

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment SPC

Minutes of Meeting

held on Thursday 27th May 2021 at 14.30.

The meeting was held remotely by Ms Teams software connection.

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mary Farrell

Present: Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr. Tom Forde, Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation), Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Cliona Connolly Senior Staff Officer, Mr. Philip Knight Senior Staff Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer, Caroline Sinnott, Clerical Officer.

Guest Presentation: Karin Dubsky & Mick Berry (Coastwatch)

Apologies: Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Maura Bell, Mr. Billy Murphy (PPN Member), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture), Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services

Cllr. