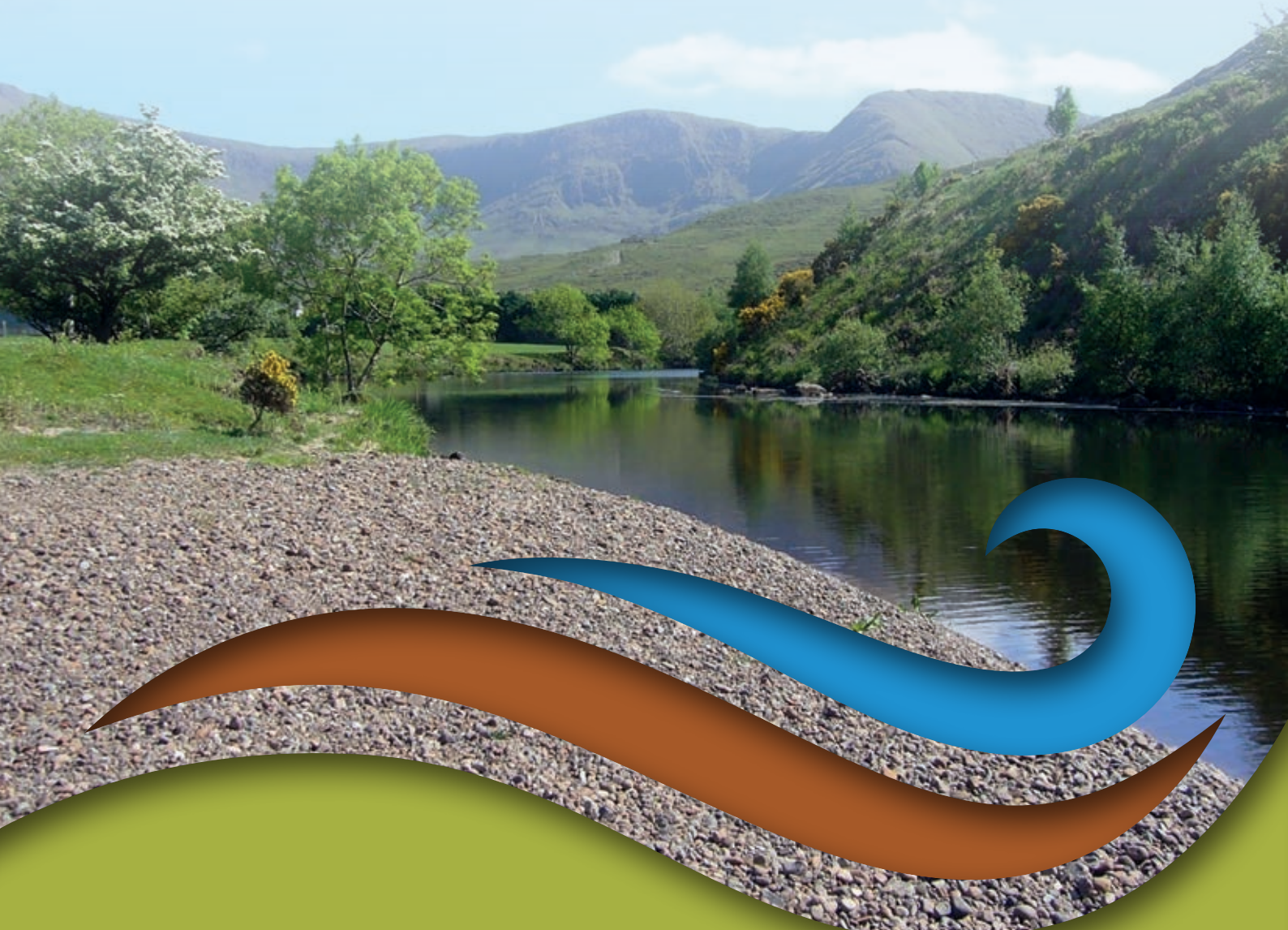




vibrant communities | catchment assessment | healthy waters



Local Authority
Waters Programme
Annual Report 2022



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DIRECTOR OF SERVICES STATEMENT

The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) establishes a framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater. It aims to prevent and reduce pollution, promote sustainable water use, protect and improve the aquatic environment and mitigate the effects of floods and droughts. The overall objective is to achieve good environmental status for all waters.

The WFD objectives are implemented through River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) and Programmes of Measures (POMs), reviewed and adopted every 6 years. The European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2014 gave effect to a new three tier governance framework and placed new obligations on local authorities in coordinating the catchment management and public participation elements of the WFD. The 2014 Regulations assign responsibility to local authorities for regional coordination, public participation, and support to the EPA and Minister in the development and implementation of RBMPs and POMs.

In response to these increased responsibilities, the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) operate as a national WFD office enabling these new obligations to be delivered on behalf of all local authorities, while providing support in catchment assessment, community engagement and community development. LAWPRO is a local government national shared service, funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH). Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils jointly manage LAWPRO.

LAWPRO has many strategic roles, however a key role, which was a priority for the Programme in 2022 was coordination of statutorily required public consultation in development of the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022 – 2027, on behalf of the Minister.

LAWPRO led a local programme of public consultation and engagements to gather feedback on the draft RBMP and local water quality issues during 2022. Local public consultation is an important exercise, it is required by the WFD (Article 14). Covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings continued to affect operations in the early part of 2022, therefore the opportunity to host in-person public meetings was not possible. 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.

During the local consultations, LAWPRO used a range of tools to gather feedback. Following the collation of over 400 submissions, a thematic analysis was carried out on the participant responses. The overall aim of the submissions analysis was to delve into the detail of participants' responses and obtain learnings to influence the third cycle RBMP. The learnings from this public consultation will contribute to strategies to protect and improve water quality both at community and public body level.

Preparation for the third cycle is well underway within the Programme, with a review of new RBMP actions assigned or enhancement of existing functions for LAWPRO being progressed. These include:

- Further activation, development and support of local level initiatives (rivers trusts, catchment partnerships).
- Restoration works to be advanced in 427 areas where environmental objectives are not being met.
- Protection measures to be progressed in 85 areas, that are meeting their environmental objectives but require protection to ensure their water quality does not deteriorate.
- Catchment projects aimed at improving water quality to be advanced in 15 areas.
- LAWPRO, in consultation with stakeholders, to produce templates for the catchment management plans that will be put in place for each of the 46 hydrometric catchments.
- The Blue Dot Programme to draft a detailed work plan for waters with a High-Status Objective, with a view to them forming part of the proposed local catchment plans.
- Evaluate the outcome of the Resilience Project for Rivers Trusts to inform future community engagement initiatives.
- Examine ways in which further support can be provided for the formation and capacity building of local forums to help identify and implement measures.
- Conduct assessments of water bodies with unknown pressures in priority areas for action to identify the significant pressures in these areas with a high level of confidence.

Other important actions which have implications for LAWPRO and Local Authorities include:

- DHLGH: Consideration will be given to extending and expanding LAWPRO and ASSAP to support the implementation of the new CAP Strategic Plan. There will be an increased focus on sustainability across the entire farm advisory service (both Teagasc and private advisory services). This may include a role in the preparation of Farm Sustainability Plans.
- LAs/EPA: Local authorities and the EPA, through the NIECE network, will ensure that compliance assurance (including enforcement) actions for agricultural activities will be further enhanced and ensure that there is an increased targeting of inspections by local authorities based on water quality results, critical source areas and the EPA's PIP Maps.
- DHLGH: DHLGH to amend the existing Bathing Water Regulations (S.I. No. 79 of 2008) to provide discretion to local authorities on determining the bathing season for individual bathing waters.
- LAESNTG: The Local Authority Environmental Services National Training Group (LAESNTG) will provide a training programme for catchment assessment and Integrated Catchment Management for the staff of local authorities and all implementing bodies.

Many other actions are included such as monitoring, sustainable urban drainage, nature-based solutions, drinking water protection etc. Coherence in service delivery is key, including with climate change, biodiversity and other national priorities.

While there is significant work and collaboration now taking place as part of implementation of the RBMP, we are still unfortunately facing a significant challenge to turn around the decline in our water quality in Ireland. The recent launch of the EPA Water Quality in Ireland 2016 – 2021 report shows only over half, 54% of our surface waters are in satisfactory ecological health being in either good or better ecological status. This means that at least half (46%) of the surface water bodies in Ireland are not as ecologically healthy or resilient as they should be. Our rivers and transitional waters in particular are suffering from continued and persistent declines. There was however some good news with a small increase in the number of high-status water bodies (38 additional water bodies) and a higher net improvement in river water quality in Priority Areas for Action than seen outside of these areas, indicating that when targeted action and collaborations are enhanced, improvements in water quality can be achieved.

Looking ahead we must take every opportunity to further develop our collaborative work and integrate our work programmes with the Climate Action Regional Offices and the new Climate Action Teams coming on board in Local Authorities. We will support the development of Local Authority Climate Action Plans. We also welcome enhanced resources for biodiversity officers and look forward to working closely with them.

In particular, we welcome and are supporting the review of Local Authority function delivery in the natural waters area, and the responsibilities under each function for which appropriate resources need to be assigned. The development of a Natural Waters Business Case by the County and City Management Association (CCMA) will seek to strengthen resources across several functions including agricultural inspections, bathing waters, drinking waters, and catchment assessment amongst other areas, to enable the better attainment of water quality outcomes. This may also include additional functions and resourcing for LAWPRO.

I am delighted to present this sixth annual report on the Local Authority Waters Programme. This report outlines some highlights from the work of LAWPRO in 2022 but is by no means a comprehensive update. I would encourage you to visit our website www.lawaters.ie, to learn more about our work. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Programme for their continued work and dedication.

Anthony Coleman

Anthony Coleman

Director of Services, LAWPRO and Tipperary County Council

1 [EPA_WaterQualityReport2016_2021.pdf](#)

① About LAWPRO



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 (DHLGH). Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils jointly manage LAWPRO.

Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives are implemented through River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) and Programmes of Measures (POMs), reviewed and adopted every 6 years. In July 2014, The Department of Environment, Community & Local Government (now DHLGH) issued the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2014, which gave effect to the three tier governance framework and placed new obligations on local authorities in coordinating the catchment management and public participation elements of the WFD. The 2014 regulations assigned responsibility to local authorities for regional coordination, public participation, and support to the EPA and Minister in the development and implementation of RBMPs and POMs. These responsibilities are in addition to longstanding water protection responsibilities delivered by local authorities.

In response to these increased responsibilities, LAWPRO operate as a national WFD office enabling these new obligations to be delivered on behalf of all local authorities, while providing support in catchment assessment, community engagement and community development.

The strategic role of the Local Authority Waters Programme is as follows:

- i.** To promote knowledge sharing and coordination in implementing RBMPs and POMs by local authorities, public authorities, sectoral interests and community groups.
- ii.** To coordinate/undertake statutorily required public consultation in development of the RBMPs and POMs on behalf of the Minister and a public awareness campaign in water resources management.
- iii.** To seek consistency of RBMP implementation across agencies.
- iv.** To assist the Minister and the EPA and work collaboratively with local authorities in the development of RBMPs and POMs.
- v.** To mobilise and support engagement of voluntary and community groups in protecting our natural waters.
- vi.** To foster linkages with industry and agricultural sectors.
- vii.** To develop linkages with local sectoral representative organisations such as Chamber(s) of Commerce, county level IFA, angling groups, tidy towns.

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 and their associated protected areas, as required by the WFD.

LAWPRO is working to identify the issues affecting water quality in multiple water bodies across the country. 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.

Further information about our Programme can be found online at:

[Local Authority Waters Programme - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie)



Figure 1 LAWPRO Team

② Strategic Objectives



Lough Conn

Water management in Ireland continued to evolve throughout the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for Ireland 2018 – 2021. In 2022, work continued 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 and their associated protected areas. 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 and catchments of Ireland.

LAWPRO’s Vision

Ireland’s water catchments, including our rivers, lakes, wetlands, estuaries, ground, and coastal waters, are healthy, vibrant, and biodiverse places. Cared for and protected by public bodies, water users, and local communities.

LAWPRO has several roles and responsibilities assigned to it as a Programme, with specific actions to be delivered under the RBMP. The Programme’s role and responsibilities have increased since 2016, and this has informed the evolution of our strategic planning, and annual work programme 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, Community Participation, Catchment Science, Innovation, and Communication and Awareness.



Bundorragha River

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.

Table 1 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 serviced from our Head Office in 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 (retired October 2022)	Director of Service
Anthony Coleman - from November 2022	Director of Service
Carol McCarthy	Catchments Team Programme Lead
Margaret Keegan (from February 2022)	Regional Co-ordinator – Midlands and Eastern Region & Head Office Operations Manager
Bernadette White (from February 2022)	Regional Co-ordinator – Border and West Regions
Fran Igoe	Regional Co-ordinator – South East and South West Regions

Table 2 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 October 2022, LAWPRO Director Karl Cashen retired following a long career dedicated to Local Government service. LAWPRO would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Karl for his dedicated work and commitment to LAWPRO, for supporting the growth of LAWPRO and evolution of the programme during his time as Director, and for his continued support to the Programme in his retirement.

