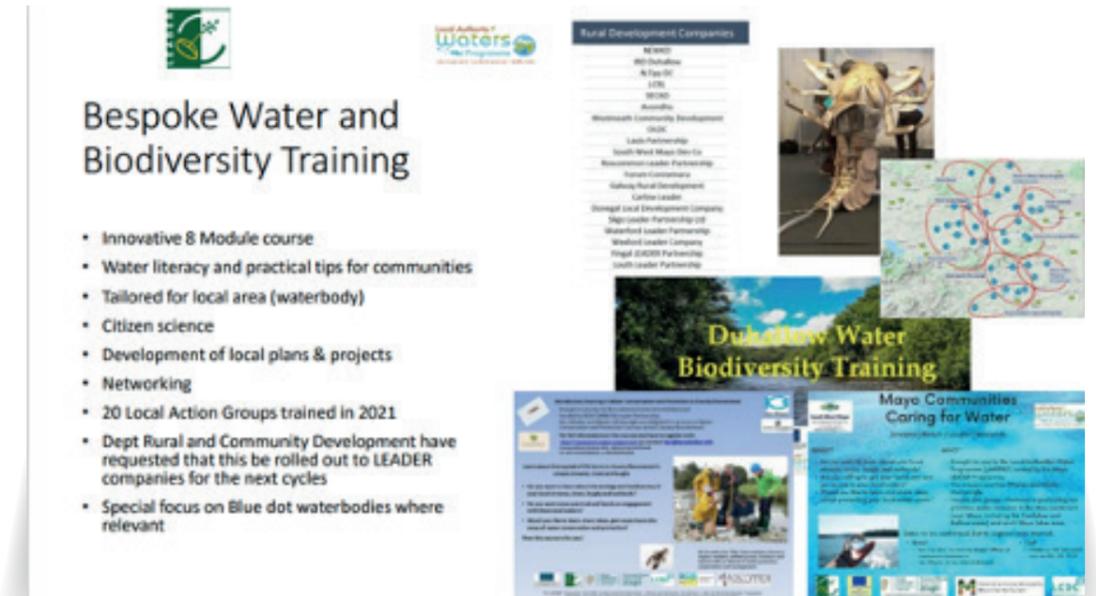


Figure 23 LEADER Training

5.13 Catchment Science and Management Training

A significant piece of work started by the Catchments Team in 2021 was the revision of a training manual previously known as the Local Catchment Assessment – Guidance on Further Characterisation. This manual was developed in 2018 by the EPA Catchments Unit, reflecting a collaborative effort between invited specialists from several stakeholders with responsibility and vested interests in environmental research and management in Ireland. The training manual and associated course was primarily intended for use by the new LAWPRO Catchments Team and staff in Local Authorities tasked with undertaking Local Catchment Assessments.

Since 2018, the work of LAWPRO in 189 Priority Areas for Action (PAAs), EPA Catchments Unit, ASSAP, EIP projects, NFGWS and others has expanded our knowledge of catchment science and management. It has also led to the conclusion that the approaches used by LAWPRO, and the EPA Catchments Unit need to become more prevalent among the public sector bodies with responsibilities for the various interrelated environmental components, including water. Consultation between the Water Quality Section in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and LAWPRO led to funding being made available in 2021 to begin the process of training manual revisions which was coordinated by LAWPRO, with support from the EPA Catchments Unit.

The Guidance Handbook consists of the following volumes:

- Volume 1:** An Overview of Catchment Science and Management
- Volume 2:** Pressures and Catchment Walks.
- Volume 3:** Observed Indicator Features and Catchments Walks.
- Volume 4:** Measured Indicator Parameters and Catchment Walks.
- Volume 5:** Urban Catchment Assessments.

Delivery of training was rolled out in 2022.

