



Scoping Exercise to Inform Co-Development of the Catchment Community Fora Model and Framework

Developed by



Glossary of Key Terms

Catchment	A catchment is an area of land around a river, lake, or other body of water. Rainwater that falls within a catchment eventually flows into rivers, lakes, or directly into estuaries or coastal waters, bringing with it any pollutants that may be in the landscape.
Community Water Officers	Community Water Officers work for the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) to build awareness of the importance of water, help build community group capacity to deliver on projects, support training and strengthen links between public bodies, funders, and communities.
Local Authorities Waters Programme (LAWPRO)	This programme is a local authority shared service managed by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils on behalf of all local authorities. It co-ordinates with the water quality work of Local Authorities through agreed regional structures, and this results in a collaborative approach to river catchment management.
Measures	This term is used in the EU Water Framework Directive and domestic legislation. It means an action which will be taken to help achieve Water Framework Directive objectives.
Pressures	Human activities such as agriculture, forestry, abstraction, effluent discharges (liquid waste or sewage discharged into surface water bodies).
Water Body	A water body is an individual unit of a water feature used for monitoring and planning purposes. There are various types including a body of surface water, a body of groundwater and artificial water bodies.
Water Framework Directive	The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is the primary Directive that sets out water quality objectives and a programme of measures to address and report on the quality of rivers and lakes in Europe. These assessments are done every six years. Their results are reported for river basin districts.
Water Quality	This is a term used to describe the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water, usually in relation to healthy aquatic ecosystems.

Key Acronyms in the Report

ACRES	Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme
ALONE	A Little Offering Never Ends
CCC	County/City Childcare Committees
CCF	Catchment Community Forum
CCFs	Catchment Community Fora
CE	Community Employment
CWO	Community Water Officer
CYPSC	Children and Young Peoples' Service Committee
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
DATF	Drug and Alcohol Task Force
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
eNGO	Environmental non-governmental organisations
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HSA	Health and Safety Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICMSA	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
IFA	Irish Farmers Association
LAWPRO	Local Authorities Water Programme
LCDCs	Local Community Development Committees
MaREI UCC	Marine Renewable Energy Ireland University College Cork
NARGC	National Association of Regional Game Councils
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NMS	National Monuments Service
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
PPN	Public Participation Network
TII	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
SWAN	Sustainable Water Network

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To reference: Gardner, C., Isard, P. Scoping Exercise to Inform Co-Development of the Catchment Community Fora Model and Framework. Local Authority Waters Programme. Dublin: Quality Matters (2025).

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this report on the pilot Catchment Community Fora (CCFs) undertaken by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) in 2024. These pilots represent an important step as part of delivering the ambition of Ireland's Water Action Plan- A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland, to strengthen public participation and build community capacity in protecting and enhancing our water environment.

A key objective of the Water Action Plan is to identify the supports required for establishing effective local Fora. These Fora will act as platforms where communities and sectoral interests can come together to identify, inform, and help implement locally tailored measures that improve water quality. The pilot CCFs are an important response to this ambition, fulfilling multiple actions in the Water Action Plan.

Over the summer of 2024, LAWPRO held workshops in one pilot catchment per region (Midlands and East, South East, South West, West and Border), engaging with individuals and groups who are heavily engaged in their local water environments. These workshops explored different models and approaches for community participation, gathering valuable insights, ideas, and perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders. The enthusiasm, commitment, and knowledge shared by participants have shaped the development of a model that can be adapted and rolled out across all 46 catchments in Ireland.

The CCFs offer a vital opportunity to create channels for local voices to be heard and to establish direct links between communities and the governance structures of the Water Action Plan. LAWPRO is committed to supporting the development of CCFs that are inclusive, effective, and reflective of the needs and priorities of local communities. We look forward to working with stakeholders to gain valuable learnings from the five pilot CCFs to be established and use the experience to build a strong and lasting framework that empowers people to play an active role in water management.

We look forward to a shared journey toward healthier natural waters and more resilient catchments for all.

Anthony Coleman

Director of Services

Local Authorities Waters Programme

Executive Summary

A national scoping exercise was conducted by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) to inform the development of a Catchment Community Fora (CCF) model as outlined in the Water Action Plan 2024. The establishment of CCFs aim to enhance community participation in water management and support the implementation Plan using an integrated catchment management approach.

LAWPRO was tasked with designing a national model for CCFs to improve water quality through community engagement. The scoping exercise included five regional workshops and an online survey.

Workshops were held in five catchments: Slaney, Boyne, Mal Bay, Galway Bay SE, and Newry-Fane-Glyde-Dee. 99 participants attended; 22 additional responses were collected via an online survey.

Workshops used co-design methods to gather input on the roles, structure, and governance of CCFs.

The workshop findings are summarised as follows:

- Participants envisioned CCFs as:
 - Platforms for community-government dialogue.
 - Hubs for awareness, education, and knowledge sharing.
 - Facilitators of stakeholder collaboration.
 - Advocates for water quality monitoring and restoration.
- Potential Roles and Responsibilities were identified in four main activity areas:
 - Local Action: Monitoring, education, citizen science.
 - Information Sharing: Updates, resources, and data.
 - Advocacy: Policy influence, accountability.
 - Public Engagement: Events, volunteer recruitment, visibility.
- Stakeholder Involvement were identified as:
 - Individuals and local groups (e.g., anglers, farmers, youth).
 - Local organisations and schools.
 - Environmental NGOs (e.g., An Taisce, Rivers Trust).
 - Statutory bodies (e.g., EPA, LAWPRO, Inland Fisheries Ireland).
- Supports needed to overcome Barriers included:
 - Secretariat support from LAWPRO and professional expertise.
 - Clear governance and decision-making structures.
 - Training and access to scientific data.
 - Community outreach and inclusive engagement.
 - Sustainable, multi-year funding.
- Challenges identified included:
 - Bureaucracy, lack of trust, over-reliance on volunteers.
 - Risk of dominance by certain groups or agencies.

Three models were evaluated with the following observations summarised:

- A Local Organisation-led:
 - Community-based, but may lack capacity.

- Public Body-led:
 - Stable funding, but risks bureaucracy.
- Single National Organisation (e.g., LAWPRO)
 - 79% of groups preferred this model for consistency, oversight, and expertise.

A survey was also conducted on members that were unable to attend on the day which reemphasised the findings of the original workshops. In particular, the survey highlighted a strong support for CCFs' roles in advocacy, education & collaboration, a preference for inclusive membership with limited voting rights for government reps. The survey also emphasised the importance of clear governance, autonomy, and adequate support.

This scoping exercise recommends the establishment five pilot CCFs in the original catchments with members recruited from workshop participants and other local networks that is hosted and supported by LAWPRO. A clear Terms of Reference for members along with the appointment of support staff overseen by the establishment an Implementation Advisory Group is strongly recommended. Following establishment of the pilots, an ongoing review should be undertaken to inform the potential national rollout which identifies long-term funding and administrative requirements.

This scoping exercise provides a detailed, community-informed roadmap for establishing Catchment Community Fora across Ireland. These Fora are envisioned as inclusive, well-supported platforms that empower local communities to play a central role in protecting and improving water quality.

Introduction

Background

The establishment of catchment community fora follows the Water Action Plan 2024 adoption of a 'Integrated Catchment Management' approach. This approach involves:

- Gathering the best available information to understand the catchment (i.e., where the water comes from, how it flows through the landscape, and the activities that may be causing pollution)
- Looking at all the uses of water (i.e., drinking, agricultural, industrial, and recreational, and the ecosystems that depend on water to survive)
- Engaging local communities and involving them in the management of their catchment

Through the development and implementation of 46 Catchment Management Work Plans, this integrated catchment management approach focuses on identifying and deciding on specific measures for each catchment and water body, as well as identifying co-benefits of water focused measures for climate and biodiversity (1).

Under the Water Action Plan, the Local Authorities Waters Programme (LAWPRO) has been assigned responsibility for undertaking research into and establishment of a new national model and framework for Catchment Community Fora. LAWPRO is a national shared service working on behalf of Ireland's 31 local authorities to protect and restore good water quality in our rivers, lakes, estuaries, ground and coastal water through catchment science and local community engagement.

Scoping Exercise Overview

Between May to October 2024, LAWPRO convened and facilitated five in-person consultations titled "Water Matters: A Conversation on Community Involvement and Water" in five catchments across Ireland. Using a co-design approach, the aim of these consultations was to facilitate discussion and gather insights from community representatives and stakeholders in a catchment about the new catchment community fora model. Through a series of facilitated table group exercises, participants had an opportunity to discuss and inform the design of various components of the fora model, such as defining the roles, function, structure, and tasks of a catchment community forum.

In total, the consultation process involved 99 individuals across the five water catchments. These catchments included:

- Slaney River Catchment
- Boyne River Catchment
- Mal Bay Catchment
- Galway Bay South East Catchment
- Newry, Fane, Glyde and Dee Catchment

At each consultation workshop, facilitators and notetakers were seated at tables comprised of five to seven individuals; their role was to facilitate table group exercises and record detailed notes of the discussion and emerging themes. Following each consultation, an online survey was shared with individuals and groups who were unable to attend the consultation workshops to gather additional views and perspectives on the fora model.

Overview of the Report

The report summarises points, themes and suggestions reported by individuals who attended the five consultation workshops on the CCF model and framework, along the supporting documentation used by LAWPRO in this scoping exercise. The report is divided into three parts.

Part One contains findings from the scoping exercise undertaken with a range of stakeholders who participated in five catchment consultations, held between June to September 2024, and an online survey on CCFs, which was undertaken between July to November 2024. In catchment consultations, roundtable exercises were used to encourage participants to share their views and perspectives on various aspects of this CCF model and framework. Each section of this report presents findings for each roundtable exercise held with participants. The sections of the report are as follows:

- Methodology: An outline of the methods used to involve stakeholders in the five pilot catchments and steps involved in designing the scoping exercise for co-designing the CCF model and framework
- Section 1: Benefits of the CCF as reported by participants, along with the vision statements for the CCF co-developed by each table group.
- Section 2: Roles, responsibilities, and tasks of a CCF, including a broad range of actions a forum could undertake within a catchment.
- Section 3: Potential members of the CCF forum, other relevant catchment stakeholders, and strategies for public engagement and member recruitment.
- Section 4: Factors supporting or challenging the establishment of a CCF, including participants' views on key considerations, necessary supports, and potential barriers.
- Section 5: Participants' perspectives on the proposed governance options for the CCF, including strengths, weaknesses, and ranked preferences of three governance models.
- Section 6: Suggestions from participants regarding the further implementation and piloting of the CCF model.

- Section 7: Findings from an online survey on the CCF model and framework undertaken with individual unable to attend the five catchment workshops.
- Section 8: Recommendations co-developed by LAWPRO on the CCF model and framework.

The part contains a synthesis of findings for 24 table groups across the five consultation workshops, along with 22 responses from the online survey. All findings raised by two or more table groups, with exception of the findings on the online survey. Throughout the number of table numbers are entered as brackets at the end of each statement to illustrate the number of groups who raised each point unless otherwise stated.

Part Two of this report contains an annex with appendices and supplementary detail about the scoping exercise.

Part Three of the report contains supporting documentation from the scoping exercise, which consists of information shared with participants who attended the catchment consultations and the online survey shared with individuals who were unable to attend the workshops.

Methodology

Overview

This mixed methods research consisted of five in-person consultation workshops across five selected catchments and an online survey for individuals unable to attend. These activities gathered views from community groups, eNGOs, and stakeholders on the CCF model. These consultations were followed by a series of co-development workshops with LAWPRO to review findings and co-create key documents to support the pilot implementation of the CCF model and framework.