3.2 Head Office

LAWPRO 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 programme can be achieved. Head Office provides financial operations support, communications and marketing services, community funding services, 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 budget in 2022 was €8,368,736.

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 – The IT Administrative Officer provides continuous technical support for all the staff of LAWPRO and An Fóram Uisce. In 2022, technical support was also provided to the CCMA Review of Local Authority Natural Water Functions and Resources Project Team. We also provided advice and support to the Waters of Life Integrated Project, led by the DHLGH.

In 2022, a new interagency system was developed and launched for the mapping and sharing of Urban Renewal and Development Fund (URDF)/ and Rural Renewal and Development Fund (RRDF) and Active Travel projects. LAWPRO facilitated several webinars related to Nature Based Solutions in 2022 and were supported by this section.

Laptop and mobile hardware were replaced for 60% of staff with devices older than 5 years.

Several surveys were developed throughout 2022 to gather feedback from the public and agencies.

Technical support was provided for the Communities Caring for Water Conference 2022 which was a hybrid on site and livestreamed event.

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 WFD and RBMP. 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 and our team of Community Water Officers offer advice to local authorities, public bodies, and community groups on available funding streams.

A Community Water Development Fund (CWDF) was first introduced in 2018, funded by the DHLGH and administered by LAWPRO, and represents a commitment to strengthen the Local

Government role in public engagement and participation in water management. The CWDF aims to grant aid projects that will bring about an increased level of knowledge and awareness of water bodies and their water quality, increased engagement with our local waters, and projects that support the protection of water bodies, an increased understanding of how they function or restoration requirements. It aims to build community capacity in water related challenges, and help to support the work of a wide variety of groups across the country who have an interest in water.

The CWDF is discussed further under Section 5 below.

Environmental Health and Safety management system – In 2022 LAWPRO was successfully recertified to the ISO 45001 (Health and Safety Standard) and the ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) standards by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). This followed internal and external audits of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) system in May and June.

Due to changing personnel on both the Senior Management Team and Catchments Team, induction into EHS roles and responsibilities was undertaken.

The EHS work programme focused on a number of items in 2022. The health and safety focus was on wellbeing and mental health. This included a wellness day for staff that included talks on cancer awareness, mental wellbeing, physical and nutritional wellbeing as well as a talk on financial planning and pensions. The Employee Assistance Scheme offered by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils was also promoted throughout the year. A review of the personal protective equipment supplied to staff ahead of the start of the third cycle of the WFD was also undertaken. As a result of this review a procurement process was started for new PPE. Customised training for dealing with difficult clients was also developed and rolled out to staff.

The environmental management system progress saw the continued roll out of the green procurement policy and procedure and also the monitoring of water usage at head office at Ballingarrane, Co. Tipperary. Work on a biodiversity plan for the head office was also ongoing during 2022.

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 cover a range of disciplines, including environmental science, agricultural science, aquatic ecology, hydrogeology, and hydrology.

Name	Role
Gary O'Connell	Border Region
Margaret Keegan (up to February 2022) Eoin McAleer – from September 2022	Midlands and Eastern Region
Ruth Hennessy	South East Region
Maeve Ryan (up to July 2022) Niamh Rogan – from October 2022	South West Region
Bernadette White (up to February 2022) Cormac Mc Conigley – from October 2022	West Region & Blue Dot Catchments Programme Manager

Table 3 Catchment Managers

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

Local Catchment Assessments use chemical, biological and environmental information gathered by the Catchments Team or others to figure out what is causing impacts on waterbodies. This very often identifies highly complex issues affecting water quality across a range of sectors. LAWPRO then issues referrals on the problems identified and evidence collated, to the relevant implementing bodies, such as the Local Authority, EPA, Forest Service and Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), where related to agriculture.

More information on our catchment assessment work can be found at [Catchment Information - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](http://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 to be put in place by the implementation body or landowner, the WFD three-tiered governance structures are utilised (Figures 1 and 2). 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 efforts to protect and restore good water quality in Ireland, through its contribution of detailed water body characterisation (scientific evidence to inform measures implementation). 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.



3.4 Communities Team

A core aim of LAWPRO is to engage communities in caring for local water bodies through active participation 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's Communities Team at Cabragh wetlands

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.

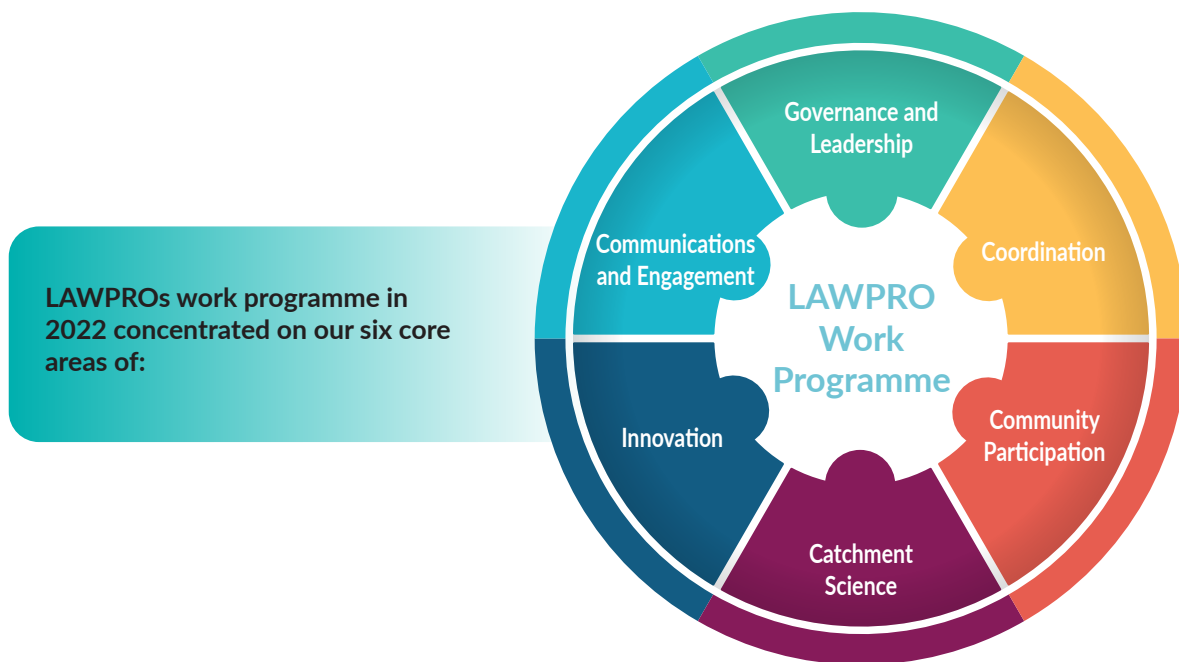
Our Communities Team leads on the delivery of several key elements of LAWPRO's work programme, including:

- The Community Water Development Fund, which supports community groups to enhance the quality of local streams, rivers, lakes and coastal areas, or raise awareness/water literacy about local waters. The fund is in place since 2018, 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 with an emphasis on Water Heritage Day to promote an appreciation of water features as part of our natural heritage. 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 encourage communities and stakeholders to integrate Nature-based solutions into the urban and rural fabric to improve surface water management from water quality, flood risk, biodiversity and climate perspectives. The public can play an important role in the delivery of Nature-based solutions and often champion them within their local community.
- Citizen science enables communities to participate in the collection water quality samples and assist in monitoring. This can compliment formal agency monitoring programmes and provide additional data to tell the story of water in local communities. Data collected by citizen scientists can be accessed at: [Citizen Science - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie).

4

LAWPRO's Work Programme





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.

<p>Tier 1 National Management and Oversight</p>	<p>Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</p>	<p>Policy, necessary legislation and resourcing the Plan. Supported by the Water Policy Committee which has been established to assist the Minister.</p>
<p>Tier 2 Technical implementation and reporting</p>	<p>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)</p>	<p>The catchment characterisation process, overseeing the national monitoring programme, chairing the National Technical Implementation Group and assisting and advising the Minister.</p>
<p>Tier 3 Regional Implementation</p>	<p>Local Authorities / LAWPRO</p>	<p>Co-ordinating the implementation of measures on the ground, and the knowledge required for successful delivery of many potential measures.</p>

Figure 1 WFD Tiered Governance Structure as per Water Policy Regulations 2014

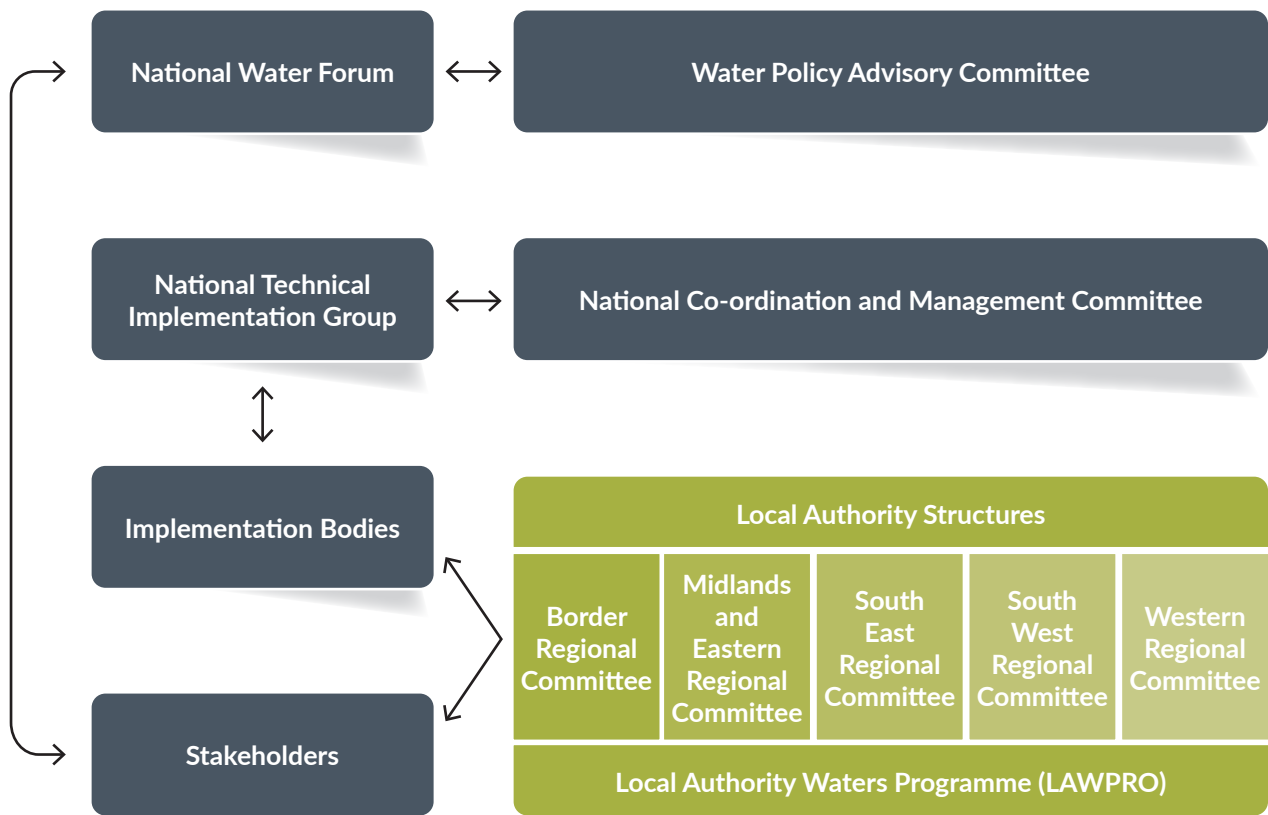


Figure 2 WFD implementation structures and their interactions

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

- Nature-based surface water management implementation strategy
- DMURS NBS advice note working group
- NBS project intervisibility working group
- Project Steering Groups e.g.: Pearl Mussel Project European Innovation Partnership Steering Committee
- Project Steering Groups e.g.: 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. Information on the committees can be found here [Regional Committees - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](#), with access to meeting notes and associated documents which are being uploaded, retrospectively, and also going forward.

These local authority structures are central to tracking the evolution of the local catchment assessment approach and public participation throughout the 2nd cycle implementation of the WFD. A central part of the Regional Operational Committees 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.

