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Tuarascáil maidir le Scrúdú ar Thuarascáil CLEAR ar Loch
Tóchair

Iúil 2025

Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy

Report on Examination of CLEAR Report on Lady's Island
Lake

July 2025

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Contents

Related information	4
Publications	4
Committee videos.....	4
Committee debates	4
Contact details.....	4
Terms of reference	4
Cathaoirleach's Foreword.....	6
2. Joint Committee Consideration	8
Recommendations	11

Related information

Publications

All publications for this committee are available on the [Oireachtas website](#).

Committee videos

Footage of Committee proceedings can be found on the [Committee videos page](#).

Committee debates

Transcripts of Committee debates can be found on the [Committee debates page](#).

Contact details

The contact details for the Committee can be found on the [Committee page](#).

Terms of reference

Read the [terms of reference](#) for the Committee.

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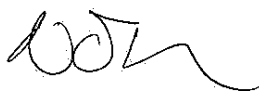
Cathaoirleach's Foreword

The continuing ecological crisis taking place at Lady's Island Lake in County Wexford is a devastating example of environmental decline in Ireland today. For over forty years, the situation has continued to deteriorate despite the efforts of the local community.

The recent EPA commissioned CLEAR Report comprehensively establishes that the decline of Lady's Island Lake is directly attributable to over-enrichment of surface waters with nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. It has also become abundantly clear that, despite the remits of multiple bodies with their interests in restoring and maintaining the lake, an absence of primary responsibility has led to the continuance and deepening of the problem.

As Cathaoirleach, I was delighted to make this issue the first topic being considered by this joint committee during the 34th Dáil. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all stakeholders for their contribution to our meeting on 11 June 2025, the content of which is summarised in this report. The report also contains 7 recommendations that the Joint Committee considers essential to the long-term restoration of the lake and which will be expressly communicated to Ministers with remit for this issue.

This issue highlights a failure in public administration as regulations and standards were clearly insufficient to protect the lake yet no public body saw it as their responsibility to show leadership to reverse that decline.



Naoise Ó Muirí TD, Cathaoirleach

July 2025

1. Introduction

The Joint Committee agreed to examine the recently published CLEAR Report¹ on Lady's Island Lake in Co. Wexford, which was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Lady's Island Lake is one of Ireland's largest coastal lagoons² and is protected under the EU Habitats Directive³ as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Since the 1980s, it has become heavily eutrophic with an excessive growth of algae blocking the sun from reaching the lakebed. The proliferation of algae is attributed to agricultural runoff entering the lagoon. The impact on the fish populations has been catastrophic and the lake's future as feeding area for migratory birds is under serious threat.

The CLEAR Report estimates that a 5 to 7-fold reduction in nitrogen and phosphorous inputs to Lady's Island Lake will be necessary to return the lagoon to its previous condition. The report found that, at present, around 60 tonnes of nitrogen and 1.5 tonnes of phosphorous enters the lagoon every year. The buildup of polluted sediment on the lakebed over the past 40 years is a particular problem. The CLEAR report identifies the longstanding need to stem the flow of harmful nutrients into the lagoon, and outlines remedial actions aimed at doing so.

¹ EPA Research CLEAR Report [Research-Report_473.pdf](#)

² A coastal lagoon is a lake or pond that is fully or partially separated from the sea by a permeable barrier – [NPWS](#)

³ The [Habitats Directive | National Parks & Wildlife Service](#) contributes to ensuring biodiversity in the European Union by conserving natural habitats and wild fauna and flora species

2. Joint Committee Consideration

The Joint Committee considered the CLEAR report at its meeting on 11 June 2025, inviting various stakeholders to participate. The witnesses included representatives from Aquafact (the report authors), Wexford County Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The EPA was also invited but could not attend due to hosting a water conference on the same day. Furthermore, submissions were received from An Taisce, Coastwatch, Jim Hurley (local campaigner) and Teagasc.

1. The Committee agreed that the CLEAR report comprehensively establishes the scientific reasons for the deterioration of Lady's Island Lake and that clear and focussed attention should now be given to the long-term restoration of the lagoon. The work of Aquafact and the report authors in carrying out the research was commended.
2. Members established that the problem at Lady's Island Lake has been ongoing for over forty years and that the failure to adequately address it underlines a lack of co-ordination and leadership among the multiple Departments and Agencies involved.
3. The Committee heard that responsibility for different aspects of the problem lies with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Local Authority Water Programme (LAWPRO); the NPWS; the EPA; and Wexford County Council. This has led to a lack of coordination as no body/organisation holds the responsibility for overall coordination. It was agreed that solutions to the problem depend on full-scale involvement of, and cooperation between, all bodies. The need for the participation of Teagasc and Uisce Éireann in restoration efforts was also highlighted.
4. The Committee recognised the invaluable role played by community groups and individuals in highlighting the problem and advocating for the restoration of the

lake, including Mr Jim Hurley and the Lady's Island Drainage Committee. Ciara O'Mahony, Eastern Division Manager of NPWS, added:

"I have never come across a community as motivated by the natural heritage value of their area."