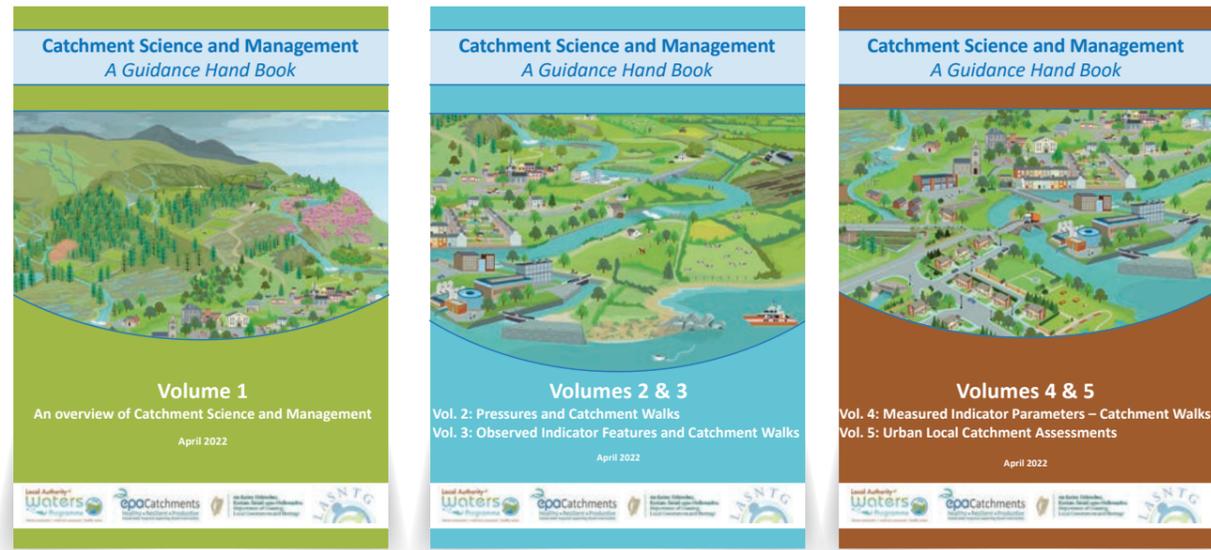


Figure 24 Catchment Science and Management Handbook cover pages

5.14 Deel Spatially Targeted Buffers EIP

This European Innovation Partnership (EIP) project catchment area covers two headwaters in the Deel (Newcastle West) river system, both of which are situated within the Upper Deel Priority Area for Action (PAA). They are poorly draining catchments with intensive agriculture.

The project focus is on spatially targeting biodiversity measures and extending nutrient (organic and inorganic) application buffer zones in focused flow delivery zones, to intercept runoff of phosphate and sediment from critical source areas, to help achieve our WFD objectives. This innovative approach to the sizing and siting of buffer zones and biodiversity measures could optimise benefits for water quality and aquatic biodiversity more effectively than the current 'one size fits all' approach in the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations. Results are expected to improve aquatic biodiversity, terrestrial biodiversity, and water quality in the project catchment, and to reduce the requirement for channel maintenance under the OPW drainage scheme, thus further enhancing aquatic biodiversity.

The project aims to provide solid evidence of the value of this targeted approach to manage buffer zones and biodiversity measures in critical source areas, and it will deliver real examples on demonstration farms for wider knowledge transfer. The project has included the use of autosamplers and flow meters to estimate loadings from storm events to better understand phosphate transport on the wider landscape.

This one-year project finished at the end of 2022 with the implementation of several on-farm measures within the two catchments. Monitoring will continue however, as the Upper Deel is proposed as an expanded Area for Action for the 3rd River Basin Management Cycle which will inform over time, the efficacy of on-farm measures.



Figure 25 Wetland construction as part of the Deel EIP

5.15 Lough Carra – the journey towards LIFE

Lough Carra

LAWPRO Catchment Scientists have been actively working within the Lough Carra catchment since 2018 which forms part of the greater PAA which includes the Lough Mask catchment. Lough Carra is 15.6 km² in area, mostly shallow, with 3 distinct but connected basins fed by small rivers and groundwater from throughout a catchment area of more than 100km². The lake is important for the provision of drinking water, fish stocks, recreational activities, and tourism. It forms part of the Lough Carra/Mask Complex Special Areas of Conservation and Lough Carra Special Protection Area, which are designated for nine Annex 1 habitats. It contains a variety of charophyte communities and an extensive visible covering of the lake bed and rocks with a rare calcareous encrustation. The lake is one of the most important and extensive examples of Marl Lake habitat in Ireland and in Europe.

LAWPRO's engagement and support to the Lough Carra Catchment Association and Lough Carra LIFE Project

The Communities Team of LAWPRO were instrumental in providing financial support and guidance towards the establishment of the Lough Carra Catchment Assessment (LCCA) in April 2018. A number of staff members from Co-ordinator, Community Water Officer and Catchment Scientists have become members and attended regular meetings, and regularly provide updates on our work within the PAA. The LCCA have secured Community Water Development funding each year for awareness initiatives, administrative cost support and some on the ground water quality measures such as fencing off sections of watercourses and the provision and installation of solar powered drinking water troughs for animals.

Figure 26 Lough Carra – showing calcareous encrustations on its rocky lake floor and shores



LAWPRO have provided support and shared our work with consultants for the LIFE bid during two rounds of applications for LIFE funding between 2019 and 2021, the second of which was successful in 2021. Sharing of LAWPRO's interim findings from local catchment assessments helped to strengthen the bid in the focus area of water measures implementation. LAWPRO also provided written support at application stage.