Examples of issues discussed at the Regional Operational Committees include:

- WFD Characterisation
- RBMP & Significant Water Management Issues public consultation & feedback
- LAWPRO & ASSAP updates
- Implementing body updates
- Intensification of Agriculture
- Marine issues
- Hydromorphology, land drainage, local drainage districts
- Planning/Blue Dots/Nature-based SuDS
- County Development Plans
- Forestry licensing and management issues
- Community engagement & funding
- Biosecurity (crayfish plague), Blue/Greenways
- Projects – e.g., water relevant European Innovation Projects, LEADER, Catchment CARE, Freshwater Pearl Mussel captive breeding project on the Portlaw Clodiagh, Community Water Development Fund Projects, Citizen science, Pearl Mussel Project, Wild Atlantic Nature, Waters of LIFE, Source to Tap etc.

Examples of issues raised to the National Technical Implementation Group include:

- Pesticides
- Sheep dip
- Movement of manures
- Norovirus
- Marine issues

These committees are important for a number of reasons. They allow for a coordinated approach to bringing the WFD to the relevant public bodies in fora where there is collective learning and knowledge sharing. LAWPRO and ASSAP bring updates in the Prioritised Areas for Action (PAAs) and outline progress (including for high status or Blue Dot waterbodies). The fora have allowed for the incorporation of local expertise together with scientific evidence to select Areas for Action going into the 3rd RBMP (2022-2027) during the latest characterisation process.

Issues on the ground are raised and discussed, actioned where possible at the local level. Where the issue is significant and needs to be actioned at a higher level, then this can be referred up through the governance structures as described above. A key benefit of these committees is the collective discussions, problem solving and provision of context to issues from the various sector perspectives. Going forward climate is also an issue that will need to be taken into account.

A strong focus for the third cycle implementation of the River Basin Management Plan will be on the tracking and effectiveness



Nire Valley hosts Regional Water Framework Directive Committee on the protection of Water Quality

THE Nire Valley and Ballymacarbery Community Centre provided the setting for the quarterly meeting of the SE Regional Operational Committee on Water Quality last Friday morning. Sean Agnew, local authority staff and local farmers to discuss issues affecting water quality in the South East Region and in Co. Waterford. Chaired by Director of Services, Pádraig Galvin of Waterford City and County Council and supported by the Local Authority Water Programme, the Operational Committee is one of five committees which supports Ireland's efforts to address the decline in water quality and protect public health and the valuable resource that clean water is for so all. The River Basin Management Plan is Ireland's road map through which the agencies try to resolve these issues and the meeting provides the opportunity to discuss and plan to meet them in a collective manner. Issues of concern discussed at the meeting included the protection of bathing and shellfish waters and public health along the Waterford coastline and actions that Irish Water are undertaking to protect water quality. Also attending the meeting were representatives of the upland farming community involved in the Crossagh European Partnership. Presentations were given by Mr. Owen Carton and Catherine Foley of Reggae on the challenges facing sheep farming in the Crossagh. The Crossagh RBP is the first time that farmers in Co. Waterford have been involved in looking at the management of the uplands with all of the resources available from the mountain provide. Sea level diversity and climate to cultural heritage. Helen Lawless of Mountainwise, Ireland launched a beautifully illustrated guide to the wildlife that can be encountered on the Crossagh Mountains, entitled "Walking with Wildlife". Helen outlined the importance of the mountains for everybody, both local and non-local and the need to look after them properly. The group made a site visit to the Nire valley to see the wonderful landscape and discuss the issues further through a "walking workshop". This included a discussion by HSE Donaghmore scientist with LAWPRO, Dr. Paul O'Callaghan of the aquatic invertebrates that live in streams that flow from the Nire valley lakes. The sample showed that there were lots of stone water - living things which is an indicator of good water quality, although there were signs of organic siltage which could be a sign of erosion from upland past. The group discussed the challenges facing this sensitive landscape from a variety of activities, not just farming but also walking and outdoor recreation. It was explained that uncontrolled fires can be a problem affecting not just wildlife such as nesting birds but can also cause problems for water quality and flooding. Prescribed burning (deliberate and safe) is a land management practice to rejuvenate abandoned or undergrazed dry heaths with overgrown heather in order to make the area suitable for sustainable grazing but fires also lead to the spread of undesirable plants such as heather and purple moor grass, which provide no nutrition to sheep compared to heather. It was recommended that there is a need to develop an overall high level strategy that would bring in wider policy, look at supports for the local community and focus on Agri-environment schemes for the benefit of the local economy and landscape of the Crossagh. As it stands the area is not meeting prescribed objectives under the EU River Framework Directive for water quality for the wildlife under the EU Habitat Directive. The River Nire is designated as a high status objective waterbody, meaning that it should have protection. 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Attending the SE Region Operational Committee Meeting in Ballymacarbery last Friday were from left to right: Dr. Paul Agnew, LAWPRO; Olympia Nugent, Department of Agriculture; Catherine Foley, Reggae; Catherine Keane, Reggae; Helen Lawless, Mountainwise Ireland; Neil Wall, Paddy Whelan; Liam Beersford and Owen Carton.

Field trip by the South East Regional Operational Committee to workshop issues impacting on water quality in the Nire Valley in Co. Waterford. Under consideration was the high nature value of the catchment areas, the high status objective of the local water bodies, well planned outdoor recreation, funding and sustainable landscape management and planning with the local community.



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 and within implementing bodies is key to delivering workplans and implementation of statutory functions, and this was strongly highlighted in all Regional Operational Management Committees by committee members.

For Local Authorities, 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 Pearl 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 the 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.

For additional information see here:

Minutes from the Water Policy Advisory Committee:

www.gov.ie/en/collection/ebabd-water-policy-advisory-committee-meetings

Documents from the Regional Management and Operational Committees:

<https://lawaters.ie/regional-committees/>

Minutes from the National Technical Implementation Group:

www.catchments.ie/download/wfd-national-technical-implementation-group/

The EPA-IPA Research Programme on Ireland's water governance arrangements resulted in two reports being published:

<https://www.catchments.ie/research-on-irelands-water-governance-arrangements/>

4.3 Community Participation and Catchment Science

Figures 3 and 4 provide an overview of metrics across various elements of LAWPRO’s work in 2022. 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 3 2022 Communities Team Activities



Figure 4 2022 Catchment Assessment Team Activities



LAWPRO staff attending macroalgal training in May 2022, Co Galway

5 Innovations, Initiatives & Highlights



5.1 Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 – Consultation Findings

LAWPRO delivered local level public consultation on the Draft RBMP to support the national public consultation process. The main objectives were to raise awareness of the Draft RBMP and water policy implementation structures, facilitate discussions on local water bodies, and encourage active involvement in the public consultation.

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.

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 consultation process.

→ **Municipal District level:** 63 public meetings at a local level were delivered by LAWPRO, supported by Local Authority staff and Elected Members. These meetings focussed on Municipal District boundaries to mobilise local communities in their local areas. This approach facilitated local involvement in a national consultation process. [RBMP Public Meetings 2022 - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie)

LAWPRO ran a media campaign across local and regional press and radio to disseminate water quality 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.

Engagement and reach

LAWPRO's ambition was to increase awareness of the Draft RBMP and engagement in the consultation process. It achieved this, as evidenced by the social media campaigns generating a reach of over 1,130,000 social media accounts and 60,000 link clicks to the VCR and meeting registration pages. A specific aim was to reach new audiences and a younger age demographic. Data from the social media campaigns show significant reach in age brackets between 18–44 for both male and female account holders. The age demographic for those who completed the online submission/survey form matches the profile for the general population in Ireland, indicative of a representative sample.

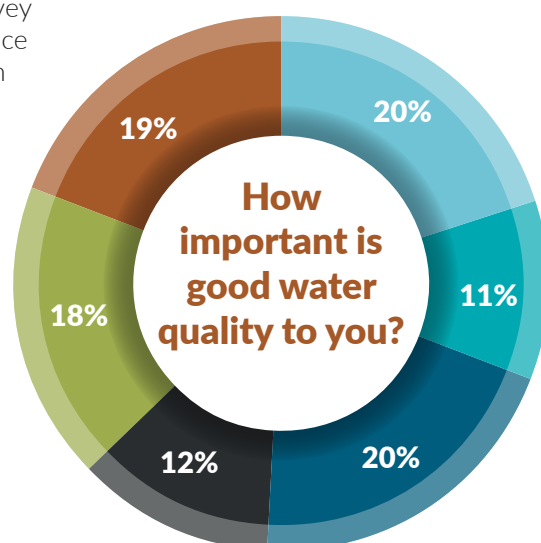
Attendances and submissions

LAWPRO successfully achieved its objective to engage local communities in the public consultation process. This is evidenced by 6,100 unique attendees in the VCR, 1,594 attendees at public meetings, and 450 local submissions, during a time of Covid-19 restrictions. In addition, Community Water Officers commented that in almost all cases there were good numbers of attendees at meetings not previously known to them. When compared to the consultation process for the 2nd Cycle RBMP, LAWPRO considers that there is now greater knowledge and understanding of water quality issues and policy objectives at a local level, as evident in the comments gathered at public meetings and feedback via local submissions.

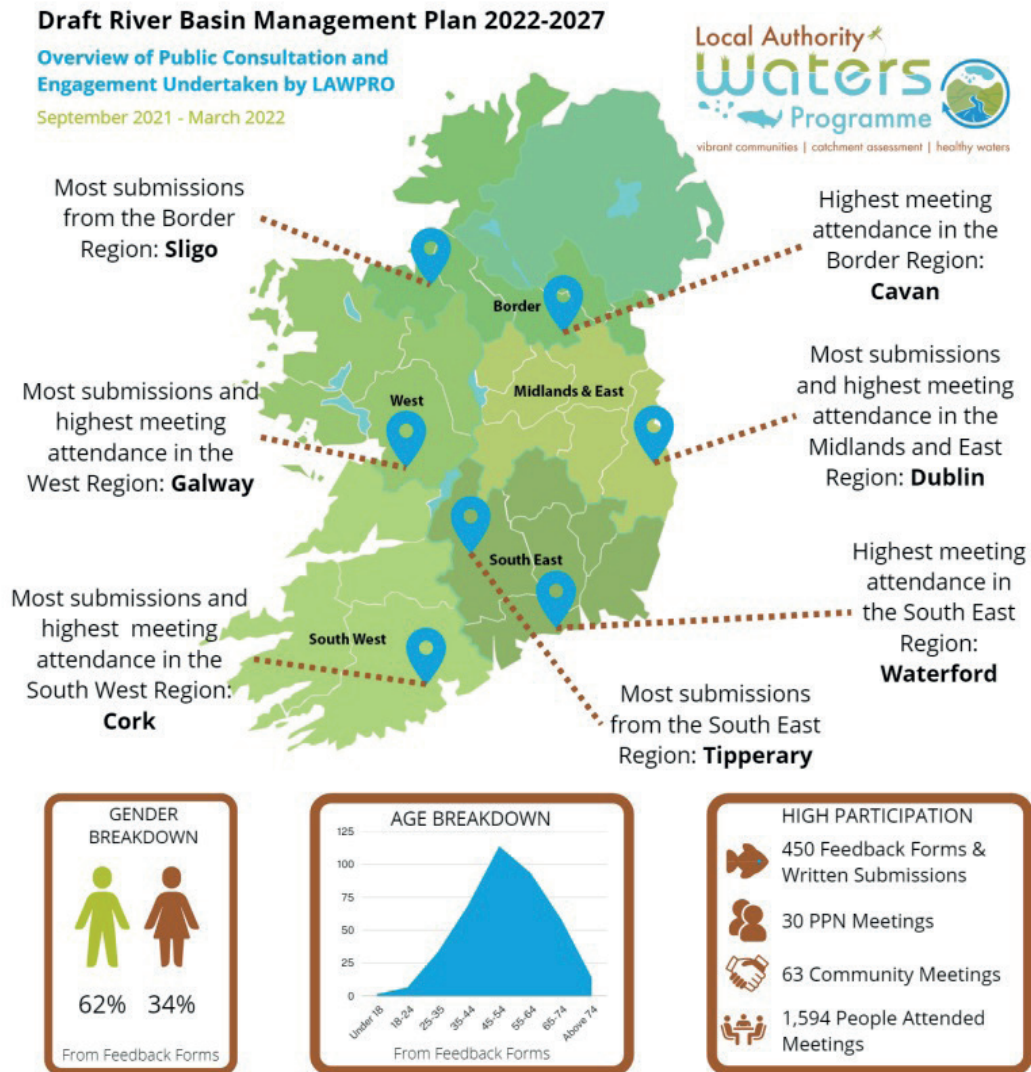
Public opinion on the importance of good water quality

Respondents to the LAWPRO local submission survey identified importance of good water quality was placed on 'Drinking water' and 'Nature and wildlife' with an interest in health and wellbeing and future use also of similar importance.

