Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee

Minutes of Meeting – Thursday 2nd April 2026 in County Hall, Wexford & Remotely

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy

Present: Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy, Cllr. Pat Kehoe, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr. Catherine Walsh, Cllr. Patricia Byrne, Natasha Ariff (PPN), Joe Ryan (WCTU) Dr. Mary Bourke and Georgia Southern University Students & Lectureers.

Staff: Eamonn Hore (Director of Services), Abraham Dunne (Senior Engineer), Frank Burke (Climate Action Co-Ordinator), Eoin Kinsella (Agricultural Scientist), Alan Quirke (Director of Services), Rory O'Mahony (Senior Executive Engineer), Hugh Maguire (Administrative Officer), Enda Waters (Executive Engineer), Siobhan Murphy (Executive Scientist), Melissa Goff (Senior Staff Officer), Lillie O'Brien (Assistant Staff Officer).

Remotely: Cllr. Aidan Browne, Clare Kelly (Climate Action Officer)

Apologies: Jer O'Mahony (Agriculture), Cathy Lee (PPN) Mary B. Walsh.

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The Cathaoirleach expressed sincere sympathy on behalf of the SPC Committee to Cliona Connolly on the recent passing of her mother.

The Cathaoirleach acknowledged apologies from Jer O'Mahony and wished him a speedy recovery.

1. Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meeting held 30th January 2026.

The Minutes of the Meeting held 30th January 2026 was proposed by Cllr. Pat Kehoe and seconded by Natasha Ariff. No matters arose.

2. Update on Water Quality matters – Eoin Kinsella

Eoin Kinsella gave a summary update regarding the Lady's Island Lake Action Plan and detailed the following:

- Last year an EPA project report revealed a large amount of nutrients entering the lagoon and Wexford County Council are now taking the lead to develop an action plan and a draft has been submitted to the DHLGH, LAWPRO and EPA for comments.
- The position of Senior Executive Scientist and applications due.
- Monitoring 13 feeder streams feeding into the lagoon. Samples taken 3 times last year and then only last week to start 2026.
- Regarding enforcement 31 inspections were carried out under the NIPs and 18 of those failed. For 2026 a target of 60 inspections to take place
- Under NAIP 42 inspections were carried out and 17 revealed minor non-compliances. It is expected that all 52 farms will be inspected by end of April under GAP regulations.

After the presentation, the following queries were raised and responded to.:

- Will the water quality action plan be open to public submissions? Position of Senior Executive Scientist advertised, and it is envisaged that the Water Action Plan draft will start then. It is hoped to launch a booklet like the Slaney Catchment which will be available to the public.
- Has the Council actively sought funding? Funding received from DHLGH was for scope and hydrogeological study and the remaining funding will cover the staffing salaries for the next five years.
- Regarding feeder streams being polluted, is 3 times a year enough for sampling for the feeder streams? While there is a huge resource needed for sampling and increasing costs, WCC can investigate funding support from the DHLGH.
- Is there any measures taken regarding the illegal or overspreading from slurry and fertiliser and the surface runoff that is going in? WCC carry out inspections under the GAP regs. The dates for slurry spreading run between 1st and 30th September and the farmyard manure 30th January. Regulations must stay a minimum of 5m away from water courses and 10m during certain times of the year. If there is a yellow rainfall warning, farmers can't spread manure and we would carry out surveillance runs to identity any that do.
- Are there other lakes at risk that we are looking at? While Our Lady's Island lake is unique, we are familiar with Tacumshane lake , Ballyteigue slob which we are currently investigating compliance enforcement.
- Frank Burke also pointed out that under the Climate Action Team there is local biodiversity action funding each year and we apply for Department funding also. Three MD's have been surveyed on a number of small lakes which is fed to the planners and WCC are awaiting results on funding for fourth. The Climate Action team work together with Eoin on Map Alerter also.
- Has the window for spreading on a national level been reassessed as the rain is become more prevalent in the last number of years and saturation levels higher which farmers may not be notified of? It is up to the DHLGH and Department of Agriculture to review this. There is regulations also stating if land waterlogged farmers shouldn't spread and we will warn them if not adhering to it.
- Are we focusing on domestic wastewater treatment systems? Yes, we have 31 inspections carried out and 18 failed and target for this year is 60. WCC focus on carrying out between 200 to 300 in rural areas for this year.
- Is there a reason why systems are failing? Common failure is tanks being installed and left 10/12 years and not being desludged. Most failures are due to maintenance of the tanks.
- Regarding the difficulty of getting grants for those that failed it was said WCC would look into having to pay before you receive the grant? That was being brought up at the EPA meeting in the last two weeks. Staff member is on leave so I will update you next time.
- Eamonn Hore informed the meeting that the Minster visited the island last year and announced €3/4 million in funding from the business case we sent up and it will cost at least over €2m over a number of years. He stated that from the Taoiseach down there is a commitment there and it has to be science based. Delighted that we are taking the lead and this will be used as a template to restore other significant bodies to good quality.