Scope and proposed objectives of the Lough Carra LIFE Project

Lough Carra has been studied extensively in recent decade by ecologists, universities, state bodies, and other interested groups, and many signs of deterioration have been highlighted such as decline of Charophyte cover, greening of the unique marl crust, increase in Chlorophyll concentrations, water colour has become less clear, invertebrate and fish populations have changed.

LIFE Lough Carra's overall mission is about improving ecosystem resilience and reducing nutrient pollution in Carra. The LIFE Project aims to work with local farmers, landowners, and community groups, to restore the Marl Lake habitat of the lake, and to improve the conservation status of other habitats and species within the lake catchment area.

Key actions of the project will include:

- The development and administration of a pilot Results Based Agri-environment Scheme, specifically adapted for farmers in the Lough Carra catchment.
- A Groundwater study of the Lough Carra catchment, focusing on groundwater/surface water connectivity, and subsequent identification of the full catchment area, to help target nutrient-management measures.
- Purchase a small area of land on or near the lake shore, for the purposes of demonstration and conservation activities, including wetland construction, habitat restoration, and associated training courses.
- The restoration and management of woodlands, wetlands, and drains in the catchment.
- Habitat enhancement for key species, and controls of invasive species.
- A monitoring programme of the project impacts.
- Knowledge exchange, public outreach, and awareness campaign.

The Project which secured €5 million of EU LIFE funding started in September 2021 and will run until September 2026. The project is coordinated by Mayo County Council, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey of Ireland, Coillte and the Local Carra Catchment Association. LAWPRO are one of a number of supporting partners on the project and have committed to support the objectives of the project, will share findings from local catchment assessment work within the PAA, and support community participation and other mutually beneficial actions in the project. For more, see [Lough Carra LIFE](#).

5.16 Proof of Concept work in Focus – Silver River

The Silver Kilcormac PAA was the first area for action that underwent local catchment assessment in 2018. The PAA consists of four waterbodies, all of which were assigned moderate ecological status (2013-2018) by the EPA. As agriculture was deemed the significant pressure in the Silver Kilcormac_020 waterbody, it was selected as one of 13 “Proof of Concept” Waterbodies nationally by LAWPRO and the EPA Catchments Unit. These waterbodies were selected as a safe space to learn and to further refine the LAWPRO/ASSAP approach and to work out how best to demonstrate and communicate that the right action in the right place has been identified and implemented. Community engagement was initiated by the Community Water Officer through a Community Meeting on the 19th of November 2018 in St. Joseph’s Community Centre which was subsequently followed up by a streamside event for the agricultural community led by the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP). Key stakeholders and partnerships were identified at both meetings by the Community Water Officer, ASSAP and the Science Teams which included Kilcormac Local Development Association, the community groups, the various farm organisations, Inland Fisheries Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Public Works, and Bord Na Móna. Local catchment assessment work was initiated in spring 2019. Monthly sampling of water quality was initiated at Ballynacarrig Bridge monitoring point to track improvements as there was no operational chemistry for the waterbody.

Fieldwork and local catchment walks were completed by 2021. Agriculture was confirmed to be the significant pressure. The catchment walks identified several agricultural related issues, these included point sources of pollution (the most significant pressure), lack of set-back distances and vegetative buffers, animal access points. ASSAP engaged with these farmers and got several the measures implemented on a voluntary basis. Examples of the measures implemented were removal of point sources of pollution, improved setback for the spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers and removal of stockpiles of silt upstream of high-status objective monitoring point (RS25C210100) to protect the high biological status objective (Q4-5).

The EPA assessed the waterbody in 2021 and noted the improvements in biology at Ballynacarrig Bridge and the Black River which both returned to Q4 Good Water Quality and the monitoring Bridge Upstream of County Bridge (RS25C210100) remained at high biological status (Q4-5). This resulted in the overall ecological status for the waterbody to improve from Moderate (2016-2021) to Good (2013-2021) and the waterbody is now meeting its objectives under the Water Framework Directive.



Figure 27 Ballynacarrig Bridge is the last biological monitoring station for the Silver (Kilcormac)_020 waterbody which was assigned Good Biological status by the EPA in 2021 after 10 years at moderate biological status.