- Drinking Water 20%
- Supporting Jobs (manufacturing/Agriculture/ Tourism) 11%
- Nature and Wildlife 20%
- Sport and recreation 12%
- Supporting health and wellbeing 18%
- For future generations to enjoy 19%



Graph 1 The most important aspects of good water quality as ranked by respondents



Icons	Channel	Stats	Rationale
	Local Press	64 Press Releases 41 Meeting adverts	Total Readership 1,851,676 people
	Local/regional radio	21 sets of radio adverts	Total audience 3,286,000
	Facebook and Instagram	Reach 79,141 Total clicks 14,264	Promotion of VCR and link to portal
	Facebook and Instagram	Reach 1,051,638 Total clicks 45,507	Promotion of local meeting and link to registration page
	Virtual Consultation Room	6,100 unique visits	Public consultation and engagement during Covid-19 restrictions
	Online submission/survey form	450 local submissions	Ensure local input into decision making process

Figure 6 Social and digital media analytics

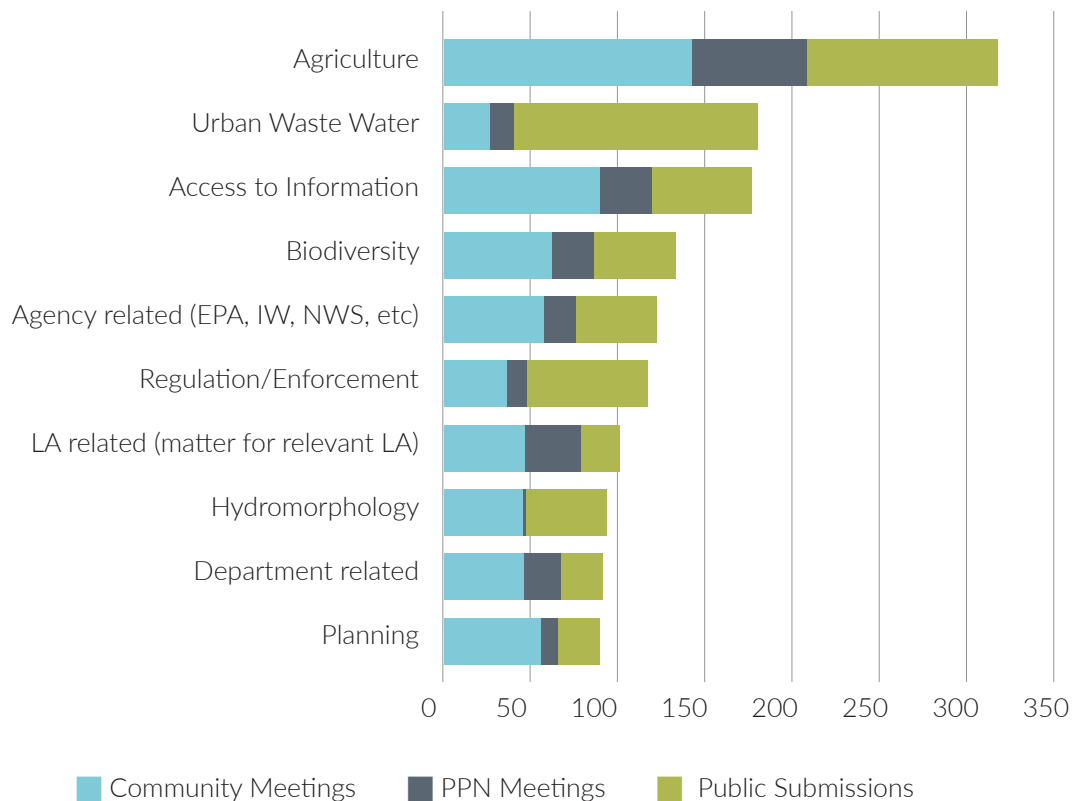
Themes arising from public feedback

Public participants in the consultation process via the LAWPRO local submission form shared knowledge of issues pertaining to local waterbodies. LAWPRO also compiled the comments gathered at the 93 public meetings. A list of the key themes emerged from recurring issues and concerns raised by local communities. These themes are presented in the table below, with the top ten themes presented in Figure 7.

Access to Waters	Heritage
Access to Information	Hydromorphology
Agency Related	Industry
Agriculture	Invasive Alien Species
Biodiversity	Local Authority Related
Climate Change	Mines and Quarries
Consultation Process	Peat
Department Related	Recreation
Domestic and Urban Wastewater	Riparian Zones
Dumping and Litter	Regulation and Enforcement
Forestry	Water Quality
Funding	Urban Surface Water Run-off
Flooding	

Table 4 Themes raised during Draft RBMP consultations.

Theme analysis



Respondents were asked to rank six different water-related initiatives and actions, ‘Protecting water quality as part of agricultural and land management activities’ was ranked the most important. In addition, respondents had the choice of five options for protecting and restoring good water quality. Most respondents chose ‘Greater enforcement of regulations (Prosecuting or penalising water polluters)’ as the most important. Commenting on reporting pollution incidents, 61% stated they knew who to contact, with 37% of respondents stating they had reported a pollution incident. Overall, respondents identified their main interests in water quality as: preventing pollution, preventing flooding, and climate change activism.

5.2 Community Water Development Fund

Open Call – Grants Scheme

LAWPRO administers a Community Water Development Fund on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage since 2018.

The 2022 Open Call was announced and launched at our ‘Communities Caring for Water Conference’ held virtually on 20 Nov 2021. The fund helps local communities deliver projects and initiatives that enhance the local water environment, delivering multiple benefits for biodiversity and climate action.

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 2022 we received 202 applications seeking €1.03m in grant aid. 67% of grants applications fell into the small-scale project category and the average grant awarded was just under €3,000.

No. applications received	No. grants awarded	Amount sought	Amount Granted
202	182	€1,038,832	€510,093

Table 5: Community Water Development Fund Open Call summary details 2022

Applications received by group type in 2022 shows that Tidy Towns & Residents Associations, Community Development and Environmental Groups are the most active applicants (**Figure 8** below). 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.

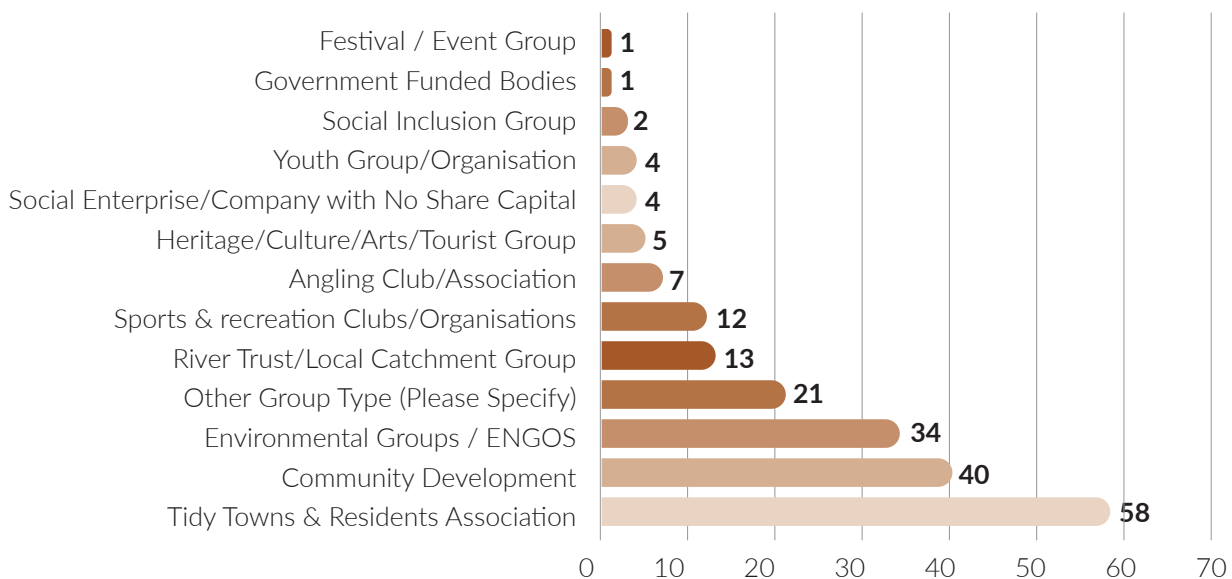


Figure 8 Community Water Development Fund – Grants Awarded by Group Type 2022

Following an evaluation process, grants offered under the Open Call amounted to €510,000 and 182 successful applicant groups from across the country.

Types of projects approved for funding included:

- Water quality actions such as river and habitat enhancement work, e.g., planting of native species and hedgerow, pollinator friendly planting, river-bank stabilisation, fencing and riparian buffer zones, etc.
- Match funding for large projects with a biodiversity/water quality element.
- Preparation of local plans, such as feasibility studies, habitat management plans, ecological surveys, and biodiversity action plans.
- Water literacy awareness raising initiatives such as riverbank tidy ups, biodiversity information boards, citizen science workshops, outdoor classrooms, rainwater harvesting and enhancement of wetlands.

For further information and details of grants awarded can be viewed online [Funding - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie).

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 groups, that has resulted in 797 CWDF applications up to and including 2022. These are 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 via the Community Water Officers. This can be used to financially assist with small awareness events e.g. walks and talks, community meetings e.g. venue hire, Citizen Science e.g. workshops, equipment etc, development and dissemination of water awareness material and publications e.g. leaflets, booklets etc, jointly sponsoring water related events, etc.

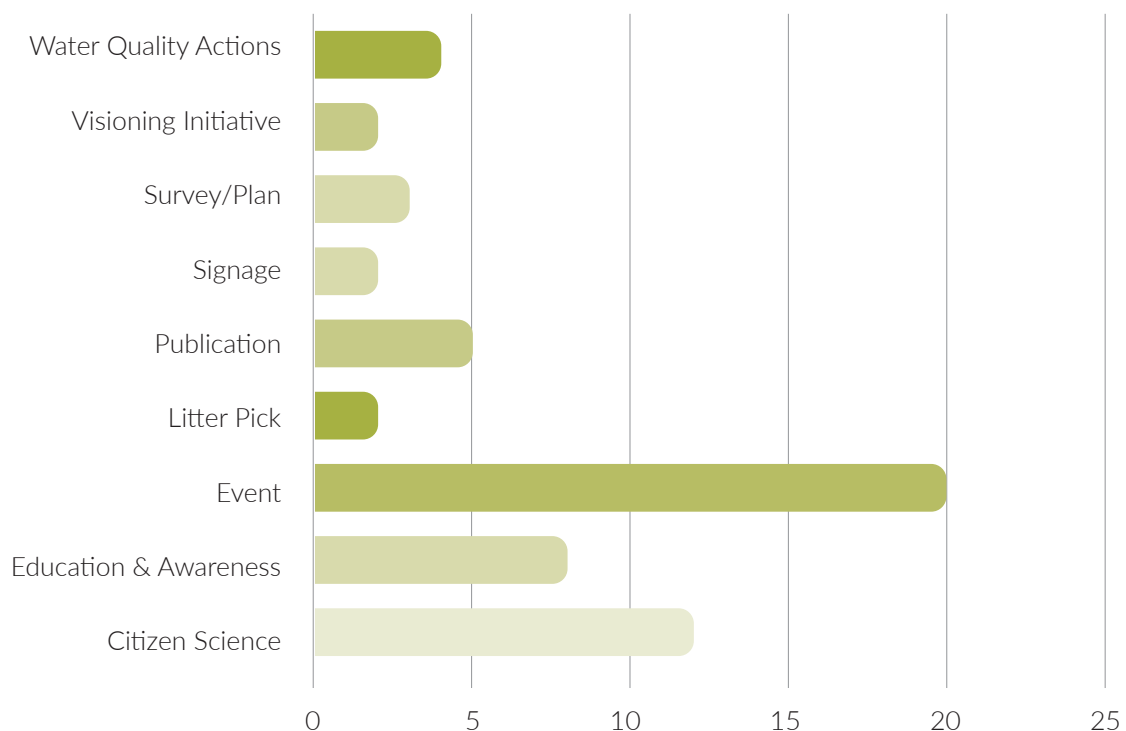


Figure 9 Local Awareness Initiative Types funded in 2022

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 voluntary led organisations, with support to Rivers Trusts and Catchment Associations in the following ways:

Supporting emerging Rivers Trusts/Catchment Associations

LAWPRO supports emerging and existing Rivers Trusts/Catchment Associations by inviting them to apply for the recoupment of ongoing operational costs such as insurance and audit fees. In 2022, grants were awarded to 18 groups with a total award of €26,159.

iCatch Hub Network

In 2022, LAWPRO contributed €10,000 to The Rivers Trust to fund the continuation of a network called iCatch Hub Network. The Network was initially set up by The Maigue Rivers Trust and Inishowen Rivers Trust with funding from The Wheel (€17,938) and LAWPRO (€4,801) in 2020. The Network consists of established Rivers Trusts/Catchments Associations who meet monthly to share experiences, receive training and information sessions on relevant topics facilitated by The Rivers Trusts.