Catchment Consultations with Community Representatives and Stakeholders

Approach and Design

The consultation approach was collaboratively developed by LAWPRO and Quality Matters, an independent research organisation commissioned to support the process. The methodology followed a three-part structure:

1. **Co-Design Workshops** - Initial workshops were held with LAWPRO's Regional Coordinators and Senior Community Water Officers to agree on the format, objectives, and structure of the consultations. It was agreed that each event would be a full-day, in-person workshop engaging local community representatives, environmental NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders.
2. **Workshop Planning and Materials** -A detailed workshop plan was developed, including guidance for table group exercises, facilitator handbooks, and participant communications. Materials were reviewed and amended following feedback from An Fóram Uisce, who also recommended the inclusion of an online survey. Preparatory briefings were provided to LAWPRO and An Fóram Uisce to ensure alignment.
3. **Facilitator Training** -Four training seminars were delivered to LAWPRO staff and Quality Matters facilitators and notetakers. Training focused on roles and responsibilities, facilitation consistency, and data capture techniques to ensure high-quality, standardised outputs across all catchments.

Catchment Selection

Five catchments were selected to reflect ecological diversity and geographic spread:

1. Slaney River Catchment (Co. Wexford)
2. Boyne River Catchment (Co. Meath, Louth, Kildare)
3. Mal Bay Catchment (Co. Clare)
4. Galway Bay South East Catchment (Co. Galway)
5. Newry, Fane, Glyde and Dee Catchment (Co. Louth, Monaghan, Meath)

These catchments represent varied water body types and stakeholder profiles, supporting the collection of balanced and regionally relevant insights.

Participant Recruitment and Engagement

Participants were recruited by LAWPRO using stakeholder mapping and existing contact lists. Invitations were distributed at least one month prior to each workshop and recipients were encouraged to share the invitation within their networks. Participants were from the following groups:

- Local residents or professionals with an interest in water, biodiversity, or agriculture in the catchment
- Members of community groups, development organisations, or environmental NGOs
- Members of Public Participation Networks (PPNs), the Irish Farmers' Association, or related local networks
- Individuals who previously worked with LAWPRO on collaborative actions

In total, 99 individuals attended across the five workshops:

- Slaney River Catchment: 20
- Boyne River Catchment: 25
- Mal Bay Catchment: 18
- Galway Bay South East Catchment: 19
- Newry, Fane, Glyde and Dee Catchment: 16

Data Collection and Analysis

Each workshop was structured around small table group discussions facilitated by trained staff. Facilitators and notetakers captured key discussion points, emerging themes, suggestions, and any written participant contributions. Notes were transcribed into a uniform template to ensure consistency.

All data were reviewed by Quality Matters and then analysed thematically. Notes from 24 table groups were coded to identify recurring patterns and consolidated into thematic findings. Themes were cross-validated against original notes to ensure accuracy and to reflect the participants' perspectives. Only themes raised by three or more table groups were included in the final analysis.

Summary Reports

Following each workshop, a summary report (12–15 pages) was produced and shared with participants. These reports provided a concise synthesis of the issues, ideas, and recommendations raised in group discussions. They also supported continuity by informing subsequent workshops and allowing early trends to be tracked. Although the reports indicated emerging themes, all data were re-analysed during the final synthesis to ensure findings were robust and systematically coded.

Online Survey on Catchment Community Fora Model and Framework

Survey Design and Purpose

In parallel with the workshops, an online survey was developed to gather the views of individuals and organisations who were unable to attend the in-person consultations. The survey aimed to validate workshop findings and further explore perceptions of the CCF model. The survey included both qualitative and quantitative / rating-style questions and was hosted on SoGoSurvey, a survey platform. Survey questions were designed to mirror the structure and topics from the in-person workshops and refined after the workshops to incorporate emerging themes.

Survey Distribution

The survey was shared with 57 individuals identified by LAWPRO as invited but non-attending stakeholders. Email invitations were followed by two reminder emails. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey with relevant colleagues. Respondents received a detailed briefing on the CCF model, the purpose of the research, and a link to an article with additional context. Anonymity was assured, although organisational affiliation could be noted to contextualise responses.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey ran from June to November 2024. A total of 22 responses were received, representing a 39% response rate. Quantitative data were analysed for frequency patterns and are presented as percentages. Qualitative responses were coded to identify recurring comments, which were grouped thematically. Response counts were used for qualitative findings.

Co-Development of Model Considerations and Supporting Documents

Following data analysis, LAWPRO's Regional Coordinators and Senior Community Water Officers collaborated co-design a set of supporting documents informed by findings from the scoping exercise. These documents are intended to support LAWPRO's responsibilities under the Water Action Plan 2024 and to aid with pilot implementation of CCFs in five pilot catchments.

LAWPRO has develop a draft implementation plan for implementing a CCF pilot in the five pilot catchments. This draft plan will be shared and discussed with DHLGH and An Forám Uisce to gather input towards developing a detailed implementation plan and pilot for establishing CCFs in Ireland.

Report Limitations

There were two key limitations to this research.

Limitation	Description and Mitigation
Selection Bias	As participation was voluntary, not all stakeholder groups may have been equally represented. To mitigate this, attempts were made to ensure a diversity of

	<p>stakeholders for each catchment were invited and represented in consultation process, however, some stakeholder groups may have been over or under-represented in at the workshops. Also, an online survey was available to non-attendees.</p>
<p>Limited Awareness of CCF Model</p>	<p>Participants may have had limited prior knowledge. To address this, all participants received an information sheet and a presentation during the workshops. Survey participants received background materials and links to additional resources.</p>

Part One: Findings
from Scoping
Exercise on
Catchment
Community Fora

1 Understanding the Benefits and Vision for Catchment Community Fora

Overview

This section discusses the views and perspectives of participants on the potential benefit of the CCF model, and the vision for how a CCF may have an impact for both catchments and members of the community. The benefits and vision statements were co-created in table group exercise by participants.

Theme Analysis of Benefits of Catchment Community Fora

To understand participants' perspectives on the benefits of establishing CCF, table groups were invited to discuss ideas on the ways that CCF might benefit integrated catchment management and increase public participation in the catchment or wider community. Answers from table groups were categories into four thematic areas:

1. Supporting Community to Engage with Key Decision Makers and Government
2. Awareness Raising and Knowledge Sharing on Water Quality
3. Improve Communication Between Stakeholders (i.e., individuals, groups, and organisations)
4. Prioritizing Work to Improve Water Quality

This following section will explain these themes and summarise views shared across 24 table groups involved in the workshops.

Theme 1: Supporting Community to Engage with Decision Makers and Government

Participants agreed a CCF should be a platform for community members to discuss issues and engage with decision makers or the Government on actions or issues relating to water quality. Benefits of CCFs was described by participants in various ways:

- **A CCF acts as the representative or voice of community interests and needs when engaging with decision makers (n=18):** Over two-thirds of table groups felt a CCF should act as the representative for community interests and issues, relaying views to senior decision makers and influencing policy changes.
- **Local communities are consulted and/or involved in decisions on catchment management (n=11):** Nearly half reported a benefit of a CCF should be facilitating consultations or encouraging greater community involvement in integrated catchment management decisions, such as water management plans and local projects.
- **A CCF works to connect local community with larger Government departments, implementing bodies, or key political representatives (n=7):** Less than a third thought a CCF should serve as a space for direct community engagement with representatives from key Government

Departments, implementing bodies, or political representatives to share up-to-date information and perspectives.

- **CCF should put pressure on Government and enforce environmental legislation (n=7):** Less than a third highlighted that the CCF should put pressure on and hold the Government accountable for enforcing environmental measures and legislation, including reviewing local implementation and bringing attention to polluters.

Theme 2: Awareness Raising and Knowledge Sharing on Water Quality

Participants envisaged CCFs should serve as a platform for raising awareness of catchment issues as well as sharing solutions, discussing actions, sharing local practices to improve water quality. This theme was described by participants in various ways:

- **Provide practical guidance on ways to address water quality issues (n=15):** Nearly two-thirds of table groups recommended providing individuals, farmers, and communities with easily accessible information and practical guidance on protecting and restoring water quality.
- **An information hub and details on relevant authorities to contact when there is an issue with water quality should be available (n=4):** Four tables suggested an information hub with contact details for relevant authorities to improve communication with enforcement agencies.
- **Create awareness for water quality through educational programmes (n=14):** Over half of table groups explained that educating the public and implementing community programmes would create awareness and encourage water quality protection.
- **Creating awareness through community events (n=4):** Four tables suggested community events organized by a CCF to increase public awareness of local water bodies and educate about threats.

Theme 3: Improve Communication Between Stakeholders

Participants stated CCFs should be a platform to coordinate communication between relevant stakeholders in the catchment. This theme was described by participants in several ways:

- **Facilitate joined up thinking between community members and stakeholders about addressing water quality (n=20):** The majority explained how a CCF should facilitate greater collaboration among community members and relevant stakeholders (e.g., Local Authorities, Government officials, farmers, landowners, foresters) to improve water quality.
- **Improve communication with farmers and agricultural sector (n=8):** Eight tables highlighted how CCFs should increase communication with farmers, serving as an important link by educating on best practices and creating a network for sharing effective practices.

Theme 4: Prioritising Work to Improve Water Quality

Participants stated a CCF should promote and restore the quality or increase the status of water bodies flagged by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This theme was described by participants in several ways:

- **Increase water quality monitoring and support independent data collection (n=7):** Over a quarter explained a benefit of the forum would be to improve water quality through encouraging routine monitoring and independent data collection by forum members (citizen science).
- **Adopt a holistic view to protect and restore biodiversity (n=7):** Over a quarter of table groups expressed that a benefit of a CCF would be promoting a holistic view of protecting and restoring all aspects of biodiversity, understanding co-benefits for climate change and the environment.
- **Identify emerging risks to water quality and work to address them (n=4):** Four tables explained that a benefit of a forum is raising attention to emerging risks impacting water quality and relaying this information to members and agencies.
- **Emphasize ownership over the catchments (n=4):** Four table groups felt a CCF is an opportunity to emphasize the public's ownership and responsibility for protecting water bodies, helping people to understand and care about their own catchment.

Vision Statements

At the beginning of each catchment workshop, table groups were invited to brainstorm vision statements to describe the role of a CCF. In this exercise, a vision statement was described as a description or image of the future that a CCF should aspire to create. Out of 24 tables, 22 table groups created and shared a vision statement for CCF.

These vision statements were grouped under three themes:

1. A Platform where Communities Share and Respond to Water Issues
2. Protect and Improve Water Quality
3. A Voice for Water and for the Community

The section below explains each theme and shares examples of vision statements developed by participants.

Theme 1: A Platform where Communities Share and Respond to Water Issues

These statements highlight a vision for CCF as a platform where stakeholders share water-related concerns and issues occurring in the catchment and work collectively to find solution-focused ways of addressing these issues. These vision statements highlighted how a CCF would:

- Co-ordinate and liaise with stakeholders to protect and restore the water bodies and the surrounding environment for all (n=8)
- Act as a conduit between people on the ground that are passionate about protecting their local rivers and waterbodies, with both local and national government (n=17)
- Identify problems impacting water in the community, and to engage key stakeholders to improve and protect water quality (n=20)

This is best described by the following vision statements:

A CCF act as a conduit between people on the ground that are passionate about protecting their local rivers and waterbodies, with both local and national government.

A CCF must have real influence in the management of their catchment and should have a critical role in decision making and with ensuring local authorities and other state agencies achieve objectives set out in their plans or by enforcing the legal protections set out in legislation.

A CCF brings together like-minded people who respect our waters by blending local knowledge and expertise. It raises awareness about water issues and is a hub where members can help support our farmers and other people involved in catchment management.

Theme 2: Protect and Improve Water Quality

This theme refers to visions statements where a CCF operates as a platform for communities and individuals work together to prioritizes and protect water bodies. These vision statements highlight how the goals of a CCF is to:

- Make healthy waters as a priority (n=4)
- Encourage and communicate awareness of water quality (n=15)
- Help people understand that water gets better when we all stick together (n=24)

This can be best demonstrated by the following statements:

The purpose of CCF are to protect and improve water quality.