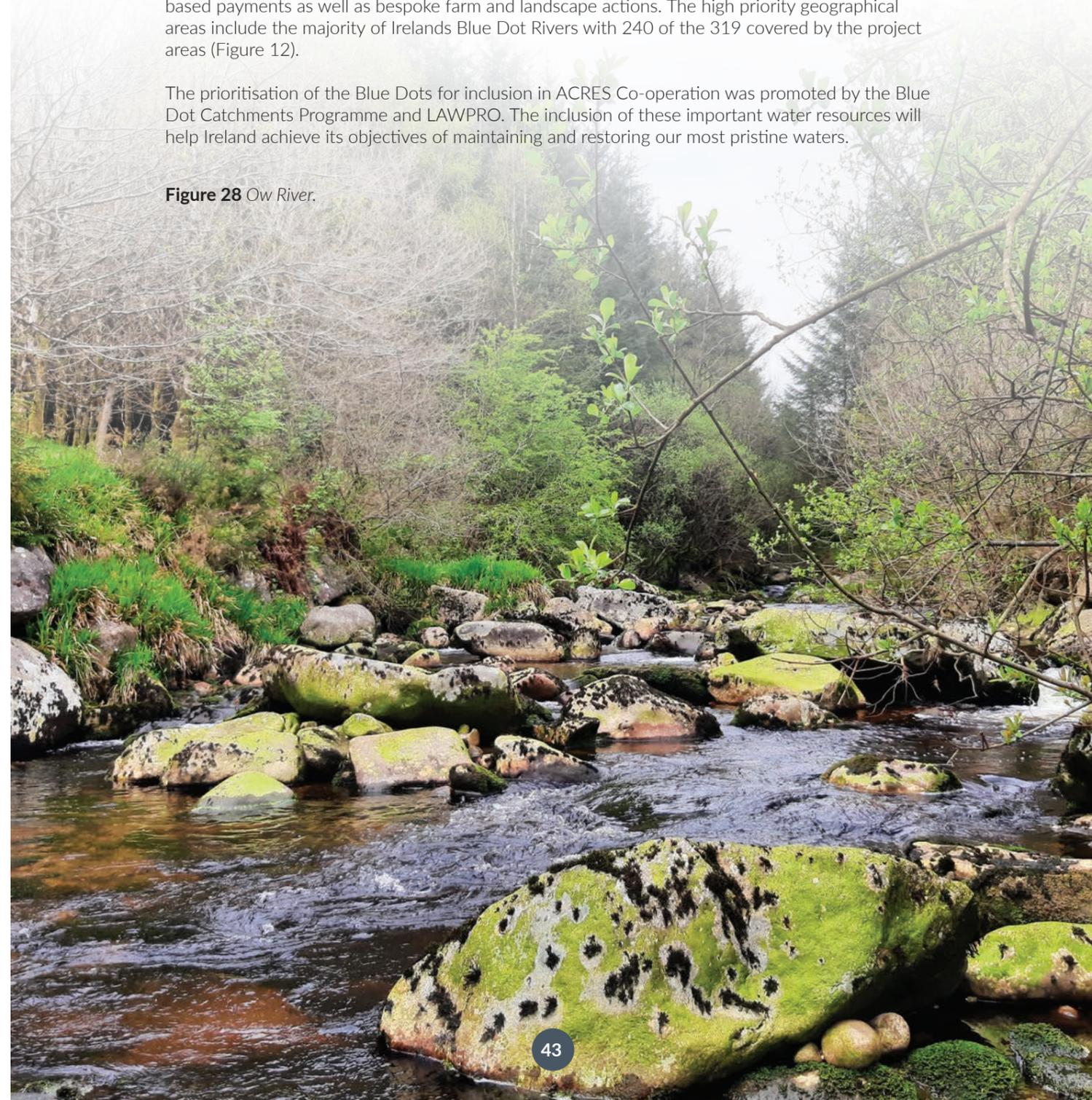
5.17 Blue Dot Catchments Programme & ACRES Co-operation Project Area Selection

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) is Ireland’s agri-environment climate scheme under the CAP Strategic Plan. This €1.5 billion flagship scheme is a farmer-friendly scheme to help address biodiversity and water quality declines while delivering an income support for farm families.

The scheme is divided into two streams, ACRES General and ACRES Co-operation. ACRES Co-operation is available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas and involves results-based payments as well as bespoke farm and landscape actions. The high priority geographical areas include the majority of Ireland’s Blue Dot Rivers with 240 of the 319 covered by the project areas (Figure 12).

The prioritisation of the Blue Dots for inclusion in ACRES Co-operation was promoted by the Blue Dot Catchments Programme and LAWPRO. The inclusion of these important water resources will help Ireland achieve its objectives of maintaining and restoring our most pristine waters.

Figure 28 Ow River.





vibrant communities | catchment assessment | healthy waters