From its inception, The Rivers Trust was very involved in the design and delivery of the Network and was suitably placed to continue to build on what was established.



5.5 Irish Rivers Trust's Resilience Pilot Project – 2019 - 2022

Over the last three years both Inishowen Rivers Trust in County Donegal and Maigne Rivers Trust in County Limerick have been in receipt of funding from the Department for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), managed by LAWPRO and administered by The Rivers Trust, for the Resilience Pilot Project.

The funding has enabled both Trusts to employ a dedicated project officer, who, working full-time, has been tasked with securing additional funding for their Trust, as well as developing strategic approaches (e.g. development and implementation of business, corporate sponsorship and fundraising strategies) towards greater self-sustainability within each charity.

The Rivers Trust secured the funds on behalf of the trusts and is administering the funding and providing support and knowledge transfer to Inishowen and Maigne Rivers Trusts.

The project concept was approved and granted funding by the Department pre-Covid 19 pandemic, however, the project's implementation coincided with the beginning of the pandemic and the resulting social restrictions. Both trusts have shown remarkable resourcefulness and determination in keeping going through these unprecedented and difficult times, delivering on almost all the original objectives on the project.

The recent EPA report "Case studies on Local Catchment Groups in Ireland, 2018-2020" by O Cinnéide, O'Riordan and Boyle (2021) reflects on the staff and core funding difficulties of catchment groups and rivers trusts and states:

"In summary, the current scale and model of financial support for catchment groups is inadequate, with seed funding from LAWPRO, virtually no support for personnel costs and a high reliance on project funding. If maintained in its current scale and form, it may be seen as a serious impediment to the continued activity and growth of many trusts or catchment groups. The review of structures and policy frameworks for catchment groups in the next River Basin Cycle needs to be accompanied by a commitment to provide a blend of core funding and project support, to ensure a transition to a more sustainable and participative WFD landscape, as seen since 2000 in the UK and in many EU member states".

In quarter 3 of 2022, LAWPRO initiated an evaluation of the Pilot Resilience Project. The evaluation scope encompassed the following:

1. Review the outputs and measures for success in terms of the Project Officers' responsibilities
2. Make conclusions in terms of the success or otherwise of the Project.
3. Make recommendations for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in terms of supports, if needed, for the water community sector considering the project findings but also more broadly considering the expanding role of communities in the draft and final Third Cycle River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 (RBMP).

Exodea Europe Consulting Limited were the successful bidder for this evaluation. A final report with recommendations is expected in Q2 of 2023, at which time recommendations will be communicated to all parties and to the DHLGH.

5.6 Communities Caring for Water Conference

The Communities Caring for Water Conference is organised and delivered annually through collaboration between the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and The Rivers Trust (RT). Its main purpose is to provide a national platform for community groups to showcase successful projects and initiatives being delivered across the country. This annual conference also provides an opportunity for experts to present leading science and policy developments in the water sphere and in related areas of climate and biodiversity action.

2022 was the fourth successive year of the Communities Caring for Water Conference and the first delivered through a hybrid model with both in-person and online attendees. The capacity of the venue was 60 persons, and this number was made up from groups and individuals, 'local champions', already engaged with LAWPRO and The Rivers Trust.

The theme for the conference in 2022 was 'Community Participation in a Changing Environment', with a focus on citizen science and river restoration work by community groups, rivers trusts, local development companies, LEADER, and charities like Seal Rescue Ireland.

Each year the open call for LAWPRO's Community Water Development Fund is launched at the conference.

"Rivers are like a thread that links humanity. The energy in the room was palpable and everyone had the same passion to find solutions and to work together in caring for rivers."

Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust.



L to R: Fran Igoe, LAWPRO, Constanza O'Toole, The Rivers Trust, Mark Lloyd, The Rivers Trust, Bernie White, LAWPRO, Mark Horton, The Rivers Trust.

The conference was opened by Malcolm Noonan, T.D., Minister for State for Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage who said, *“the importance of good water services and clean waters to protect public health, support economic growth and preserve our environment for present and future generations cannot be underestimated. However, we have urgent issues to address and a lot further to go if we are to achieve these goals.”*

The conference included a workshop to canvas the views of community groups on the establishment of local Catchment Community Fora, to be introduced under the next River Basin Management Plan for Ireland, which will provide a roadmap up to the end of 2027. This approach will place a greater focus on the 46 individual river catchment areas.

The workshop was informed by a presentation by Dr Bernie White, Regional Coordinator with LAWPRO, who set out the context and framework for establishing proposed Catchment Community For a in five catchments, with an added overview of the proposed Catchment Management Plans.

It is expected that Catchment Community Fora will be established initially in five pilot catchments to facilitate greater community participation in decision making on actions for water quality. The learnings from this process will then inform the approach to establishing the fora in the remaining catchments.

It was acknowledged that there isn't a best practice model for this type of community participation in water management, either in Ireland or across Europe. The views expressed by participants in the workshop were documented to assist with establishing this new model of participation. A common theme on the day was that resourcing for public bodies will be key, together with the relevant sectors delivering on their obligations, combined with better funding for community groups to better support community participation, project delivery by catchment groups, and enabling groups to play a more significant role in decision making through the local fora.

“I never cease to be amazed by the amount of community-driven activity across Ireland to protect and improve our precious freshwater environment. The conference highlighted this incredible movement and to understand the challenges communities face in meeting local issues head-on. With declining water quality in our rivers and lakes, alarming biodiversity loss, and climate change, rivers trusts, catchment associations and communities caring for water, all need to be properly resourced and supported to buck the ongoing trend in declining water quality. Sustained positive action at a greater scale can deliver benefits for our freshwater environment and society as a whole.”

Mark Horton, All-Ireland Director of The Rivers Trust,

5.7 National Heritage Week & Water Heritage Day

Over 90 community events were supported by LAWPRO Community Water Officers in 2022, during Heritage Week and on Water Heritage Day. Water Heritage Day is held in partnership with the Heritage Council. As an island nation, our history and our heritage have been shaped by the sea and the great Irish rivers, lakes and wetlands. Water Heritage Day celebrates water throughout Ireland, its history and heritage and our connections with it.

This is a collaborative effort with many stakeholders each year including Local Authority Heritage Officers, Tidy Towns Groups, Clean Coasts, Group Water Schemes, Community Co-ops, Heritage Centres, Historical Societies and Environmental interest groups.

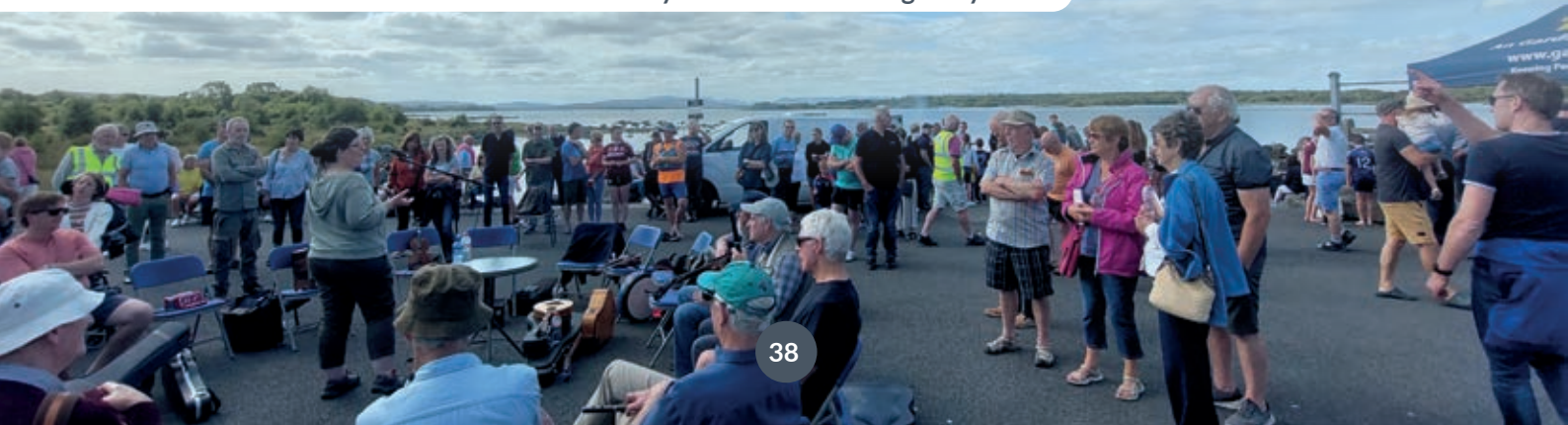
Most of the events in 2022 were enjoyed outdoors but there were opportunities for people to join online events such as the Dublin City's Water Heritage Webinar Series as well as the chance to delve into digital online projects and short water documentaries - Sliabh Beagh: Where Community, Climate, Nature and Water Meet and The Pearl Mussel: A Heritage Species in Peril.

The waterside events catered for many interests and all age groups including family fun days, citizen science workshops, catchment excursions and river walks. Every County was proud to showcase their unique waterbodies – Sligo celebrated its pristine waters, Roscommon invited people to enjoy water and 'a laugh by the lake', Donegal showcased catchments by boat, Clare farmers led river walks and Laois explored life in the river with water ecology workshops.

Water Heritage Day is also an opportunity to engage with the arts and celebrate our strong cultural connection to water. We listened to water-themed music in Galway, storytelling in Longford, poetry in Westmeath and viewed photography exhibitions in Kilkenny and admired the ancient skills in currach building in Meath. There was something for everyone to enjoy!

Corrib Beo collaborated with several heritage, biodiversity, sporting, and community groups to host a series of events showcasing the vibrant natural and cultural heritage of the Corrib region. The programme was launched on the banks of the River Clare in Claregalway Castle on August 8th and ran until Water Heritage Day August 21st. The events were collectively attended by approx. 1000 people, from all over the Corrib Catchment. The festival was not only successful in celebrating the rich cultural and natural aspects of the Corrib but also kindled a sense of connectivity between the communities around the lake. The final event took place at Knockferry and Kilbeg piers where the Corrib narrows, and communities travelled across the lake for music and talks in a celebration of Corrib Life.

Hands around the Corrib – Knockferry Pier - Water Heritage Day 2022



In Kilkenny, a Water Heritage Day event was run at the Outdoor Activity Hub in Graignamanagh Co Kilkenny, called the River Barrow Safari with Éanna Ní Lamhna. The route of the safari took in the confluence of the Barrow and Duiske Priority Areas for Action where LAWPROs Catchments Team are working. The event was very well attended with approx. 100 people. Éanna spoke about plants, trees, birds and flying insects amongst other things during the safari.



*River Barrow Safari with Éanna Ní Lamhna
L to R: John Grace (participant), Éanna Ní Lamhna, Ann Phelan - LAWPRO*

The Water Heritage Day Award, sponsored by LAWPRO, was awarded to Streamscapes for the production of 'The Coomhola River Catchment – People & Place, Waters & Wilds', a Blue Dot Catchments booklet. The booklet focusses on the stunning catchment of the Coomhola River, highlighting its long-term achievement of high-status river water quality, while also outlining the issues facing the catchment in order to protect it. The booklet was officially launched during Heritage Week by Christopher O'Sullivan TD. The launch also included fieldtrips organised by the Coomhola Salmon Trust's 'StreamSchool' and the formal opening of an outdoor classroom shelter along the Cooleenlemane Stream. A copy of the booklet can be found here:

[Publication of the Blue Dot Catchments booklet by Streamscapes - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie)

For more water Heritage Day highlights from 2022 see [Water Heritage Day - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](https://lawaters.ie)



Presentation of Water Heritage Award to Streamscapes at the Heritage Week Annual Awards Ceremony 2022

5.8 International Water Days

International water days form an important part of the LAWPRO calendar as we work with communities to celebrate water and encourage better water stewardship. In 2022 LAWPRO celebrated World Wetlands Day on February 2nd with a special webinar event entitled “Water Dragons”. This well attended event discussed the role that wetlands play in supporting some of our more iconic aquatic biodiversity. Focusing on dragonflies and damselflies, we examined these fascinating creatures, their diversity, the role of the citizen scientist and how people can get involved in surveying them. The discussion included a focus on water quality and what we can do to enhance their distribution and habitats. Dave Wall from the National Biodiversity Data Centre lead out with a presentation on the work being carried out by the NBDC and supported by the EPA. Dr. Hugh Feeley of the EPA and Dr. Fran Igoe of the Local Authority Waters Programme joined the conversation to discuss water quality and habitat restoration considerations.