The purpose of CCF are to help create sustainable and healthy water bodies in a catchment.

A CCF protects what we have and improves the water quality of our catchment's water bodies, lakes and rivers.

Theme 3: A Voice for Water and for the Community

The third and final theme refers to vision statements that highlighted the importance of giving voice to the community. These vision statements highlighted that CCF:

- Improves water quality by giving a voice to all in the community (n=13)
- Gives equal voice to all in the community, to take ownership and to love and appreciate and value their water that supports their life (n=19)
- Is an inclusive and holistic voice for our waters and our communities (i.e., human and non-human) to restore and revive for a sustainable distant water future (n=21)

This was described by table groups in the following ways:

A CCF brings the entire catchment community, from source to sea, together for the awareness, protection and restoration of water quality and biodiversity for now and into the future.

A CCF empowers local communities to have a strong voice, to get the word out on water quality, biodiversity loss and climate change.

A forum for people to recognize, own, and understand water bodies in their catchment, to develop an awareness for water quality, to create a network of all community stakeholders, and to be a voice for water.

Conclusion

Participants envision CCFs as crucial platforms for integrated catchment management, primarily by supporting community engagement with decision-makers, raising awareness and sharing knowledge on water quality, improving communication among diverse stakeholders, and prioritizing work to enhance water quality. The co-created vision statements further reinforce these roles, portraying CCFs as conduits between local passions and governmental action, protectors of water bodies, and inclusive voices for both the environment and the community, aiming for sustainable and healthy water futures.

2 Themes for Roles and Tasks of a Catchment Community Forum

Overview

This section builds on the previous one by detailing themes and participant views on the specific roles, responsibilities, and tasks of a Catchment Community Forum (CCF). During a table group exercise, participants identified potential roles and actions of a CCF, which were then grouped into four main areas of activity.

Activity 1: Programmes of Local Work and Actions

Improve buy-in or connection among local community groups and organisations to implement actions to improve water quality (n=10): Nearly half of the table groups stated CCF should work to improve buy-in and develop connections with local community groups and eNGOs towards implementing measures to improve water quality. Participants highlighted that a CCF should ensure people understand and are aware of local work. Forum meetings could be used as a platform for discussing and sharing independent activities or solutions for water quality issues.

- CCF could offer networking opportunities to develop greater awareness of people and their work in the catchment
- Knowledge exchanges or peer-to-peer sessions could be held where members seek guidance from experts or practical advice
- Local connections could be built through developing forum resources and guides, outlining CCF operations and cooperative work

Undertake local water quality monitoring and track implementation of measures (n=8): Participants suggested CCF should be responsible for monitoring water quality between EPA cycles and tracking progress of measures implemented under Catchment Management Work Plans, where feasible.

- Specific activities include monitoring local lakes, rivers, and water bodies
- CCF could track progress of actions outlined in Water Action Plans, Catchment Management Work Plans, and/or Sectoral Action Work Plans
- Educating the public and landowners on assessing changes or measuring water quality on their properties
- Holding demonstrations and supporting rollout of citizen science activities with a water-related focus
- If environmental violations are learned about, they should be reported to appropriate authorities, and the forum should be empowered to request information or updates

Deliver educational activities with a focus on improving water literacy and environmental awareness (n=5): Five table groups stated a CCF could deliver educational workshops and seminars to improve

public awareness of water-related harms and environmental good practice, targeting the general public, community groups, children, and young people. Examples include:

- Delivering classroom talks and presentations to students
- Undertaking outreach activities to meet and raise awareness among groups not involved in environmental activities
- Participating in community-wide events and festivals
- Holding community awareness events on water-related issues or harmful practices
- Supporting school-based environmental initiatives or developing a Flag Programme to educate students on water quality

Activity 2: Information Gathering and Sharing

Share relevant information and updates on water quality and forum activity (n=14): More than half of the table groups reported CCFs must communicate important information, news, updates, and publications among its members, and ideally make it publicly available through a user-friendly website. Types of information suggested by participants include:

- Accessible reports summarizing water quality trends and impacts of measures
- Resources with contact information on forum members, community groups, and eNGOs
- Relevant good practice literature and research on improving water quality
- Updates on activities, nature-based solutions, or projects from other catchments or organizations
- Updates on the latest developments and efforts to protect and restore water bodies

Work cooperatively to collect data on water quality (n=4): Four table groups suggested a CCF should work cooperatively with community groups to collect data on trends and monitor water quality using both quantitative and qualitative indicators, emphasizing the value of local knowledge.

Activity 3: Advocacy and Attention Raising

Advocate on behalf forum members and water bodies to influence the implementation of relevant legislation, plans and strategies (n=12): Half of the table groups agreed that a critical role of CCFs should be to advocate on behalf of forum members and to increase local influence on relevant planning, legislation, and strategies, by facilitating consultations and gathering input.

- CCFs could serve as a platform for members to discuss issues and ideas to advocate for policy changes
- CCFs could serve as the representative voice for the catchment, raising concerns directly with appropriate bodies
- CCFs could work with other fora, community groups, and eNGOs to identify shared concerns and agree collaborative actions
- CCFs should maintain strong links and open communication with key policy/decision makers and environmental stakeholders

Keep Government and implementing bodies accountable for protecting water quality in the catchment

(n=6): Six table groups agreed a CCF should hold the Government and implementing bodies accountable for their strategies and pressure Regional Management Committees and Regional Operation Committees to fulfil agreed measures. Participants felt CCFs should have powers to enforce timely responses.

Activity 4: Public Involvement and Promotion of Catchment Community Fora

Hold local events to increase community involvement (n=8): Eight table groups stated CCFs should hold local events focused on raising awareness of water bodies and engaging people in catchment management or forum participation. Examples include coastal/river walks, clean-ups, recreational activities, public talks, and artistic/musical events.

Offer community updates on the work of CCF (n=5): Five table groups stated the importance of sharing regular updates about the work and positive impact of a CCF, especially for recruiting members or engaging the local community.

Offer incentives or hold an award/ceremony to engage communities and highlight local achievements

(n=4): Four table groups suggested hosting community awards or ceremonies to boost morale and reward local efforts, or offering incentives to encourage environmentally friendly activities.

Assist with recruiting volunteers for environmental and community groups undertaking water-related projects (n=3):

Three table groups stated a CCF should assist eNGOs and community groups in enlisting volunteers for projects, clean-up activities, or implementation of measures by communicating information to the public.

Organise field visits to water bodies of importance (n=3):

Three table groups suggested a CCF should organize field visits to high-status objective water bodies to familiarize members and the public with important rivers, lakes, and water bodies, demonstrating the effectiveness of measures.

Hold regular meetings with a clear agenda and information on how public can participate in forum meeting (n=3):

Three table groups highlighted CCF meetings must be accessible and open to the public, with clear instructions on how the public can raise questions or concerns.

Conclusion

Participants provided detailed insights into the potential roles and tasks of CCFs, encompassing practical local work, vital information sharing, active advocacy, and diverse public engagement initiatives. These roles emphasize the CCFs function as a hands-on, community-driven entity that collects data, educates, influences policy, and actively involves citizens in protecting and improving water quality.

3 Identifying Stakeholders Involved in Catchment Community Fora

Overview

Participants in the five consultation workshops identified a wide range of individuals, groups, and institutions that could play a role in a CCF. Stakeholders were grouped into four broad categories:

- Individuals and Local Groups
- Local Organisations, Businesses, and Schools
- Environmental NGOs and Charities
- Implementing Bodies, Statutory Agencies, and Government

Specifically, the involvement of individuals and groups was seen as crucial to ensure diverse representation, encourage collaboration, and promotion of various interests in water protection across a catchment. More details on the various stakeholders suggested by participants can be found in [Appendix 1: Details on Catchment Stakeholders](#).

Individuals and Local Groups

Participants named various community-based stakeholders with existing or potential interest in water quality or the catchment. The most frequently identified stakeholders were:

- Anglers (n=13, 54%)
- Individuals with interest in water/environment (n=11, 46%)
- Tourism and local guides (n=7, 29%)
- Farmers (n=5, 21%)
- Travellers/Traveller groups, Beekeepers, Solicitors (each n=6, 25%)

Other stakeholders included artists, landowners, foresters, older adults, farm advisors, and young people.

For community or voluntary groups, participants suggested the involvement of:

- Tidy Towns and Recreational Clubs (n=14, 58%)
- Environmental and Heritage Groups (n=11 and n=8)
- Angling Clubs (n=7, 29%)
- Voluntary associations and faith-based groups (n=7)

Also, participants highlighted the importance of tapping into established local networks, which would help a CCF to build trust and legitimacy in the catchment.

Local Organisations, Businesses, and Schools

Local Organisations

Participants highlighted organisations with strong community ties:

- Farming Organisations (n=10, 42%)
- Public Participation Networks (n=8, 33%)
- Irish Farmers Association (n=7, 29%)
- Other named groups included the Irish Countrywomen's Association, Scouting Ireland, Teagasc, and youth services.

Local Businesses

Suggested business participants included:

- Tourism and eco-tourism businesses (n=17, 71%)
- Livestock businesses (n=14, 19%)
- Chambers of Commerce (n=7, 10%)
- Forestry, recreational, and energy businesses (n=3–2 each)

Also, participants suggested that local businesses may have both an environmental and economic interest in maintaining water quality.

Schools and Education

Schools were seen as important collaborators:

- Primary and Secondary Schools (n=22, 92%)
- Universities and Colleges (n=12, 50%)
- Education and Training Boards (n=4, 17%)
- School Environmental Groups (n=3, 13%)

Also, some participants suggested involving schools and young people through activities like school visits, curriculum-linked projects, or inviting student representation on the forum.

Environmental NGOs and Charities

Participants identified national and regional eNGOs as potential partners or members. The most frequently identified stakeholders were:

- An Taisce (n=10, 42%)
- Rivers Trust (n=9, 38%)
- BirdWatch Ireland and Tidy Towns (n=8, 33%)
- Waterways Ireland (n=6, 25%)

Others included Burren Beo, Clean Coasts, Irish Wildlife Trust, Irish Peatland Conservation Council, and the Irish Environmental Network. Participants stressed the value of their technical expertise, advocacy experience, and strong public profiles in communities.

Implementing Bodies, Statutory Agencies, and Government

Participants agreed that formal institutions must play a role, though views were mixed on their voting rights and influence in decision-making. The important stakeholders include:

- Local Authorities (n=24, 100%)
- Environmental Protection Agency (n=20, 83%)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland and Coillte (n=17, 71%)
- LAWPRO (n=14, 58%)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (n=13, 54%)
- Office of Public Works (n=11, 46%)
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (n=10, 42%)

Participants valued these agencies' data, funding, and influence but were cautious about allowing representatives to dominate public discussion within a catchment.

When asked about the types of local government officials or staff, participants specified key roles within local authorities:

- Councillors (n=12, 50%)
- Biodiversity Officers (n=5, 21%)
- TDs, Heritage Officers, Climate Officers (n=1–3 each)

These representatives were seen as crucial liaisons between CCFs and local decision-making structures.

Conclusion

Participants envisioned CCF as inclusive platforms uniting a wide range of actors—from individual citizens and community groups to schools, businesses, environmental NGOs, and statutory agencies. This diverse involvement was seen as vital for developing effective, collaborative responses to water management challenges and building a sense of shared ownership over local catchments.

4 Factors that Will Help and/or Hinder a Catchment Community Forum

Overview

Participants discussed the enablers and challenges of setting up and sustaining CCFs. These were grouped under five themes:

1. Human Resources
2. Governance and Decision-Making
3. Information and Training
4. Engagement with the Local Community
5. Funding and Financial Supports

Each theme includes both supportive factors and potential hindrances identified by participants across 24 table groups.