5. Members noted evidence from Wexford County Council that there are currently around 72 farms within the sub-basin draining to Lady's Island Lake. It was further noted that the vast majority of farming practices in the area are in compliance with rules and advice for application of nutrients as stipulated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
6. Mr Eamonn Hore, Deputy Chief Executive of Wexford County Council, advised that resolving the problem would require measures that go above and beyond the EU Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)⁴. The Committee further noted the success of a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) scheme at Duncannon Beach, Co. Wexford in which local farmers and the wider community were engaged to substantially improve the bacterial, chemical and ecological quality of coastal streams.
7. The Committee agreed that current regulations and standards are insufficient to address the problem at Lady's Island Lake and that a solution should be modelled on schemes such as the Duncannon EIP and examples of other locally-led initiatives such as the Lough Carra LIFE project in Co. Mayo.
8. The Committee noted the advice of the CLEAR Report authors that a restoration plan for Lady's Island Lake must be site-specific and involve the reduced use of imported fertilisers on farmland, research on nutrients recycling and increased measures designed to retain nutrients on farmland such as buffer zones, wetland creation/restoration and tree planting.

⁴ The [Nitrates Directive](#) aims to protect water quality from pollution from agricultural sources

9. The Committee noted the potential of the Farming for Water EIP to incentivise farmers to change practices and move towards an environmentally sustainable approach when farming near waterbodies.
10. The Committee noted complications on accessing funding for a restoration project- the CLEAR report identifies seven sources of funding. Members agreed that the provision of streamlined funding for the project would generate momentum on the restoration project. Ms Catriona Ryan, director of national parks and nature reserves, NPWS, encouraged the Committee to write to respective Ministers so that specific funding for the project can be included in the Estimates Process.
11. The Committee noted agreement among all stakeholders that Wexford County Council should lead and co-ordinate the multiple bodies involved in the restoration of Lady's Island Lake and that the Committee will host a meeting on progress in Spring 2026. It was further noted that restoration of the lake is a long-term project that will span decades.
12. The Committee notes the increased importance of demonstrated efforts to conserve designated sites or species under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) for the renewal of Ireland's derogation from the EU Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC). This highlights the need to closely examine issues at catchment level, for which the Lady's Island Lake project could prove to be a positive exemplar.

Recommendations

1. The Committee recommends that Wexford County Council leads the long-term restoration of Lady's Island Lake with the full support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the EPA; the NPWS; LAWPRO; Teagasc and Uisce Éireann.
2. Taking inspiration from the Duncannon EIP and the Lough Carra project in Co. Mayo, the Committee recommends that the enthusiasm and participation of local community and farmers surrounding Lady's Island Lake is fully harnessed into the restoration project.
3. In accordance with the CLEAR report, the Committee recommends that the course of the restoration project undergoes rigorous site-specific planning in order to devise an optimal strategy for success.
4. The Committee urges the Ministers for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and Climate, Energy and Environment to ensure that the multi-body restoration project, led by Wexford County Council, is given a clear and specific mandate to restore Lady's Island Lake to a condition similar to that before the inundation of nitrates and phosphorus in recent decades.
5. The Committee recommends that funding for the project is simplified and streamlined in as much as possible. Members further undertake to request that the Ministers for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and Climate, Energy and Environment co-ordinate to this end during the Estimates process and to ensure that the project is resourced to ensure payment for ecosystem services as part of a just transition.
6. The Committee recommends that ongoing work between the various stakeholders and the local community should continue in earnest. The setting

up of a locally led agri-environment scheme, for example, could halt the lake's decline before fully fledged restoration begins. This could include the further development of buffer zones and other mitigatory measures to reduce the amount of nitrates entering the lake.

7. The Committee recommends that a new set of regulations, standards and practices for farming near large waterbodies be developed to halt environmental decline and ensure their long-term protection. The members recommend that this is done on an all-island basis acknowledging the interconnected nature of Ireland's lakes, rivers, streams, lagoons etc. as a single biogeographic unit. The action taken to restore Lady's Island Lake should be used as a national exemplar of community-led agri-environmental schemes and lessons learned from this process should directly inform the design of future schemes to address nutrient pollution and habitat restoration.