World Water Day was celebrated on 22nd March 2022. Stories from the Waterside was the focus of the celebration with an online “fireside” reading event by selected writers, whose stories are published on the website, [Stories from the Waterside.ie](http://StoriesfromtheWaterside.ie). The Stories from the Waterside initiative commenced during the Covid 19 pandemic culminating in the development of the dedicated website. Feedback from the storywriters indicated that 81% of respondents surveyed were interested in getting more information about ongoing efforts to improve water quality in their local area. Approximately half surveyed were interested in local community led water projects and a quarter were interested in public consultations on water management and a quarter interested in Citizen science to collect data.

Testimonials illustrated that the initiative went beyond storytelling and water and provided a great support for people during the Covid 19 lockdowns. “Through Stories from the Waterside more people now know of our local resource and how we value it”, “Stories from the Waterside gave me something to focus on and write about..” “A great way to focus the mind during lockdown” “Hugely important to my mental health” “Everything. It gave me something to focus on. It also made me aware of the magnificent waterways with so much diversity that we have encompassing this beautiful island of Ireland” This illustrates the importance that water has in our daily lives that we sometimes take for granted.

5.9 Tidy Towns Special Awards

Every year, LAWPRO coordinates a Waters and Communities Special Awards competition along with co-sponsors, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Waterways Ireland. This special award is run in conjunction with the national SuperValu Tidy Towns Awards, an annual competition organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

This year record numbers of applications to the competition were received. The standard of applications was exceptional, and we were delighted to hear from local activists throughout the country.

Gort River Walk Development Group, County Galway were announced overall winner of the Waters and Communities Special Award 2022 at the SuperValu Tidy Towns awards ceremony held in the RDS, Dublin on 28 October.

This group’s positivity and enthusiasm for their local environment was evident in their application which made them stand out winners for 2022. Their application told the story of how they developed a river walkway and nature trail close to the town centre which had been blighted by illegal dumping and overgrazing. The group engaged with landowners, members of the local community, and Galway County Council in the development of the walkway and nature trail. They hosted public meetings and events such as biodiversity walks during Heritage Week, photography,

and art competitions. They worked hard to enhance local wildlife and nature by removing rubbish and invasive species and by planting native trees and wildflowers. This group of local volunteers are an inspiration for what can be achieved by a local community.

In addition, the group members participated in Water and Biodiversity Training events and commissioned a Biodiversity Study and a Habitat Survey on the area around the Gort River. This led to the development of Gort Area Biodiversity Plan 2021-2024 which is now in implementation phase.

Winners of the Waters and Communities Special Award 2022

Galway	Region	Applicant	Status	Prize Money
Galway	North West & West	Gort River Walk Development Group	Overall Winner	€ 2,000.00
Roscommon	North West & West	Kilteevan Tidy Towns	Highly Commended	€ 500.00
Wicklow	Midlands & East	Arklow Tidy Towns	Winner	€ 1,000.00
Westmeath	Midlands & East	Athlone Canal Heritage Committee	Highly Commended	€ 500.00
Cork	South West & Mid West	Cobh Tidy Towns and Clean Coast Cobh	Winner	€ 1,000.00
Kerry	South West & Mid West	Currow Rural Development	Highly Commended	€ 500.00
Wexford	South East	Ahare River and Biodiversity Group	Winner	€ 1,000.00
Waterford	South East	Affane-Cappoquin GAA Club	Highly Commended	€ 500.00



Bernie White, LAWPRO (far right) attended the North West and West Regional SuperValu Tidy Towns Awards Ceremony where awards were presented by Deputy Frank Keighan to Gort River Walk Development Group, Co. Galway (national winner) and Kilteevan Tidy Towns, Co. Roscommon (regional winner).

5.10 GAA Green Club Programme

The GAA Green Club Programme ([Green Clubs Programme \(gaa.ie\)](https://www.gaa.ie/green-clubs-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 was completed in 2022, with the participation of over 30 clubs from across Ireland, these Green Clubs established Green Teams, carried out club audits and engaged in exciting sustainability partnerships and projects. LAWPRO provides guidance and expertise on the water and biodiversity themes of the initiative.



Ballina Stephenites GAA Clubs Hydration Station delivered using Water Funding provided by LAWPRO and administered by the GAA Green Clubs Team



*Official launch of the GAA Green Clubs Phase 2 Programme, Croke Park, 3rd December 2022.
Pictured from LAWPRO are Sheevaun Thompson, Bernie White and Tom Carolan.*

Throughout 2022 our Community Water Officers engaged with several clubs to help them on their journey, and we continue to visit and advise clubs taking water and biodiversity actions in and around their grounds. Some good examples of works supported by Community Water officers includes;

- Affane-Cappoquin GAA & Camogie Club, Co. Waterford: Planting of native trees around the club grounds close to the River Blackwater; installation of a water metre to monitor and control water usage.
- Midleton GAA, Co. Cork: created a three-acre nature area full of wildflowers on the club grounds.
- Mullingar Shamrocks, Co. Westmeath: have gone herbicide-free by replacing herbicide with a vinegar, soap and salt solution to maintain weeds.

A successful outcome from Phase 1 was the rollout of the GAA's first ever Green Clubs Toolkit. LAWPRO as an expert partner supported the development of the water and biodiversity elements of the toolkit, which is now accessible to all clubs taking part in the Phase 2 of the initiative.

In Phase 2 an additional 75 Clubs representing all 32 counties has been 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 and is now supporting Phase 2 clubs with support and advice. LAWPRO is also providing seed funding via our Water Action Fund.

5.11 Blue Dot Catchments Programme – Q5 River Engagements

In June 2022, LAWPRO introduced a new element to our work programme called the Q5 River Engagement Initiative. The Initiative was modelled on the LAWPRO Local Awareness Initiative funding which Community Water Officers utilise on the ground while working with communities in all counties. Similarly, this fund is used to financially support groups outside of the Open Call timeframes. While the model of this initiative is well bedded into LAWPROs work programme, adapting it for the Blue Dot Catchments Programme meant that 2022 was a pilot, so that lessons could be learned and used to expand the initiative in 2023 to encompass the full Blue Dot Network of water bodies.

The objective of the initiative comes from the Blue Dot Catchments Programme (see here: [Blue Dot Programme - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawaters.ie\)](#)) Objective number 5: Establish pilot projects for community engagement and actions. The communications goals are to:

- Generate awareness amongst key audiences regarding the quality of our Blue Dot waters.
- Turn awareness into engagement and action, in the form of stewardship of our Blue Dot waters.
- Celebrate the positive achievement of the Q5 and the need to protect these waters into the future.

We aimed to:

- Deliver a broad approach in Year 1 – 2022 – i.e. open to all awareness, engagement, and project proposals even if beyond Q5 sites if within the Blue Dot network.
- Seek multiple linked community interests e.g. tourism (slow tourism), fisheries, bathing water, drinking water etc.
- Deepen engagements with communities LAWPRO is already active in.
- Leverage e.g. Heritage Week events, Water Heritage Day etc.
- Build on CWDF funded initiatives granted in the 2021/22 call and expand their scope of work if appropriate.
- Get communities ready for the 2022/23 CWDF Call to encourage applications for the Blue Dot award.
- Encourage engagements and or collaborations with implementing bodies, catchment groups, NGOs e.g. NPWS, IFI, Rivers Trusts, Catchment Associations etc
- Develop or deepen relationships between communities and their local authority.

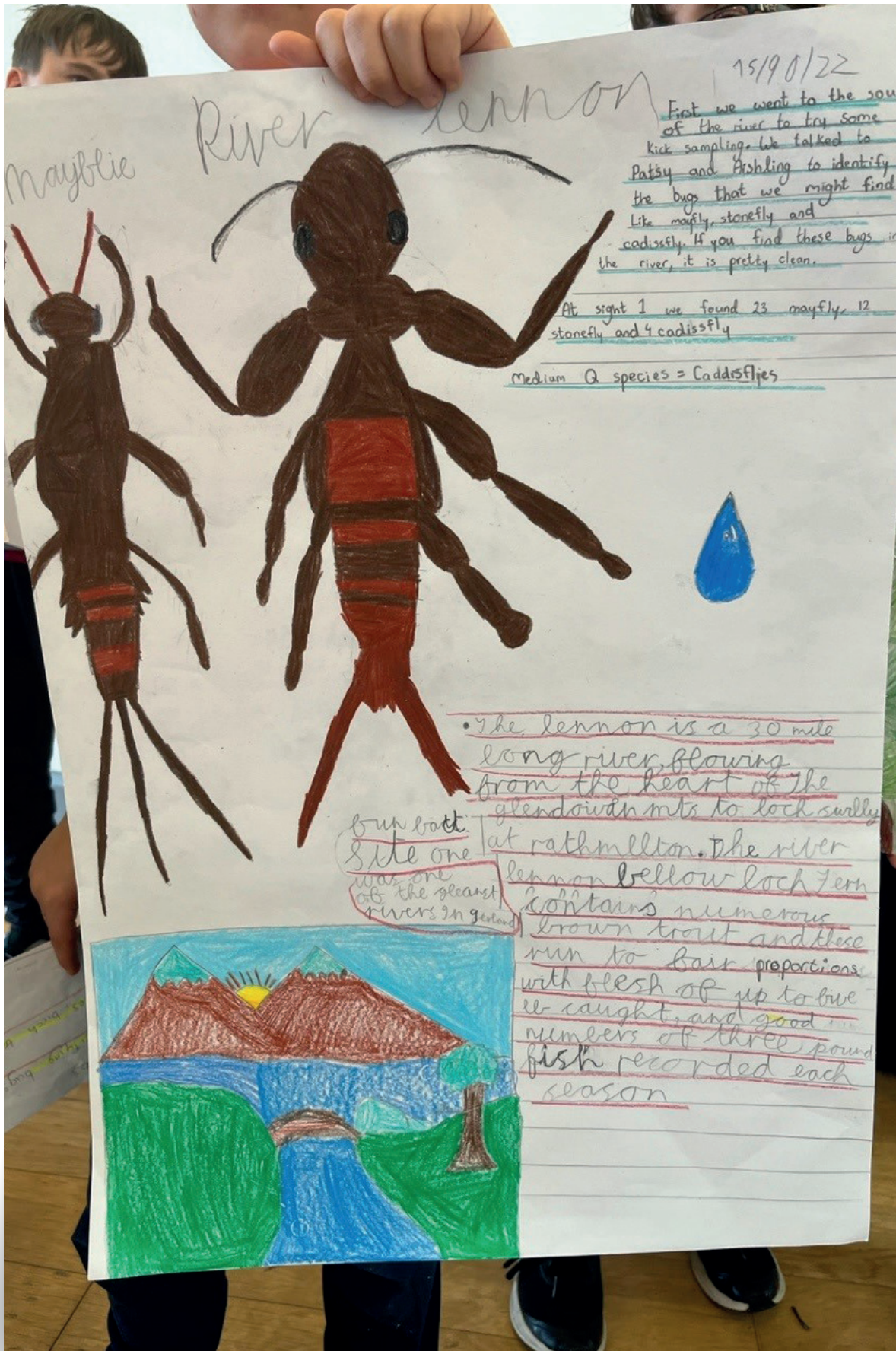




The funding was directed towards 24 rivers in Ireland, where Q5 was achieved during EPA WFD monitoring in 2021 at a river site. The rivers were: Aille (Mayo), Avonmore (Wicklow), Behanagh (Limerick), Blackwater (Kerry), Boleyneendorrish (Galway), Bullaba (Donegal), Bundorragha (Mayo), Camcor (Offaly), Derry Water (Wicklow), Douglas (Laois), Eignagh (Sligo), Failmore (Galway), Flesk (Kerry), Funshion (Cork), Glenree (Mayo), Glenummera (Mayo), Gorragh (Laois), Laney (Cork), Lee (Cork), Owendalulleagh (Galway), Owenea (Donegal), Owenmore (Mayo), Owenveagh (Donegal), Yellow (Foxford, Mayo).

Examples of engagements, events and projects delivered in 2022 included:

- Support for the Coomhola Blue Dot Catchments Booklet launch.
- IRD Duhallow tree planting in critical source areas.
- Abhainn Dá Loilíoch (Owendalulleagh) River festival celebrating rivers and woodlands in this Blue Dot catchment.
- Blue Dot Explorer: Engaging with the Q5 waters of North Donegal – schools engagements. Led by An Taisce Local Association in conjunction with Nature Northwest and LAWPRO.
- Fish passage rehabilitation feasibility study for the Straid River, Donegal. Collaboration with Donegal County Council, OPW, IFI and LAWPRO.
- Blue Dot Catchments Community Walk and Talk in the Eignagh River catchment, Sligo.



5.12 Waters of LIFE

The Waters of Life is an EU LIFE integrated project (IP) which aims to support the implementation of measures to protect/restore Ireland's High Status Objective Waters and thus to support the work of the Blue Dot Catchments Programme and implementation of the RBMP in general. LAWPRO are a project partner, together with the EPA, Teagasc, Coillte, Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM Agriculture), Forest Service (DAFM Forestry), OPW, with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as the Project Coordinator.