Theme 1: Human Resources

Factors that will help:

- **Access to Professional Support (n=16):** Fora need access to trained professionals in areas like planning, law, advocacy, and catchment science.
- **Paid Support Staff (n=13):** Staff should handle coordination, admin, communication, training, and stakeholder liaison, reducing pressure on volunteers.
- **Volunteer Recruitment Support (n=5):** Fora can assist local groups in attracting volunteers for water-related projects.
- **Involvement of Community Water Officers (CWOs) (n=4):** CWOs were widely seen as key facilitators due to their experience and networks.

Factors that will hinder:

- **Lack of Staff Support (n=14):** Without paid staff or funding, Fora may fail to run effectively or risk volunteer burnout.
- **Poor Leadership or Communication (n=6):** Internal discord or unclear roles can stall forum effectiveness.
- **Over-reliance on Volunteers (n=4):** Excessive dependence on unpaid members may cause delays or disengagement.

Theme 2: Governance and Decision-Making

Factors that will help:

- **Strong Links with Implementing Bodies (n=10):** Formal relationships with local authorities, Regional Committees, and NGOs strengthen Fora' legitimacy and access to resources.
- **Clear Governance Structures (n=9):** Terms of Reference, defined roles (e.g. chair, executive), and decision-making protocols build accountability.
- **Clarified Role in Broader Environmental Governance (n=9):** Fora should understand how they fit into Ireland's existing environmental framework.
- **Public and Transparent Meetings (n=7):** Regular, open meetings build public trust and allow wider participation.
- **Independence of Fora (n=5):** Fora should be free from external influence to make decisions that reflect local needs.
- **Ability to Review Progress (n=5):** Vision statements and work plans should help Fora assess impact.
- **Statutory Basis for CCFs (n=5):** Legal recognition would provide authority and consistency.
- **Creation of Executive Committees (n=4):** Regional or national committees could support networking and specialization.

Factors that will hinder:

- **Dominance by Individuals or Groups (n=10):** Power imbalances may stifle open dialogue or decision-making.
- **Overly Complex Bureaucracy (n=7):** Heavy procedures may discourage participation or slow action.
- **Influence of Government Agencies (n=7):** There was concern about Government representatives overpowering community voices.
- **Lack of Compliance or Oversight (n=6):** Fora need to adhere to environmental regulations to maintain credibility.
- **No Real Influence (n=3):** Without decision-making power, Fora may be perceived as symbolic rather than impactful.

Theme 3: Information and Training

Factors that will help:

- **Access to Catchment Science (n=17):** Fora need regular briefings, maps, data interpretation, and scientific updates.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning (n=15):** Exchanges among Fora and local groups encourage shared learning and innovation.
- **Training on Forum Operations (n=13):** Topics include conflict resolution, finance, volunteer management, and IT.
- **Training on Water Quality and Citizen Science (n=10):** Fora need practical skills for fieldwork, invasive species monitoring, and data collection.

- **Orientation on Setting Up Fora (n=9):** Clear guidance on forum models and meeting procedures is vital during launch.
- **Access to Practical Resources (n=8):** Fora need contact lists, project updates, and funding info.
- **Support for Field Testing (n=8):** Access to lab equipment and technical support enhances forum capabilities.
- **Digital Training Options (n=5):** Online tools allow flexible access to training.

Factors that will hinder:

- **Inaccessible Information (n=8):** Outdated websites or lack of updates can limit community awareness.
- **Poor Communication with Agencies (n=5):** Lack of cooperation from Government or implementing bodies reduces forum impact.
- **Misinformation (n=4):** Incorrect or misleading claims in meetings can undermine credibility.

Theme 4: Engagement with the Local Community

Factors that will help:

- **Strong Environmental Ethos (n=13):** Members should share a value for water and community service.
- **Public Outreach Events (n=14):** Events like clean-ups, river walks, school talks, and festivals raise awareness.
- **Inclusivity and Representation (n=13):** Fora should reflect the catchment's diversity, including farmers, young people, and marginalized groups.
- **Local Champions or Spokespeople (n=8):** Identified leaders can promote forum visibility and recruitment.
- **Social Media Use (n=6):** Digital platforms help reach new audiences and showcase local impact.
- **Hybrid Meeting Formats (n=4):** Offering both in-person and online access increases accessibility.

Factors that will hinder:

- **Lack of Community Interest (n=10):** Fora may struggle to engage communities if people are disengaged or sceptical about the goals of a CCF
- **Resistance to Change (n=4):** Some stakeholders, especially landowners, may be reluctant to accept forum-led initiatives.
- **Forum Seen as Enforcers (n=4):** If viewed as watchdogs, Fora risk alienating the very groups they seek to engage.

Theme 5: Funding and Financial Supports

Factors that will help:

- **Adequate Multi-Year Funding (n=14):** Sustainable financing is needed for staffing, events, and projects.
- **Ringfenced Government Budget (n=10):** Dedicated national funding ensures consistency and long-term planning.
- **Discretionary Local Funding (n=9):** Fora should be able to allocate funding flexibly for community engagement or local projects.

Factors that will hinder:

- **Uncertainty or Insufficient Funding (n=14):** Insecure or complex funding processes threaten forum stability and ambition.

Conclusion

Participants identified a range of supports needed to ensure CCFs succeed, from professional staffing and scientific input to strong community outreach and secure funding. At the same time, they cautioned against bureaucracy, exclusion, and top-down interference. With the right structure, CCFs have the potential to be powerful engines of collaborative water governance.

5 Options for the Structure of Catchment Community Fora

Overview

This section presents three governance models for managing CCFs, as discussed by participants in five workshops. Each model was evaluated based on its perceived strengths and weaknesses. The models are:

1. CCFs managed by a local organisation
2. CCFs managed by a public body or local authority
3. CCFs managed by a single national organisation

Participants ranked these based on their table group's views and perspectives on its feasibility, alignment with community values, and the potential to achieve the forum's goals and named benefits.

Model 1: Local Organisation

A local charity or company limited by guarantee would manage each forum for a specific catchment. Responsibilities include recruiting members, hosting meetings, and supporting participation. A national support body may assist the numerous local charities by providing funding, resources, training, and oversight.

Strengths of this approach are:

- **Encourages Local Buy-In (n=16):** Trusted organisations with existing community ties could foster strong local engagement.
- **Supports Forum Independence (n=13):** Autonomy from government influence allows impartial decision-making.
- **Relevant Experience and Expertise (n=9):** Organisations already active in water or environmental projects may bring necessary skills.
- **Proven Financial Management (n=5):** Some groups already have systems in place for managing grants.
- **Reduced Bureaucracy (n=2):** A community-based model may be more flexible and people-focused.

Weaknesses associated with this approach are:

- **Conflicting Organisational Values (n=18):** If the host's goals don't align with the CCF vision, it could compromise neutrality.
- **Limited Capacity or Staffing (n=13):** Smaller organisations may lack the resources to manage Fora effectively.

- **Weak Grant Management Skills (n=11):** Inexperienced groups may struggle with financial reporting or compliance.
- **Lack of Familiarity with Sector Governance (n=5):** Some groups may lack awareness of environmental governance frameworks.
- **Local Organisations May Not Be Needed (n=3):** Some participants questioned whether this layer of management is necessary at all.

Model 2: Public Body or Local Authority

CCFs would be set up and operated by local authorities or another public body, which would oversee operations and staff support while leaving decision-making to forum members.

Strengths of this approach are:

- **Secure, Multi-Year Funding (n=10):** Public bodies are better positioned to access and administer stable funding.
- **Strong Community Links (n=8):** Authorities often already work with community and environmental groups.
- **Skilled Staff in Place (n=6):** Biodiversity and heritage officers, among others, bring relevant experience.
- **Efficient Governance Systems (n=4):** Reporting, financial controls, and governance structures already exist.
- **Greater Transparency (n=3):** Decision-making and public accountability would be clear and regulated.
- **Policy Knowledge (n=2):** Familiarity with national and EU environmental policies is an added benefit.

Weaknesses associated with this approach are:

- **Disregard for Member Input (n=10):** Concerns that authorities might not take forum views seriously or act on them.
- **Excessive Bureaucracy (n=9):** Rigid procedures could stifle innovation and responsiveness.
- **Lack of Trust (n=9):** Past experiences may lead some community members to distrust public institutions.
- **Limited Independence (n=7):** Government control could restrict Fora' autonomy.
- **Political Influence (n=6):** Local political agendas could shape forum priorities.
- **Slow to Act (n=5):** Concerns over delays in setting up Fora or responding to issues.

Model 3: Single National Organisation

A single organisation (existing or newly formed) would coordinate all CCFs nationwide. This body would manage governance, funding, training, and support while Fora retain local decision-making

autonomy. Participants widely suggested that LAWPRO would be suitable for this role due to its sector experience and existing familiarity with both organisations and implementing bodies (n=13).

Strengths of this approach are:

- **Enhanced Collaboration and National Consistency (n=11):** Easier sharing of best practices, data, and collective learning among Fora.
- **Oversight and Fidelity to the Model (n=9):** Ensures Fora stay aligned with their intended purpose and values.
- **Skilled Staff (n=6):** Staff already working in catchments (e.g. CWOs) have the required expertise.
- **Simplified Governance (n=6):** Reduces complexity by consolidating support under one umbrella.
- **Streamlined Funding (n=5):** Centralised funding could reduce admin burden and enable better access to national or EU grants.
- **Efficient Resource Use (n=5):** A single organisation could allocate resources where most needed.
- **Direct Government Link (n=3):** Provides Fora with clear communication channels to policymakers.

Weaknesses associated with this approach are:

- **Reduced Local Autonomy (n=9):** Risk of local needs being overlooked if the national body doesn't engage deeply with each catchment.
- **Delays in Setup (n=4):** Concern that a national approach may slow implementation.
- **Funding Access Issues (n=3):** If funding is tightly controlled by the central body, Fora may face challenges accessing resources.
- **Lack of Local Flexibility (n=2):** A centralised model may be too rigid or disconnected from unique local conditions.

Ranking of Model Options

Participants were invited to discuss the three governance models and, as a table group, to decide on their preferred ranking of these options. 79% of table groups agreed CCFs managed by a single national organisation (Model 3) as their preferred option. Of the remaining, 8% endorsed a local authority or public body (n=2) and 4% supported CCFs were managed by local charities or organisations as their preferred option. A table detailing the ranking of model options is presented in [Appendix II: Ranking of Governance Models](#).

Conclusion

Each governance model offers distinct advantages and challenges. Participants generally supported a model that ensures:

- Local engagement and independence,
- Strong support and funding,
- Clear governance and accountability.

While many valued the local knowledge of community-based organisations, others emphasised the stability and oversight offered by national coordination or public sector management. The preferred structure may vary by catchment, but all models underscore the need for resourcing, training, and inclusive governance.

6 Suggestions for Implementation of Catchment Community Fora Model and Framework

Overview

Participants offered practical suggestions for piloting and expanding the CCF model and framework. These recommendations focus on ensuring successful early implementation, effective community engagement, long-term sustainability, and appropriate governance. The section is organized into key thematic recommendations, reflecting input from the 24 table groups.

Theme 1: Implementation of CCF Model and Framework

Participants offered the following suggestions:

- **CCFs must be established within a reasonable timeframe (n=12):** CCF should be established within a reasonable timeframe, so people involved in the scoping exercise do not lose interest in this initiative.
- **Establish a pilot to test implementation and setting-up of CCFs (n=7):** A pilot is needed to test the process of setting-up a CCF, as well as understanding good practice for supporting members with running forum meetings.
- **Develop guiding principles to support forum members with decision making (n=7):** A series of practical guidance is needed to help Fora with making decisions and ensuring all voices involved in a forum are included.
- **CCFs must secure funding and staff support (n=6):** Fora should have multi-year funding and supported by staff who help with forum administration and coordination of meetings.
- **LAWPRO should be involved in the further development of CCFs (n=4):** LAWPRO would be an ideal candidate for developing the pilot and for providing ongoing staff support to CCFs.
- **Establish sub-committees to focus on specific water quality or public participation issues (n=3):** Sub-committee should be a feature of the CCF model, so forum can establish and elect individuals to help with progressing actions.
- **CCF should host public meetings and welcome to all people (n=3):** Public gatherings open to all people in the catchment is important to ensuring CCFs are transparent and accessible to anyone who is interested in water quality.