It was proposed by Cllr. Pat Kehoe and seconded by Joe Ryan to postpone the motion to the next meeting.

4. RMCEI Plan 2026 – Rory O'Mahony

Rory O'Mahony gave a presentation on the RMCEI Plan for 2026. He explained that it involves the Council producing an enforcement inspection plan for the coming year and report on the inspections that took place on the previous year by the 28th February every year submitted to the EPA. He went through the statistics that were submitted.

The following queries were raised and responded to

- Are the complaints domestic and business? Thes response was that it includes both and they are all logged by CSU and referred to Litter/Water/Waste teams for investigation.
- A query was raised about the illegal cutting of trees? It was noted that this comes under the Forestry Acts administered by DAFM and the Gardai also have powers under these Acts.
- Regarding fines for dumping, €150 this appears small for a large-scale dumping? The answer was that the €150 fine is set in the Litter Pollution Act 1997 (as amended) and can be changed by the Minister. The Council do get some convictions under the Waste Management Act but it involves much more enforcement work to obtain a prosecution. The Council have noted that visual evidence does help with convictions and have received fines of up to €500 under the LPA. It is at the discretion of the District Court Judge in any case.
- The figures for water sampling of streams and lakes does that include wastewater also? Yes it includes agricultural, septic tank and water course monitoring. All come under water pollution and such complaints are referred to the Water Team to be investigated.
- Is there scope to increase staffing to water and prioritising water management? Agriculture staff have increased on the water team so the Council will review at the end of reporting year to see if met specified targets.
- Eamonn Hore concluded the discussion by stating the Council brought an illegal dumping case to the High Court costing €100,000 to investigate and after winning the case the total cost of fine was €15,000. If it is a serious issue the Council will take it as far as it can to get a prosecution. He also stated that the Water Team was the biggest team in Environment and all cases are examined. He also stated that 2 additional members of staff were being employed for Our Lady's Island.

5. Slo-waters Presentation by Dr. Mary Bourke, T.C.D.

Dr. Mary Bourke gave a brief statement around Climate Change and spoke about;

- Why our environment is in the state that it is,
- What we can do about it and
- Showing that there is a way forward.

She made the following points regarding the above matters

- Catchment, Drainage Basin -identifies where all the water sources, flows and effects.
- Series of sub-catchments e.g. 1 km2 up to 15km2
- Hydrological cycle – increased surface and subsurface channels
- Problems with rivers – flooding, pollution, drought, huge carbon footprint, less biodiversity.
- Increased drainage density – built storm drains, gullies, and need to slow this down.
- By improving agriculture we have removed wetland areas form the countryside.
- Urbanisation expansion – no infiltration except where drains are placed so doubling the size of floods and increasing frequency of smaller ones.
- Rivers in a changing climate. The flooding season much longer.

- Use more nature-based approach as part of the solution. Restore or enhance catchment processes affected by human invention. Rivers need to be cleaned.
- Peatland restoration – turf dams in peatland drains.
- Forestry – not parallel drains as parallel to the slope directs the flow down to next area. Contour flowing is better.
- Getting rid of small channels, fix upstream and downstream and be a community on a catchment scale.
- Leaky dams – not there to stop the flow but to slow the flow – low risk, low cost.
- Soil Bunds – demonstration site built on Fethard on Sea – took 30% of flood peak and slowed flow right down. A trip can be organized to visit this site.
- Small catchments 100km2 - took 40/80% flood peak away – flow reduction.
- Restore peatlands, plant trees along water channels, connect floodplains to rivers and construct wetlands.

Following the presentation a discussion ensued, and the following queries were raised and responded to and points made.

- Natasha Arriff proposed to go on the field trip to Fethard on Sea and it was seconded by Cllr. Leonard Kelly.
- As public representatives and executives are there things we can go after in terms of the catchment area to support the environment and to articulate to the general public? There is a few easy measures such as build a bund to store water. Also funded EIP water for farming could this be dealing with water quality also need measure monitoring data to invest in it and support farmers.
- Is there any existing schemes or should the Council be pushing new ones? CAP is very good and has done a lot for the environment.
- Is continuation chambers part of planning for multiple houses? Need to harvest our rainwater from our houses and leave drains there but add little pieces of wood to slow water down.
- Could you talk about management of these schemes? Need a budget for management which comes down to farmers grant. Planting leaky dams by putting willow inside to form its own leaky dam or plant trees right beside it.
- Reintroducing species such as beaver, have they a value in Ireland? Beaver dams are completely effective but Beavers are not a native species to Ireland.
- Eamonn Hore concluded the discussion stating that nature-based solutions along with mixed hard surface will have to be made. He also agreed to carry out a field trip to Fethard on Sea and stated that we do need to be supportive of farmers.