The project will act as a catchment-scale demonstration project to test and validate the effectiveness of implementing locally tailored 'best practice' measures across a range of land uses typically seen in the catchments of high-status waters. The purpose of this work will be to:

- Build technical understanding and capacity in relation to the design and implementation of measures across a variety of key land-uses to deliver effective solutions at a catchment-wide scale for the protection of high-status waters;
- Promote community and landowner ownership of the actions proposed and ensuring local community involvement in developing the land-use management actions to be implemented;
- Make recommendations that will inform the development of future agri-environment and forestry policies and provide for the long-term sustainable management of high-status areas;
- Enhance public appreciation of the ecology, ecosystems and natural capital value of high-status waters and their catchments;
- Develop and build synergies between measures implemented to address water quality considerations and related biodiversity objectives within the catchments of high-status waters, and:
- Monitor and demonstrate the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

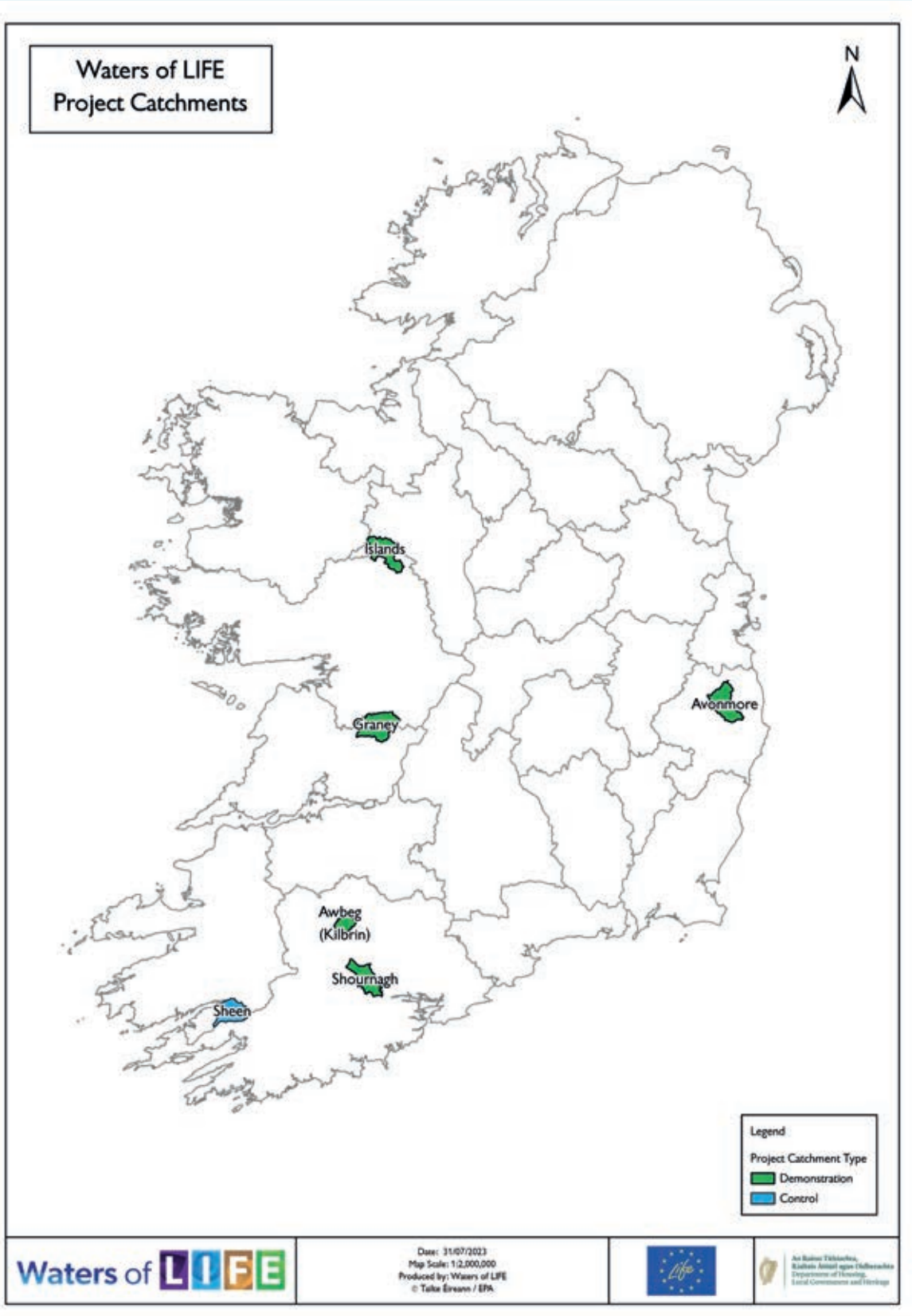
Six demonstration catchments, at sub catchment scale, were chosen for inclusion as part of the project's primary focus areas. These were selected because;

- A significant proportion of the sub-catchment was relevant to protecting or restoring High Status and they
- They represented the various pressures affecting Blue Dot waterbodies including hydromorphology, forestry, agriculture, wastewater among others with one (the Sheen) acting as a control.
- All but the control catchment are at risk of failing to meet the high-status objective that has been set for them under the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027.

LAWPRO has responsibility for multiple actions which will be delivered by the project over its lifetime. LAWPRO staff are also members of the Project Steering Group. Some of the actions delivered in 2022 included:

- Assist in the selection of the demonstration catchments.
- Support the project launch event in 2022.
- Support the development of a framework of measures.
- Support demonstration catchment public meetings.
- Deliver community engagements in Blue Dot catchments to raise awareness and activation of water quality events or projects.
- Preparation of draft desk studies for each demonstration catchment.
- Preliminary characterisation of each demonstration catchment.

LAWPRO are prepared to undertake detailed local catchment assessments in each of demonstration catchments in 2023, along with enhanced community engagement activities and project delivery in Blue Dot catchments.



5.13 Nature Based Solutions

Nature-based solutions leverage nature and the power of healthy ecosystems to protect people, optimise infrastructure and safeguard a stable and biodiverse future.

LAWPRO has been working with partners to develop and promote Nature-based Solutions specifically targeting and integrating water quality objectives. The benefits of taking a nature-based approach includes improved water quality (e.g. can filter out >80% heavy metal pollutants), flood risk management and biodiversity benefits (e.g., provide habitat for range of species).

The challenges posed by climate change and the resultant need to adapt our cities and towns to be more resilient to increasingly frequent and intensive rainfall events have also brought sustainable water management in the urban context to the fore. Nature-based solutions support climate adaptation and mitigation (resilience, micro-climate cooling, carbon sequestration etc.).

In response to the above, the DHLGH, working with LAWPRO and the CCMA established a project to actively promote the implementation of nature-based surface water management solutions. An interim guidance Nature-based Solutions - Local Authority Water Programme (lawaters.ie) and an implementation strategy were developed in 2020 and 2021 with an initial focus on cities and towns focusing on projects that intervene in the urban fabric, using an urban design and a plan led approach.

Information and training webinars along with considerable consultation across local government, state agencies, private sector and professional bodies highlighted the need for a multidisciplinary approach, and the need to mainstream the concepts of nature-based solutions with water sensitive urban designs and move away from one-off projects to multiple projects across the country.



The identification of significant public funding initiatives earmarked by the government for local authority-led projects offers the perfect opportunity to integrate nature-based solutions at scale and develop best practice in terms of design and project delivery. LAWPRO with the DHLGH is working with the relevant funding leads e.g., Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF), Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, Active Travel within the relevant Government Departments and agencies including Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, Department of Rural and Community Development and the National Transport Authority. The aim is to promote the incorporation of nature-based surface water management principles and identify barriers to their implementation.

To support this process a GIS based Nature-based Solutions Projects Intervisibility Working Group was established to identify potential opportunities. The initial focus is on mapping larger scale projects under the URDF, RRDF and Active Travel and overlaying these on to available Uisce Éireann Drainage Area Plans with a view to identifying opportunities to reduce risk from storm water entering combined sewer networks in addition to reducing surface water contaminants entering watercourses. LAWPRO is currently hosting the data.

To support this work and increase awareness and training, a series of online webinars and workshops were hosted, building on previous webinars held in 2020 and 2021. These focused on specific thematic areas

- Urban Landscaping and Nature Based Management of Rainwater for Public Realm, Regeneration projects - 8th March 2022 – Webinar. 300 attendees
- Urban Landscaping and Nature-Based Management of Rainwater for Active Travel Projects Active Travel - 10th May 2022. 230 attendees.
- Practical experiences to the incorporation of nature- based solutions (NB SUDS) to address surface water management in Ireland 13th Oct 2022. >470 attendees



All recordings and presentations can be found on the LAWPRO webpage at [Nature-based Solutions - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawwaters.ie\)](https://lawwaters.ie).

In 2022 a focus was also placed on emerging issues associated with Greenway development. Concerns have been raised by the public regarding some projects near watercourses, in particular those where greenways are replacing riparian zones and creating a hydromorphological pressure. Presentations were given to government agencies including the DRCD and personnel involved in the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme with a view to developing best practice. The following presentations were given to progress better a better understanding of design and planning for greenways to minimise risk to water courses incorporating nature-based solutions, water sensitive and animal aided design concepts.

- Nature Based Surface Water Management in Urban Areas – Water Sensitive Design & Greenway/Blueways 28 Jan 2022
- Delivering sustainability to DRCD funded projects through Nature based solutions ORIS, CLÁR, TVRS and RRDF. March 31st 2022
- SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) and Nature Based Solutions. Presentation to the Local Authority Biodiversity Conference held on 21st and 22nd September. The theme this year was how local authorities can address the biodiversity emergency.

Nature-based solutions is an emerging field in Ireland and it is important that best practice advice is based on real life practical examples. To develop a better understanding on what supports are required to integrate nature-based solutions into projects LAWPRO is working closely with the DHLGH, the professional bodies and LAs to identify case studies applicable for areas of urban regeneration and active travel. Feedback from the webinars is for good examples that can serve as demonstration sites are needed across the country.

The planning process has been an important area of focus for LAWPRO to promote best practice in nature-based solutions. The National Planning Framework is a planning framework to guide development and investment over the coming years in Ireland and recognises the need for sustainable water management solutions (National Policy Objective 57) in line with the River Basin Management Plan. LAWPRO provided advice including case studies to the DHLGH in the preparation of the guidance document “Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities” in 2022. LAWPRO also provided advice to LAs on the incorporation of Nature-based solutions objectives to protect water quality in their County Development Plans. Training presentations were given to the Southern Regional Assembly Forum and Climate Action Office training for LA planners. In addition presentations were made to a range of agencies with a policy relevance in the area of nature-based solutions (e.g., NPWS, IFI etc).

A working group was set up in partnership with the DHLGH to develop a template for the Rain Management Plans for settlements of various scales, particularly focusing on the Local Area Plan scale. The group is working with the following Local Authorities - Kildare, Cork, Offaly, and Fingal, to develop a template for rainwater management plans that can assist LAs especially when putting together Local Area Plans.

Throughout 2022, LAWPRO also worked collaboratively with the Department of Transport and the DHLGH to draft an advice note to incorporate Nature-based surface water management into the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS).

5.14 Citizen Science

Citizen science actively involves citizens in scientific studies that generates new knowledge and understanding. The experience of LAWPRO in the 2nd Cycle of the RBMP shows that citizen science helps to engage people in water quality initiatives and by involving the public in the monitoring of their local waterbodies, it increases local knowledge and the potential for data collection.



To develop a consensus on the most suitable approach for citizen science in Ireland, LAWPRO supported by the EPA, have engaged with the practitioners, agencies, trainers and community groups interested in citizen science. A series of workshops and training days to develop a strategy were organised. Recommendations from these meetings included the adoption of appropriate monitoring schemes for Ireland, the development where necessary of more community focused schemes and a national recording and mapping repository. This led to the development of a brand new scheme – the Citizen Science Stream Index (CSSI, in 2021) suitable for beginners and the adoption of the Small Stream Impact Score (SSIS, in 2021) used by scientists for the more advanced practitioners.

The schemes were trialled in 2021 with the support of locally led catchment projects e.g., Norevision, and the IRD Duhallow Farming for the Blue Dot EIP (European Innovation Partnership). Bespoke water literacy and biodiversity training was developed by LAWPRO in partnership with the Rural Development Companies who are the implementing bodies under the LEADER programme.

In 2022, LAWPRO developed a Citizen Science Recording Database, where data can be entered and mapped to a dedicated [LAWPRO webpage - Citizen Science - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawwaters.ie\)](http://lawwaters.ie).