Theme 2: Supporting Public Participation

Participants made the following suggestions:

- **CCFs share regular updates on the status of catchment area and water quality (n=16):** Regular communication and sharing information on CCFs activity is important to keeping members of the public informed and aware of CCFs.
- **Conduct further research and ensure data is accessible to the public (n=6):** Undertaking additional research and monitoring of water quality in the catchment.

- **CCFs must build a network and maintain communication with stakeholder groups in catchment (n=6):** Developing an understanding of the various stakeholders in the catchment to ensure a forum is representative of local interests and to ensure groups are provided with an opportunity to get involved in the forum.

Conclusion

Participants emphasized that successful implementation of CCFs hinges on thoughtful piloting, clear structures, inclusive engagement, and reliable support. Pilots should be used to build momentum, demonstrate value, and lay the foundation for a national network of community-driven fora capable of improving Ireland's water quality and environmental stewardship.

7 Survey Findings on Catchment Community Fora

This section presents key findings from an online survey designed to capture the views of individuals who were unable to attend CCF workshops held across five catchments. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from stakeholders by further exploring views and perspectives on the proposed CCFs model as well as validate findings gathered from in-person consultations. The survey included questions aligned with the themes discussed in previous sections, such as the vision and objectives of CCFs, stakeholder involvement, roles and responsibilities, training and support needs, and considerations for implementation.

A total of 22 individuals completed the online survey, representing 39% of the 57 individuals who were invited but unable to attend the workshops. The survey respondents were primarily members of environmental or community-based organisations with a direct interest in local water catchments. All findings are provided as a percentage out of the total number of respondents (N=22).

Finding 1: Respondent Profile

The demographic profile of respondents indicated that 50% identified as male, 45% as female, and 5% chose not to disclose their gender. The majority of respondents (91%) were aged 40 years or older, while 10% were aged between 26 and 39 years.

Geographically, respondents were drawn from eight counties across Ireland. The highest proportion of participants were from County Galway (36%) and County Wexford (27%), with others residing in Kildare, Wicklow, Carlow, Limerick, Meath, and Westmeath.

In terms of affiliation, 55% of respondents were members of a community group or volunteer association involved in catchment activities. A further 23% were members or staff of non-profit or charitable organisations, while the remaining 23% were not affiliated with any organisation.

Finding 2: Engagement with Catchment Community Fora Workshops

86% respondents were invited but were unable to attend the CCFs workshops, and the remaining 14% were affiliated with organisations that did attend, though they themselves did not participate. The primary reason for non-attendance, reported by 69% of these individuals, was personal scheduling conflicts or availability. Some respondents cited short notice or partial availability as barriers to full participation.

The highest representation of respondents by catchment was from Slaney and Galway Bay South East Catchments, each accounting for 37% of responses. Notably, there were no respondents from the Mal Bay Catchment and Newry, Fane, Glyde, and Dee Catchment.

Finding 3: Perspectives on the CCF Vision and Purpose

Respondents were asked to assess proposed vision statements for the CCFs model. The three statements that received the highest importance ratings were:

- Raising awareness of the need to protect and enhance water quality and the environment
- Engaging with decision-makers and government to ensure community voices are heard
- Providing practical, evidence-based guidance and support for actions to protect and restore water bodies

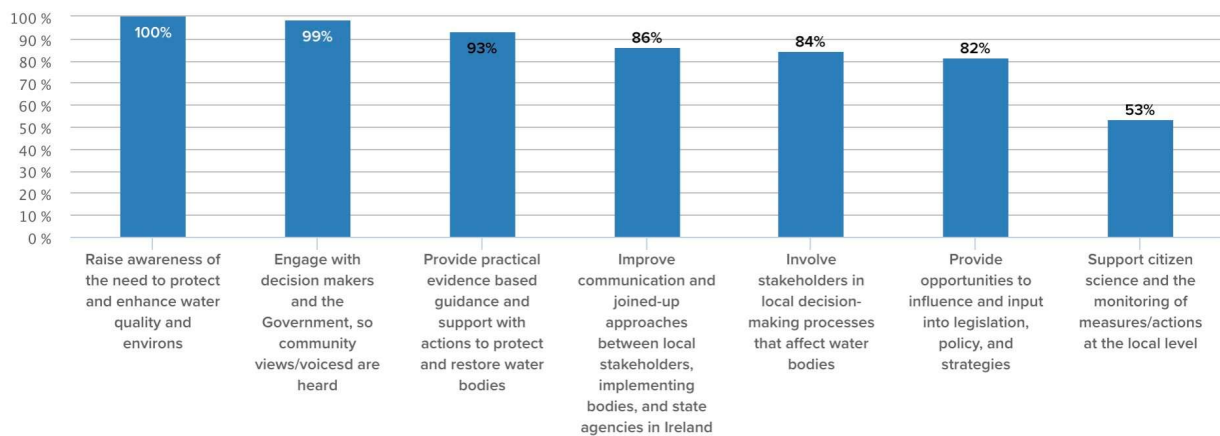


Figure 1 Ranking of vision statements by respondents (N=22)

In terms of suggestions for alternative vision statements, three respondents proposed that CCFs should focus on increasing local interest and involvement in water quality initiatives. Two others emphasised the need for greater accountability and involvement from implementing bodies and statutory agencies in supporting and endorsing forum-led actions (n=5).

Finding 4: Roles and Responsibilities of Catchment Community Fora

There was widespread agreement among respondents on the proposed roles and responsibilities of CCFs. All respondents (100%) agreed that Fora should hold regular, accessible meetings. A high level of agreement (95% or more) was also recorded for responsibilities such as providing information, serving as a liaison between communities and implementing bodies, advocating for water quality at policy levels, collaborating with other Fora, and raising public awareness.

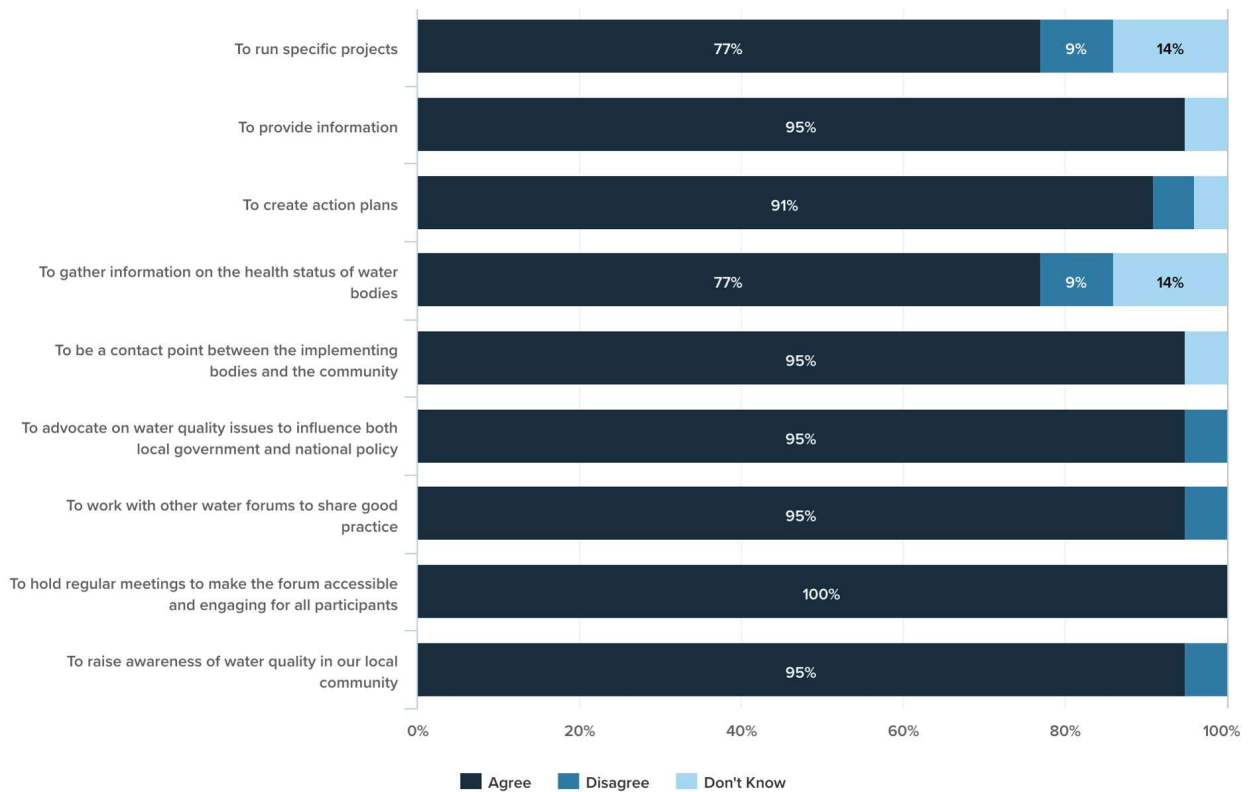


Figure 2 Rating of CCF roles and responsibilities (N=22)

Respondents also offered further suggestions, including the need to recruit and engage diverse stakeholder groups (n=3), secure involvement from LAWPRO in forum setup and funding administration (n=2), and hold local authorities accountable for adopting best practices in water management (n=2).

Finding 5; Membership and Stakeholder Involvement

The majority of respondents agreed that a wide range of individuals and community groups should be involved in CCFs. All respondents supported the involvement of Tidy Towns, farmers, foresters, landowners, anglers, and local farming groups. Support was also high for the inclusion of young people and swimmers or swimming groups.

Respondents also identified additional stakeholders who should be considered, including boating groups, local heritage organisations, academic institutions, veterinary professionals, and migrant communities.

Regarding organisational involvement, respondents showed strong support for including local farming organisations, River Trusts, and eNGOs. Schools at all levels, the Irish Farmers' Association, and youth organisations such as Macra na Feirme were also considered important stakeholders. Lower levels of support were recorded for organisations such as ESB and Chambers of Commerce.

Finding 6: Role of Government and Public Bodies

Respondents generally supported the involvement of public and governmental organisations with a clear link to water, biodiversity, or environmental protection. Inland Fisheries Ireland, Local Authority staff, Teagasc, and the Marine Institute were among those with the highest levels of agreement (90% or higher). In contrast, agencies with more peripheral roles, such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment or the Health and Safety Authority, were less strongly endorsed for involvement.

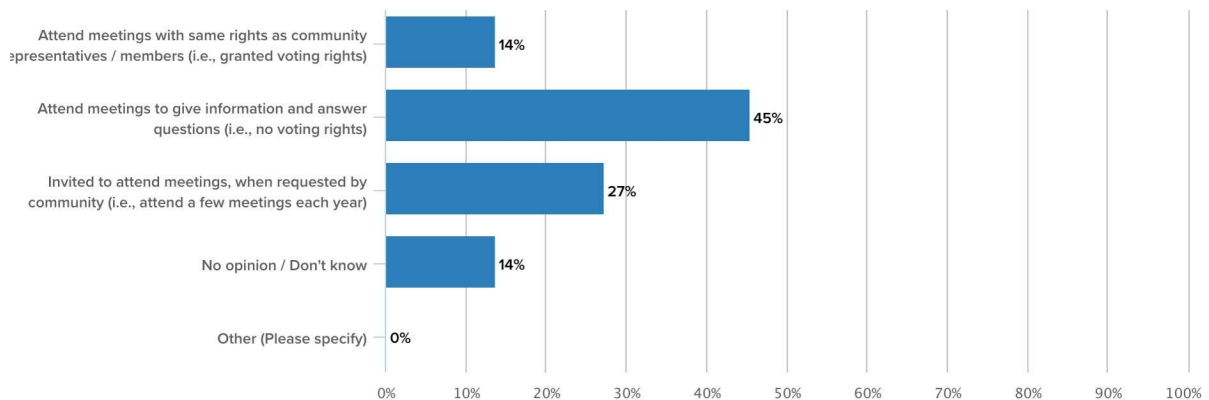


Figure 3 Rating which powers government should have at CCFs (N=22)

On the question of membership and voting rights for government or statutory representatives, 73% of respondents supported their participation in CCFs as members. However, a majority (45%) believed these representatives should attend meetings in an advisory capacity only, without voting rights. 27% felt government should attend only by invitation, and 14% supported granting them equal voting rights.