6. Climate Change Update – Frank Burke

Frank Burke began his presentation by stating that the Implementation Plan for 2025 has just been sent to the Director yesterday and it is hoped to bring it to the Council meeting on the 13th April 2026. He outlined highlights of some of the work done by Wexford County Council.

- Over 55's –Climate Change Course.
- 1 hour information session on Climate on 5th May.
- Community Climate Action programme Phase 2 – gone to Department but delayed on their end and Clubs/applicants notified of this.
- Energy update – event 30 Exhibitors, over 300 attendees.
- Green Flag – part of 6 Councils chosen to be pilot project for how a green flag would work for local authority buildings.

FB offered to organise the field trip with Dr. Mary Bourke. He will send an email out through HM to ask if am, noon or pm would suit between 11th and 24th May for the trip which would coincide with climate and biodiversity fortnight and organise a bus too.

He explained that the Biodiversity Action Plan was put out on the Council's Public Consultation Portal in early May. Funding was received to distribute out trees, fruit trees and hedgerow species and these were applied for and given out end of February.

7. Coastal Management Update – Abraham Dunne

Abraham Dunne gave a brief overview of coastal matters such as

- Seaview Rock Armour Project in Kilmore is nearing completion.
- Rosslare Coastal Erosion Flood Relief – over 1km of rock armour going in the east and on the west, a mix of sea flood wall and flood embankments. The Project is proceeding in 2 phases and start with coastal works first.
- Structural crack in Duncannon Pier - €0.5m secured to repair the crack.
- Coastal erosion at Kilpatrick Beach – gained funding to restore access road and provide rock armour.
- Piles loose where cars go onto slipway at Ballyhack Ferry – consultant on board to design and repair.
- Cahore – coastal erosion – secured funding
- Drainage District – look after 3 – Sluice gates fixed to prevent storm tides at Kilmannock.
- Coastal Erosion Strategy – Consultant on board to assess soft and hard coasts and compare old and new maps and cost risk assessment.

A discussion ensued and the following queries raised.

- What is the timeline for this Coastal Erosion Risk Plan and will it be open to public consultation? Will take roughly 9 months and a public consultation can be held for it.
- Regarding the Rosslare Coastal Erosion Flood Relief Scheme what are the emergency works going to be? Rock armour will be the works carried out.

8. Beach Management Review – Hugh Maguire

Hugh Maguire presented the meeting with an overview of Beach Management detailing the following.

- 70 beaches in the County.
- Bathing water quality samples every week during the season for 20 beaches (bathing season May to September). Results on the website www.beaches.ie
- 6 Blue Flag, 10 Green Coast beaches and 2 Blue Flag marinas. Awards run by An Taisce.
- Designated bathing beaches comes under the EU bathing water Regulations 2008 and are required to submit the targets to EPA on these beaches.
- Achieved Blue Flag back for Duncannon Beach with the help of Environmental Innovation Project working with farmers and the local Community.
- Litter Patrol, Beach Lifeguards and Beach Wardens are employed – June to August at the main Beaches.
- Working on Blue Flag for Baginbun at present.

Following the Review, queries raised were as follows

- Are the 70 beaches designated bathing water beaches or how many is there? Yes 70 beaches include a small cove to larger beaches like Curracloe. There are 9 designated beaches which means they have facilities such as carpark, toilets and are under the bathing

water regulations for testing. 20 beaches are tested and posted weekly Thurs/Friday of each week on the website and on the noticeboard at the beaches.

- Ballymoney is being tested regularly, and it is hoped to get the Blue Flag back.
- HM stated that they are working with SETU and Georgia State on a project at present about year-round testing.

9. Motion on Flooding and Farming

A discussion ensued and the following was agreed

- to amend the motion to include "such as nature-based approaches with the farming community and local organisations". It was also agreed to send this motion to Carlow and Wicklow County Council for their consideration.

10. Q&A with Georgia Southern Students under the Guidance of Dr. Keely and Dr. Potter

After the main business of the Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment SPC Meeting a Question and Answer Session was held between Georgia Southern Students, the Members of the SPC Committee and Council Environment Staff. The following matters were discussed;

- Environment Education Programmes in Wexford Schools.
- Involving Students with disabilities in Environment Education Programmes.
- The intervals involved with Water Quality Sampling.
- Using LED Light Filters for Water Quality Testing.
- Reconciling the needs of individual farmers with the needs of the overall Environment.
- Environmental Schemes that help farmers prevent water pollution.
- Managing conflict between local communities and Council Policy.

The Chair thanked the Georgia State University Students and Lecturers for attending and for their input. The next SPC Meeting was provisionally scheduled for Friday 29th May 2026.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: _____ Dated: 5/6/2026.

CATHAOIRLEACH