Currently LAWPRO is working with a number of research institutes, the EPA and the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) to put in place a citizen science recording system appropriate for the Irish riverine environment. LAWPRO has established a pilot Arc GIS based mapping and repository system to test the efficacy of the approach with a view to the establishment of a more permanent system hosted by the NBDC. In the interim, macroinvertebrate citizen science data continues to be gathered from trained members of the public and is being compiled in the LAWPRO database.

An example of citizen science in practice can be seen from activity in Cork City in 2022. The Cork City Freshwater Monitoring Network was established in 2022 to support citizen science in Cork City. Volunteers were trained in the Citizen Science Stream Index (CSSI) technique. Training was provided by the developer of the CSSI, Dr. Simon Harrison from University College Cork. Dr Harrison was supported by SECAD Partnership, LAWPRO and Cork City Council. Training took place in two parks in the city resulting in 20 sampling points surveyed across Cork City in 2022. Coordination of the work was done by Catherine Seale Duggan, LAWPRO Community Water Officer for Cork City and County.

Figure 10 Distribution map showing citizen science water quality data (CSSI) collected by volunteers in the South West of Ireland. This data can be viewed at [Citizen Science - Local Authority Water Programme \(lawwaters.ie\)](http://lawwaters.ie)

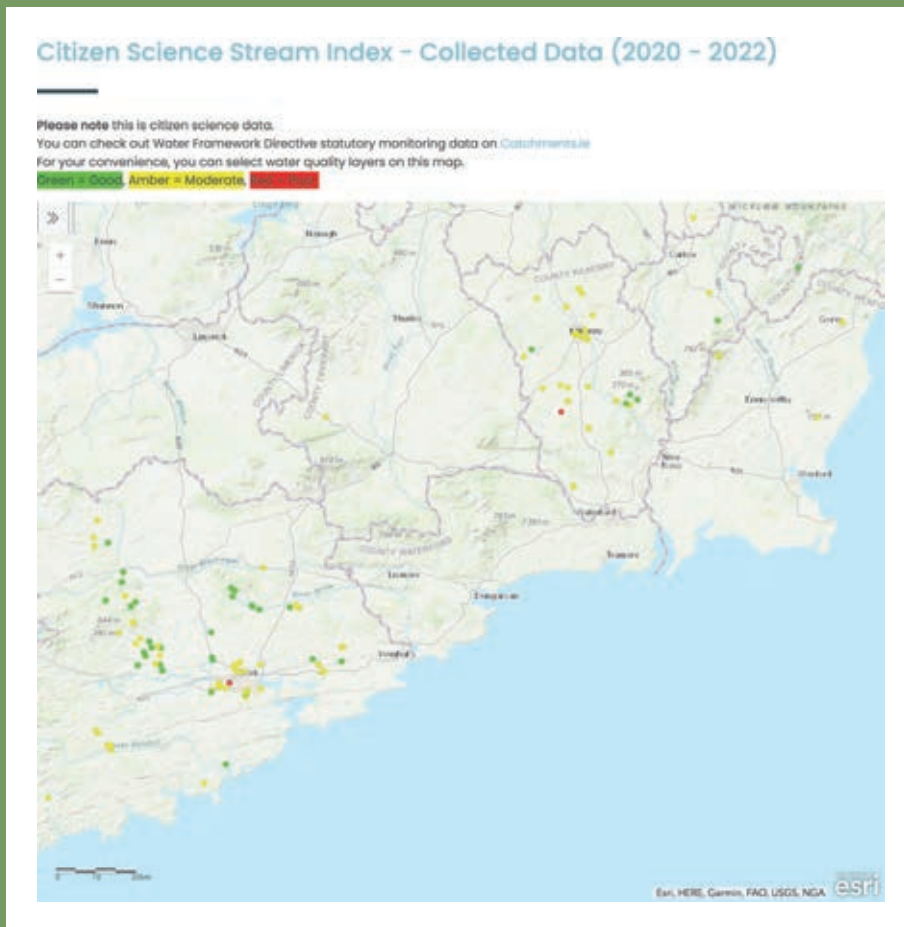


Figure 10 Citizen Science Database

LAWPRO also sponsored the Dublin City University WaterBlitz in 2022 and provided information and support to groups involved. The WaterBlitz is a co-created citizen science research project between DCU Water Institute and in partnership with Earthwatch Europe. The aim of this long-term project is to investigate how public engagement can facilitate water restoration. 2022 saw the largest WaterBlitz yet with over 700 participants (over 4 days) and 697 samples taken across Ireland. 108 community and water interest groups took part nationally, and freshwater samples were tested in all 26 counties, or in 40 of the 46 WFD Catchments. Groups included river/lake groups, environmental groups, Group Water Schemes, Tidy Towns, community groups, schools etc.



Locations were chosen by the citizen scientists to determine if waterbodies are impacted by the presence of these nutrients. These measurements provided a snapshot in time of the water quality in the waterbodies sampled. A report on the blitz can be found here: [DCU-WaterBlitz-Report.pdf](#) ([dcuwater.ie](#)).

5.15 Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

The Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was launched in early 2022 and met on six occasions between May 2022 and January 2023. At its final meeting on 21st January 2023, the Assembly voted on a series of propositions that were the culmination of careful deliberation and debate, informed by detailed input from experts, stakeholder and the general public.

The Assembly considered, inter alia:

- the international, European, national, regional and local dimensions to the biodiversity emergency;
- the threats presented by biodiversity loss and the opportunities to reverse this loss;
- the main drivers of biodiversity loss, their impacts and the opportunity of addressing these drivers;
- the perspectives of the general public, representative groups, advocacy groups, experts and policy makers on biodiversity loss, and its impact on Ireland;
- opportunities to develop greater policy coherence and strategic synergies between biodiversity policy and other policy priorities including, but not limited to, economic development, climate action, sustainable development, agriculture and tourism;
- opportunities to promote greater public understanding of, and support for, urgent action in response to the biodiversity emergency; and
- opportunities to improve the State's response to the challenge of biodiversity loss, how that response can best be resourced and implemented in a strategic and coordinated manner, and how progress can be measured.

LAWPRO was delighted to be invited to provide a speaker at the weekend meeting scheduled for the 5th and 6th November 2022. Dr Bernadette White, Regional Coordinator presented in Session One on 5th November in a themed session called 'Freshwater – From Mountain to the Sea'.

The LAWPRO presentation focused on the impacts of the main pressures found during local catchment assessments undertaken by LAWPRO catchment scientists and also observed by our community water officers and reported by communities and groups we work with. The presentation identified that the overwhelming evidence that agriculture is the largest cause of water quality deterioration in water bodies at less than good and high status. Over 92% of referrals made by LAWPRO are related to agricultural pressures. EPA figures also show significant nitrate problems in estuaries, while 43% of rivers have high nitrates and 39% of rivers have increasing nitrate. In terms of river restoration, rivers have also suffered from straightening, deepening and widening, as well as the removal of bank side vegetation, largely to facilitate drainage of land for agricultural use.

A session also held on 5th November invited speakers as part of a 'Voices from the Freshwater Community' session. An excellent account of pressures and the challenging facing our freshwater environment was provided by Colm Gallagher, chairman of the Cloganeely Angling Association, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal; Barry Deane, Chief Executive Officer of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes; Bernadette Connolly from the Sustainable Water Network, and Trish Murphy from the Inishowen Rivers Trust.

The Recommendations and Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss – the first such national citizens' assembly anywhere in the world – was launched in Dublin on 5th April 2023. It contains over 150 recommendations that have the potential to dramatically transform Ireland's relationship with the natural environment. Section 1.12 of the report focuses on freshwater recommendations, with other sections of equal importance around agriculture, marine and

coastal environments, invasive species, supporting communities, peatlands, forestry, woodlands and hedgerows etc. The report can be found at: [Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf](https://citizensassembly.ie/Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf) (citizensassembly.ie)

5.16 Lough Ennell Catchment Management Plan

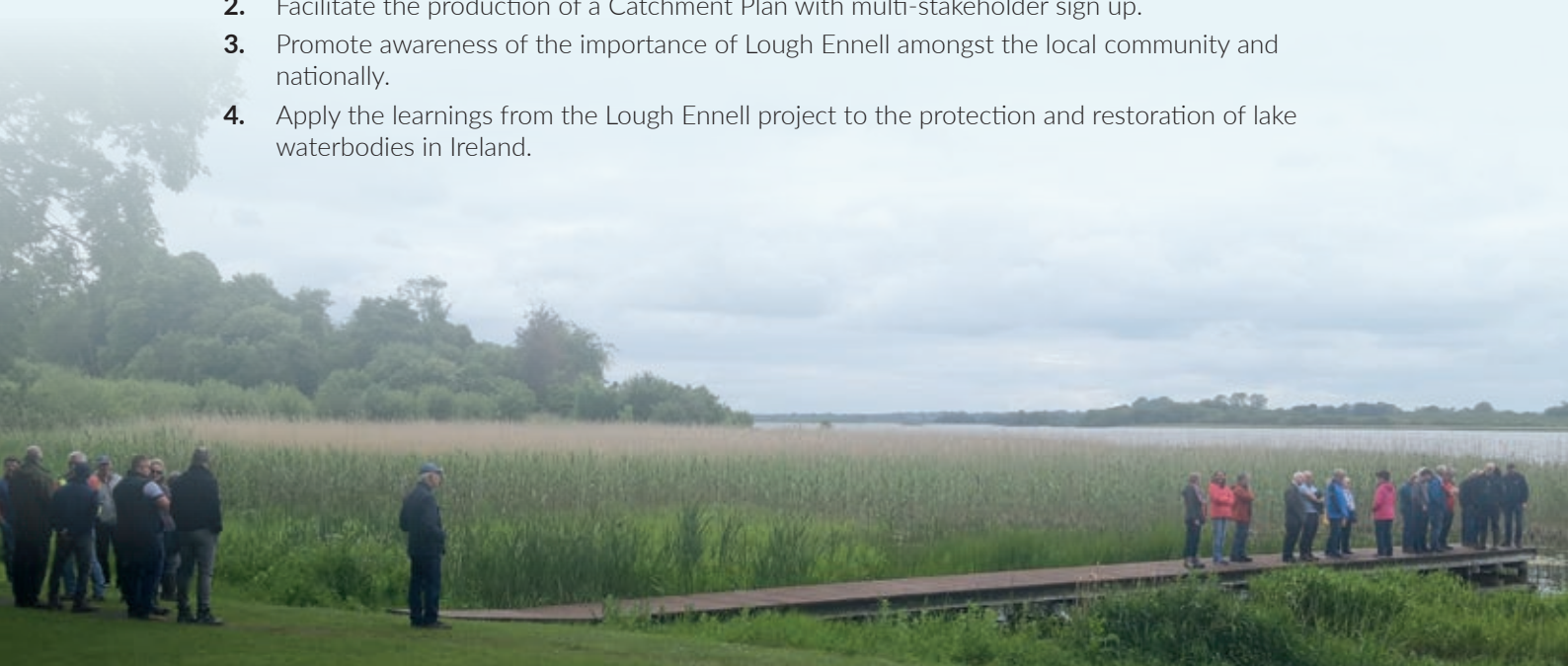
On the 1st of June 2022, Lilliput bathing waters in county Westmeath were re-opened to the public. The positive water quality outcome was made possible through the implementation of targeted measures throughout 2021 and on-going collaboration between LAWPRO, Westmeath County Council, the HSE, the EPA Bathing Water Unit, the ASSAP programme, the local community and local landowners.

“Business as usual” has now resumed at the busy inland bathing water, one of only nine in the country. Although an incident occurred in June 2022, the pressure was quickly identified and mitigated through LAWPRO/ASSAP/stakeholder collaboration; this allowed the return of the excellent bathing water category for most of the year. To provide further protection measures to the lough and to reduce the risk of deterioration in water quality, LAWPRO funded, through the Community Development Fund, a visioning workshop for the Lough on June 13th in Bloomfield House Hotel, Mullingar. The event was organised by the Lough Ennell Trout Preservation Association, Carla McNeill, Alan Lauder and LAWPRO. More than 50 stakeholders attended a workshop on the future management of the lough. The workshop explored how to improve the ecological health and bathing water quality of the lake, tourism, angling and fisheries, heritage and more.

In late 2022, the Lough Ennell Trout Preservation Association were successful in their LEADER application for the development of a catchment plan for the Lough. This was also joint funded by LAWPRO as project partners. The project aims to produce a Catchment Management Plan for Lough Ennell in County Westmeath by the end of 2023, with the involvement and inclusion of multiple stakeholders.

The objectives of the Catchment Management Plan are to:

1. Engage with statutory and community stakeholders to form a project group.
2. Facilitate the production of a Catchment Plan with multi-stakeholder sign up.
3. Promote awareness of the importance of Lough Ennell amongst the local community and nationally.
4. Apply the learnings from the Lough Ennell project to the protection and restoration of lake waterbodies in Ireland.



Visioning workshop for the Lough on June 13th in Bloomfield House Hotel, Mullingar