Finding 7: Principles, Supports, and Implementation Needs

Respondents were asked to rank organising principles for CCFs. The highest rated was “decision-making processes that are clear and well-defined”, “good governance structures that align with existing frameworks”, and “autonomy in decision-making for forum members”. Additional suggestions included a commitment to transparency and the publication of annual reports.

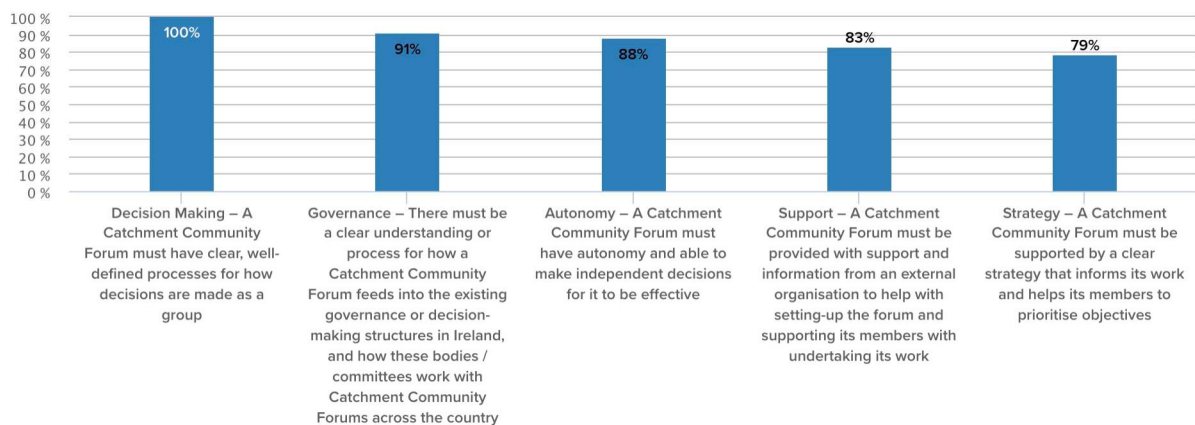


Figure 4 Ranking of principles for CCF (N=22)

In relation to supports required for successful CCF implementation, respondents identified the following as most important:

- Adequate and sustainable funding;
- Access to dedicated support staff;
- Availability of qualified professionals;
- Access to up-to-date catchment science and policy information;
- Relevant training in governance, facilitation, and conflict resolution

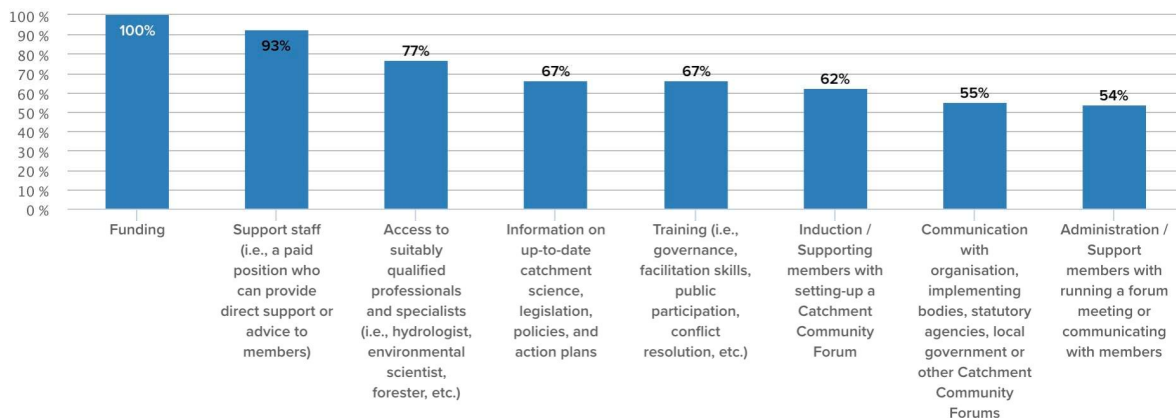


Figure 5 Rating implementation supports required for CCFs (N=22)

Ninety-one percent of respondents agreed that Fora would require support with setup and early implementation. Respondents emphasised the need for staff who can provide direct face-to-face assistance, possess knowledge of catchment science and environmental legislation, and maintain relationships with local stakeholders.

When asked who should be responsible for implementing the CCF model, 50% of respondents preferred an eNGO or an organisation acting on behalf of the Government, while 45% supported direct Government responsibility. Only a small minority (5%) expressed no opinion on this issue. Several respondents highlighted the importance of early and constructive engagement between CCFs and relevant Government departments, particularly in relation to funding and alignment with existing strategies.

Conclusions

The findings of this survey indicate strong community support for setting-up CCFs, with clear expectations for inclusive membership, practical roles, independent decision-making, and structured support. Respondents consistently highlighted the importance of transparency, governance, and active community involvement, alongside adequate resourcing and professional support. These insights serve as a valuable guide for the future development and implementation of the CCF model.

8 Recommendations

The following recommendations were co-developed by staff at LAWPRO and drawn directly from the findings and perspectives shared by individuals who participated in the five consultations in the five pilot catchments. This process was grounded in a commitment to ensure the views of participants directly inform these recommendations for setting-up CCFs.

- 1. Undertake a pilot to trial the establishment of five CCFs in the five pilot catchments consulted in the scoping exercise** – It is recommended LAWPRO design and undertake a pilot study to trial setting-up five CCFs in the five pilot catchments with the aim of exploring different approaches and gathering concrete learning about the good practice and effective mechanisms that will inform further development of the CCF model and framework as well as support its national rollout across the 46 catchments.
- 2. Recruit forum members from the individuals, groups, and organisations who participated in the scoping exercise in the five pilot catchments** – As a starting point, it is recommended LAWPRO consult with and recruit forum members for the five CCFs from the attendees who participated in the scoping exercise between June to September 2024. As findings from these catchment consultations directly informed these recommendations and the design of the pilot, it is reasonable to expect some individuals, groups, and organisation are interested in participating in this pilot and see benefit in setting-up a CCF in their catchment. Also, a subsequent awareness raising exercise should be undertaken in parallel to offer opportunities for individuals and community groups to join CCFs.
- 3. Develop a draft Terms of Reference for a CCF** – It is recommended LAWPRO develop a Terms of Reference for the CCFs, which outlines the objectives of a Forum as well as the roles and responsibilities of its membership. This Terms of Reference will serve as a template for each of the five CCFs, which will be shared with. Members at its first meeting. It is envisaged the Terms of Reference will be a living document, and it may be revised or amended throughout the pilot.
- 4. Support staff appointed to assist with administrative and coordination responsibilities involved in setting-up and running CCFs** – An important finding from the scoping exercise was the need to ensure CCFs are adequately supported and resourced by support staff, especially if members attend on a voluntary basis. Also, participants agreed a larger organisation should be responsible for staff, so they are adequately managed and supported in this role. It is recommended LAWPRO appoint a CWO and a Senior CWO to each of the five CCF, who will be responsible for all administrative and coordination responsibilities, as well as providing support to forum members in fulfilling their roles.
- 5. Establish an Implementation Advisory Group to provide guidance and support to forum members and staff involved five CCFs involved in the pilot** – It is recommended LAWPRO

convene an Implementation Advisory Group who are responsible for overseeing the pilot as well as providing ongoing advice and support to both forum members and support staff. The Implementation Advisory Group should work to ensure forum members are active participants in their Catchment Community Forum and they are provided with adequate support to improving its functioning and work overall, as well as to support staff with addressing any challenges or obstacles with undertaking the pilot. Also, it is recommended the Implementation Advisory Group appoint a representative from the DHLGH and An Fóram Uisce, who can bring their own perspective and insights to this pilot.

- 6. Undertake a review of the CCF pilot to understand good practice and to inform the rollout of a national model and framework** - To develop meaningful lessons from this pilot and to understand how these learnings can be applied to rolling out a national CCF model and framework, it is recommended LAWPRO undertake a review of the pilot. This review should involve forum members, support staff, and other stakeholder groups in the catchment that are working with CCFs. Also, it is suggested that forum members be offered an opportunity to share recommendations and suggestions on ways to further develop the CCF model or enhance its benefit for communities.

- 7. Develop a detailed proposal and business case on rollout of a national CCF model and framework** – At the end of the pilot, it is recommended LAWPRO develop a proposal outlining the national CCF model and framework, and its plan on how CCF could be gradually rolled out across Ireland. It is important this proposal consider what resources and funding is needed to ensure CCFs are supported on a multi-annual basis, because many participants felt funding should be granted for several years so they were guaranteed a Forum could work towards achieving its goals over a longer-term.

Part Two: Appendix to Scoping Exercise

9 Supplementary Detail

Overview

This annex presents supplementary details on the stakeholder groups and organisations identified, which were reported by participants in the five consultation workshops held across five pilot catchments. The purpose of this exercise was to identify and ensure CCFs had representation from a diverse cross-section of community groups, eNGOs, statutory bodies, and local stakeholders with an interest in water quality and catchment management. Also, details are provided on how three governance models for CCFs were ranked by table groups at the five consultation workshops. This section provides information highlight detailed information gathered from this consultation process.

Appendix I: Details on Catchment Stakeholders

This appendix describes the various stakeholders identified by participants as potential members of CCFs. A broad range of stakeholder were identified. Stakeholders were grouped into four categories:

1. Individuals and groups
2. Local Organisations, Businesses and Schools
3. eNGOs and charities
4. Implementing Bodies, Statutory Agencies, and Government

This following section will outline the different stakeholders for each category, and the percentage of table groups who named these groups.

Individuals and Local Groups

This grouping refers to individuals and community groups in the catchment with an existing relationship to water bodies or may serve as a representative for different public interests in the catchment. In broad terms, these stakeholders refer to anyone with an interest in water or improving water quality, and who be willing to participate in a forum.

In the workshops, participants identified 21 groups of individuals who may be interested in joining a forum. Stakeholders most repeatedly highlighted by table groups included anglers (54%) individuals with interest in water or the environment (46%), and tourism or local guides (29%).

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Anglers	54% (n=13)
Individuals with interest in water/environment	46% (n=11)
Tourism and local guides	29% (n=7)
Solicitors	25% (n=6)
Bee keepers	25% (n=6)
Travellers or Traveller groups	25% (n=6)
Farmers	21% (n=5)

Acres farmers	17% (n=4)
Foresters	13% (n=3)
Artists	13% (n=3)
Contractors	13% (n=3)
Farm advisors	13% (n=3)
Migrants and people from new communities	8% (n=2)
Social Media and media experts	8% (n=2)
Older / senior people	8% (n=2)
Landowners	8% (n=2)
Fishermen	4% (n=1)
Game keepers	4% (n=1)
Photographers	4% (n=1)
Scientists	4% (n=1)
Young people	4% (n=1)

Table groups identified 29 community groups or local branches of larger environmental NGOs, which operate at a catchment level. The most frequently reported groups named by table groups were recreational groups and clubs (58%), local Tidy Town groups (58%), and environmental groups (46%).

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Recreational Groups and Clubs	58% (n=14)
Tidy Towns	58% (n=14)
Environmental Groups	46% (n=11)
Community Development Groups	33% (n=8)
Heritage Group and Councils	33% (n=8)
Angling Clubs or Groups	29% (n=7)
Religious / Spiritual / Church Groups	29% (n=7)
Voluntary Environmental Groups or Associations	29% (n=7)
GAA	21% (n=5)
Water Organisations (I.e., Safety, Sports, etc.)	21% (n=5)
Local Farming Organisations	17% (n=4)
Windfarm Opposition Groups	17% (n=4)
Community Groups	13% (n=3)
Gun Clubs	13% (n=3)
Macra na Feirme	13% (n=3)
Walking Groups	13% (n=3)
Climate Action Groups	8% (n=2)
LEADER Partnership	8% (n=2)
Residents ' Groups or Associations	8% (n=2)
Rivers Trust	8% (n=2)

Social Inclusion Groups	8% (n=2)
Arts & Creative Groups	4% (n=1)
Community Centres	4% (n=1)
Gardening Groups	4% (n=1)
Local Community Development Companies	4% (n=1)
Men's Sheds	4% (n=1)
Surf Clubs	4% (n=1)
Trader Groups	4% (n=1)
Wildlife Groups	4% (n=1)

Local Organisations, Businesses, and Schools

This group refers to local organisations, businesses and schools that could be involved in a CCF or who could nominate a representative to attend a forum on their group's behalf. Table groups identified 28 organisations, which include farming organisations (42%), the Public Participation Networks (33%), and the Irish Farmers Association (29%).

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Farming organisations	42% (n=10)
Public Participation Network (PPN)	33% (n=8)
Irish Farmers Association	29% (n=7)
Irish Countrywomen's Association	13% (n=3)
Scouting Ireland / Girl Guides of Ireland	13% (n=3)
Teagasc	13% (n=3)
Arts Organisations	8% (n=2)
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)	8% (n=2)
Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)	8% (n=2)
Youth Services	8% (n=2)
ALONE	4% (n=1)
Bord Bia	4% (n=1)
Citizens Information Centres	4% (n=1)
Comhairle na Nog	4% (n=1)
Community Employment (CE) Organisations	4% (n=1)
Disability organisations	4% (n=1)
Farmers' Union	4% (n=1)
GAA	4% (n=1)
Hospitals	4% (n=1)
Irish Organic Association	4% (n=1)
Irish Shellfish Association	4% (n=1)
Libraries	4% (n=1)
Macra na Fierme	4% (n=1)

Migrant organisations	4% (n=1)
National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC)	4% (n=1)
Organic Trust	4% (n=1)
Philanthropic organisations / funders	4% (n=1)
Pride of Place	4% (n=1)

A sub-group identified by participants were local businesses. Participants suggested that some local businesses, with a connection to water and the environment, might be interested in joining CCF. Suggestions include livestock businesses (19%), tourism and eco-tourism businesses (71%), and a local Chamber of Commerce (10%).

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Tourism and eco-tourism businesses	71% (n=17)
Livestock businesses	19% (n=14)
Chamber of Commerce	10% (n=7)
Industry	8% (n=6)
Co-operatives	4% (n=3)
Credit unions	4% (n=3)
Forestry businesses	4% (n=3)
Recreational businesses	4% (n=3)
Golf courses	3% (n=2)
Markets	3% (n=2)
Media	3% (n=2)
Pharmaceutical companies	3% (n=2)
Energy companies	1% (n=1)
Farms	1% (n=1)
Fisheries	1% (n=1)
Garden centres	1% (n=1)
Livestock businesses	1% (n=1)
Mines	1% (n=1)
Social enterprises	1% (n=1)
Waste management companies	1% (n=1)

Another sub-group reported by participants were schools, collected, and education providers. Many participants highlighted how young people were an important group, and their views should be represented in the work of a forum. Suggestions include:

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Primary and Secondary Level Schools	92% (n=22)
University and Colleges	50% (n=12)
Education and Training Boards	17% (n=4)

Schools or Environmental Groups in Schools	13% (n=3)
Academics	4% (n=1)
MaREI (UCC)	4% (n=1)
Teachers and Principals	4% (n=1)

Environmental NGOs and Charities

In catchment workshops, participants identified 25 eNGOs or environmental charities who might be interested in participating in a CCF, or who might have staff who would serve as a representative for their organisation. The highest reported organisations include An Taisce (42%), Rivers Trust (38%), Birdwatch Ireland (33%) and Tidy Towns (33%).

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
An Taisce	42% (n=10)
Rivers Trust	38% (n=9)
Birdwatch Ireland	33% (n=8)
Tidy Towns	33% (n=8)
Waterways Ireland	25% (n=6)
Burren Beo	17% (n=4)
Cuan Beo	13% (n=3)
Environmental NGOs	13% (n=3)
Irish Peatland Conservation Council	13% (n=3)
SWAN	13% (n=3)
Bats Conservation Ireland	8% (n=2)
Clean Coast	8% (n=2)
Friends of the Earth	8% (n=2)
Irish Environmental Network	8% (n=2)
Irish Wildlife Trust	8% (n=2)
Wildlife Organisations	8% (n=2)
Climate Action	4% (n=1)
Coastwatch Europe	4% (n=1)
Corrib Beo	4% (n=1)
FLAG	4% (n=1)
Hometree	4% (n=1)
Inland Waterways Association of Ireland	4% (n=1)
Northern Ireland Environmental Agency (NIEA)	4% (n=1)
Pure Mile	4% (n=1)
Wicklow Uplands Council	4% (n=1)

Implementing Bodies, Statutory Agencies, and Government

The fourth and final group identifies a range of implementing bodies, statutory agencies, and Government representatives who should be involved in CCFs. Overall, participants agreed it was

important for representatives of implementing bodies, statutory agencies, or elected officials to participate in CCFs, but there uncertainty about whether representatives should have the same voting rights as other members and concern for whether representatives would act impartially in discussions or decisions at a forum meeting.

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
Local Authority / County Councils	100% (n=24)
Environment Protection Agency	83% (n=20)
Coillte	71% (n=17)
Inland Fisheries Ireland	71% (n=17)
Local Authorities Water Programme (LAWPRO)	58% (n=14)
National Park and Wildlife Service	54% (n=13)
Office of Public Works (OPW)	46% (n=11)
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	42% (n=10)
Teagasc	33% (n=8)
Bord na Mona	29% (n=7)
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	21% (n=5)
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	21% (n=5)
Faillte Ireland	17% (n=4)
An Bord Pleanála	13% (n=3)
Marine Institute Ireland	13% (n=3)
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	13% (n=3)
Uisce Eireann	13% (n=3)
Electricity Supply Board (ESB)	8% (n=2)
Geological Survey Ireland	8% (n=2)
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	4% (n=1)
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication	4% (n=1)
European Innovation Partnership (EIP Projects)	4% (n=1)
Dublin Port Authority	4% (n=1)
EirGrid	4% (n=1)
Electric Ireland	4% (n=1)
Health Service Executive (HSE)	4% (n=1)
Local Authorities Water Programme	4% (n=1)
Met Eireann	4% (n=1)
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	4% (n=1)
Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)	4% (n=1)
An Fora Uisce / The Water Forum	4% (n=1)

A sub-group identified by participants were City and County Councils and local authorities. Participants identified nine roles or positions within local government who should be involved in CCFs. These individuals are listed in the table below.

Stakeholder Groups	Percentage (Out of 24)
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Councillors	50% (n=12)
Biodiversity Officers	21% (n=5)
TDs	13% (n=3)
Heritage Officer	8% (n=2)
Climate Change Teams	4% (n=1)
Climate Officers	4% (n=1)
Community Water Officers	4% (n=1)
District Councils (Northern Ireland)	4% (n=1)
District Engineer	4% (n=1)

Appendix II: Ranking of Governance Models

In the five catchment workshops, table groups were asked to discuss and rank the three model options. Out of 24 table groups, the majority of participants agreed a single organisation as their preferred option (n=19, 79%). Of the remaining table groups, 8% rated a public body or local authority as their preferred option (n=2), and one table group preferred that CCFs were managed by local organisation (n=1). One table group did not agree on their ranking (n=1).

The table below shows the ranking by each table group, which the first choice in highlight.

Workshop	Table Groups	Model Option 1: Local Organisation	Model Option 2: Public Body or Local Authority	Model Option 3: Single Organisation
Workshop 1: Slaney River Catchment	1	3 rd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	2	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	3	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	4	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
Workshop 2: Boyne River Catchment	5	1st choice	3 rd choice	2 nd choice
	6	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	7	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	8	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	9	N/A	N/A	N/A
	10	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
Workshop 3: Mal Bay Catchment	11	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	12	1 st choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	13	3 rd choice	1st choice	2 nd choice
	14	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
Workshop 4: Galway Bay Southeast	15	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	16	3 rd choice	2 nd choice	1st choice
	17	1st choice	3 rd choice	2 nd choice
	18	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	19	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
Workshop 5: Newry, Fane, Glyde, and Dee Catchment	20	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice
	21	2 nd choice	3 rd Choice	1st choice
	22	2 nd choice	3 rd Choice	1st choice
	23	3 rd choice	1st choice	2 nd choice
	24	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	1st choice

Table 1 Ranking of proposed governance options by table groups

Part Three: Supporting Documentation

10 Supporting Documentation

Overview

In the scoping exercise, a series of consultation workshops were held across five pilot catchments. Each workshop followed a consistent agenda designed to promote inclusive dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaborative reflection among participants. This structure was intended to ensure participants could actively contribute their local knowledge and perspectives while engaging with technical and strategic aspects of water and catchment management. The following section provides an overview of the agenda for the five workshops, along with the online survey to gather views and perspectives from individuals or representatives of organisations who were unable to attend the workshops,

Workshop Agenda

The following document is the agenda and facilitation plan for the consultation workshops held in five pilot catchments for the scoping exercise on the CCF model and framework.

Water Matters: A Conversation on Community Involvement and Water

Agenda

Length	Discussion Topic	Format
30 minutes	Welcome / Introduction to Water Matters – A conversation on community involvement and water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of workshop • Aims / objectives of workshop • Context setting presentation about catchment • Question and answer session 	Plenary
10 minutes	Welcome and participant introduction at table group	Roundtable Group Exercise
40 minutes	Vision and Role of a Catchment Community Forum	Roundtable Group Exercise
15 minutes	Tea / Coffee Break (15 mins)	-
25 minutes	Identifying who Should be Involved in a Catchment Community Forum	Roundtable Group Exercise
45 minutes	Understanding What Will Help and/or Hinder a Catchment Community Forum	Roundtable Group Exercise
15 minutes	Summary and Review of Roundtable Exercise	Plenary
45 minutes	Lunch Break (45 mins)	-
45 minutes	Options for the Governance Model of Catchment Community Fora	Roundtable Group Exercise
40 minutes	Participants' Suggestions on Implementation & Further Considerations for Catchment Community Fora	Roundtable Group Exercise
15 minutes	Tea / Coffee Break (15 mins)	-
45 minutes	Principles for Catchment Community Fora	Roundtable Group Exercise
15 minutes	Closing of Workshop / Thank You	Plenary

Online Survey on Catchment Community Fora Scoping Exercise

The following survey was developed to gather views, perspectives, and insights about the CCF model and framework from individuals who were unable to attend the consultation workshops held in the five pilot catchments. More information on the process used to develop this survey is provided in the [Section 1: Methodology](#).



Online Survey on Catchment Community Fora

Background

The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is inviting community groups to complete a brief online survey about Catchment Community Fora. The online survey is intended for individuals who did not attend a local workshops held in the five catchments and would like to participate in this process. Under the *River Basin Management Plan*, LAWPRO is tasked with scoping how Catchment Community Fora could be established in Ireland and designing a new water catchment-based approach to community participation.

While the function of Catchment Community Fora varies from country to country, similar models show us that a catchment community forum might:

- Serve as a platform for local residents and stakeholders to work collaboratively to tackle water quality problems or implement measures
- Operate as part of the governance structures for protecting and restoring water bodies in Ireland
- Be involved in decision making processes and inform the development of new water-related policies and strategies
- Enlist public support or enhance community involvement through awareness raising, education, or catchment-led activities.

To read an article with information about this scoping exercise, please visit this website (link to: <https://www.catchments.ie/help-design-irelands-catchment-community-Fora-participation-framework/>).

Instructions

The survey is intended for any person unable to make one of the five in-person consultation workshops. Your views are important in shaping this new initiative. The online survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary and is anonymous. You will not be asked to give your name or any personal information. When your response is submitted, it will be shared with Quality

Matters, an independent research charity, who is supporting LAWPRO with preparing a final report on this scoping exercise.

Any Questions?

If you have any questions about this online survey, or the scoping exercise on catchment community Fora, please feel free to contact Jimmy McVeigh, Regional Coordinator with LAWPRO by email (jmcveigh@lawwaters.ie).

Background Information

1. What is your gender? (Choose an answer, and tick as many as relevant)

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Non-Binary
- d. Prefer not to answer

2. What is your age? (Choose an answer)

- a. 18 to 25 years old
- b. 26 to 39 years old
- c. 40 to 64 years old
- d. 65 years or older
- e. Prefer not to answer

3. What county do you currently reside? (Choose an answer)

- a. [Add list of counties]

4. Did you receive an invitation from LAWPRO to attend an in-person consultation workshop in one of the pilot catchments between June and September 2024? This workshop invited individuals

and groups to participate in a conversation about a Catchment Community Forum for the local area held in the following locations:

- Slaney Catchment Workshop (Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford - Saturday, June 15th)
- Boyne Catchment Workshop (Navan, Co. Meath - Wednesday, June 25th)
- Mal Bay Catchment Workshop (Ennistymon, Co. Clare - Wednesday, July 25th)
- Galway Bay South East Catchment Workshop (Loughrea, Co. Galway - Saturday, July 27th)
- Newry, Fane, Glyde, Dee Catchment Workshop (Dundalk, Co. Louth – Saturday, September 21st)

- a. Yes, I did receive an invitation
- b. No, I did not receive an invitation

5. [This question will only appear if they indicate 'Yes, I did receive an invitation' for the previous question] **Which in-person workshop were you invited to attend? (Choose an answer)**
- Slaney Catchment Workshop (Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford - Saturday, June 15th)
 - Boyne Catchment Workshop (Navan, Co. Meath - Wednesday, June 25th)
 - Mal Bay Catchment Workshop (Ennistymon, Co. Clare - Wednesday, July 25th)
 - Galway Bay South East Catchment Workshop (Loughrea, Co. Galway - Saturday, July 27th)
 - Newry, Fane, Glyde, Dee Catchment Workshop (Dundalk, Co. Louth – Saturday, September 21st)
 - Don't know
6. [This question will only appear if they indicate they were invited to attend any of the five in-person consultation workshops] **If you did not attend an in-person consultation workshop, what was the reason you were unable to attend? (Tick all that apply)**
- A colleague or peer attended on behalf
 - I was not available to attend
 - I was not given enough notice
 - Unable to attend due to work
 - I was not sure if I was the right person
 - It seemed like too much time
 - Distance to travel / lack of transportation
 - Childcare
 - Did not feel like a good use of time
 - Event felt like it's a talking shop / won't change things
 - Other (please specify): _____
7. **Are you a member of a group or organisation addressing any water quality or environmental issues in Ireland? (Choose an answer)**
- Member of a non-profit or charitable organisation
 - Member of a community group or volunteer association
 - Not affiliated or involved with any organisation or organisation
8. [If the respondent indicates they are affiliated with an organisation or group only] **What is the name of your organisation or community group? (Write an answer)**
- Name of Organisation: _____
9. [If the respondent indicates they are not affiliated with an organisation or group only] **What is your relationship with water or the environment? (Choose the best answer)**
- Local resident
 - Farmer
 - Landowner
 - Forrester

- e. Professional working in Environmental field
- f. Other (please specify): _____

Vision and Objectives for Catchment Community Fora

To get a clear understanding of the possible role of Local Water Fora, please answer the following questions. Currently, these Fora do not exist in Ireland and hope to be established in the coming years.

10. To understand views on the purpose of a Catchment Community Forum, please rank each of the following statements from most important (1) to least important (7). (Rank each option from 1st to 7th)

The purpose of a Catchment Community Forum is to support the community to:

- a. Raise awareness of the need to protect and enhance water quality and environs
- b. Provide practical evidence-based guidance and support with actions to protect and restore water bodies
- c. Engage with decision makers and the Government, so community views are heard
- d. Provide opportunities to influence and input into legislation, policy, and strategies
- e. Involve stakeholders in local decision-making processes that affect water bodies
- f. Improve communication and joined-up approaches between local stakeholders, implementing bodies, and state agencies in Ireland
- g. Support citizen science and the monitoring of actions at the local level
- h. Other (please specify): _____

11. In order to achieve the objectives above what should be the responsibility and/or tasks of a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
a. To run specific projects	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
b. To provide information	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
c. To create action plans	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
d. To gather information on the health status of water bodies	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
e. To be a contact point between the implementing bodies and the community	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
f. To advocate on water quality issues in order to influence both local government and national policy	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
g. To work with other water Fora to share good practice	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
h. To hold regular meetings to make the forum accessible and engaging for all participants	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know

12. Is there anything else you feel should be the role, responsibility, or task for a Catchment Community Forum? If no, please leave blank. (Write a brief answer)

Stakeholders Involved in a Catchment Community Forum

To get a clear understanding on who should be members of Local Water Fora, please answer the following questions. Currently, these Fora do not exist in Ireland and hope to be established in the coming years.

13. Do you agree or disagree the following individuals or groups should be members of a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

	Agree	Disagree
Tidy Towns		
Local environmental groups		
Anglers		
Farmers		
Foresters		
Landowners		
Young People		
Older People or Retirees		
Local churches		
Swimmers or swimming groups		

14. What other individuals or groups should be members of a Catchment Community Forum? If none, please leave blank. (Write an answer)

- a. Answer 1: _____
- b. Answer 2: _____
- c. Answer 3: _____

15. Do you agree or disagree the following Local Organisations, Businesses, Schools, and Non-Governmental Organisations should be members of a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

	Agree	Disagree
Primary, Secondary and Third-Level Schools		
Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)		

Local farming organisations		
Birdwatch Ireland		
Irish Famers' Association		
Macra		
River Trust		
Scouting Ireland / Girl Guides Ireland		
Chamber of Commerce		
ESB		

16. What other organisations, businesses, schools or NGOs should be members of a Catchment Community Forum? If none, please leave blank. (Write an answer)

- a. Answer 1: _____
- b. Answer 2: _____
- c. Answer 3: _____

17. Should representatives for environmental bodies, statutory agencies, or local government be members of a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know
- d. Other (please specify): _____

18. [This question will only appear if the person indicates 'agree' to previous question] If you agree representatives from environmental bodies, statutory agencies, or local government should be members, what is your view on their level of involvement in a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

- a. Attend only when it is requested by Catchment Community Forum
- b. Attend meetings, but only to give information or answer questions (i.e., no voting rights)
- c. Attend meetings with same rights as community representatives / members (i.e., granted voting rights)
- d. No opinion / Don't know
- e. Other (please specify): _____

19. [Question appears if respondent indicated 'agree' to the previous question] Which of the following Implementing Bodies, Statutory Agencies, or Local Government representatives should be involved in a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

	Agree	Disagree
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)		
Local Authority Staff		

Public Representatives (i.e., TDs, councillors, senators, etc.)		
Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)		
Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI)		
Teagasc		
The Marine Institute		
Electricity Supply Board (ESB)		
Waterways Ireland		
Failte Ireland / Tourism Ireland		
The Heritage Council		
The Health and Safety Authority (HSA)		
Office of Public Works (OPW)		
Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)		
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)		
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)		
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)		

20. What other implementing bodies, statutory agencies, or local government representatives should be members of a Catchment Community Forum? If none, please leave blank. (Write an answer)

- a. Answer 1: _____
- b. Answer 2: _____
- c. Answer 3: _____

Principles of Catchment Community Fora

To get a clear understanding on who should be members of Local Water Fora, please answer the following questions. Currently, these Fora do not exist in Ireland and hope to be established in the coming years.

21. Rank each of the following principles from most important (1) to least important (5) based on how important you feel it is for a Catchment Community Forum to work effectively? (Rank each option from 1st to 5th)

- a. Decision Making – A Catchment Community Forum must have clear, well-defined processes for how decisions are made as a group
- b. Autonomy – A Catchment Community Forum must have autonomy and able to make independent decisions for it to be effective

- c. Governance – There must be a clear understanding or process for how a Catchment Community Forum feeds into the existing governance or decision-making structures in Ireland, and how these bodies / committees work with Catchment Community Fora across the country
- d. Strategy – A Catchment Community Forum must be supported by a clear strategy that informs its work and helps its members to prioritise objectives
- e. Support – A Catchment Community Forum must be provided with support and information from an external organisation to help with setting-up the forum and supporting its members with undertaking its work
- f. Other (please specify): _____

22. In the previous question, you were asked to rate several principles for a Catchment Community Forum. Would you like to suggest a new principle for a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

- a. Yes
- b. No

23. [This question will only appear if a person indicates 'yes' to the previous question] What principle would you like to suggest for a Catchment Community Forum? (Write an answer)

24. Rank each of the following supports from most important (1) to least important (8) based on important these supports are for a Catchment Community Forum to be supported effectively? (Rank each option from 1st to 8th)

- a. Funding
- b. Support staff (i.e., a paid role who can provide direct support or advice)
- c. Information on up-to-date catchment science, legislation, policies, and action plans
- d. Training (i.e., governance, facilitation skills, public participation, conflict resolution, etc.)
- e. Access to suitably qualified professionals and specialists (i.e., hydrologist, environmental scientist, forester, etc.)
- f. Induction / Supporting members with setting-up a Catchment Community Forum
- g. Administration / Support members with running a forum meeting or communicating with members
- h. Communication with other organisation, implementing bodies, statutory agencies, or local government
- i. Other (please specify): _____

Implementation and Future Considerations

To gather feedback about how Local Water Fora could be implemented please answer the following questions. Currently, these Fora do not exist in Ireland, so this feedback will be quite useful.

25. Do you agree that communities will need support with setting-up a Catchment Community Forum? (Choose an answer)

- a. Strongly disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neither disagree or agree
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly agree
- f. N/A

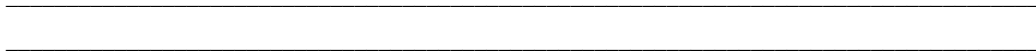
26. If an organisation was responsible for offering support to Catchment Community Fora, what skills and experience are important? (Tick all that apply)

- a. Staff who can provide face-to-face support to a group
- b. Delivering training
- c. Expertise and knowledge of public participation
- d. Expertise and knowledge of integrated catchment management and catchment science
- e. Expertise and knowledge of current legislation, policy, strategy and actions relevant to the environment and/or water protection
- f. Existing relationships and knowledge of local community groups and stakeholders in water catchments
- g. Existing relationships and knowledge of key decisions makers, implementing bodies, statutory agencies, and government departments
- h. Familiarity with the existing governance structures for improving water quality
- i. Developing and sharing practical guidance and 'how to' resources
- j. Other (please specify): _____

27. Who do you think should be responsible for setting-up Catchment Community Fora in Ireland? (Choose an answer)

- a. The Government
- b. An Organisation or Non-Governmental Organisation
- c. Don't know / No opinion

28. Do you have any additional comments or feedback to help with the establishment of Catchment Community Fora? If no, please leave blank. (Write an answer)



Your response has been submitted!

Thank you for sharing your views and perspective with the Local Authority Waters Programme. Your response will be included and inform the design of a national model for Catchment Community Fora in Ireland.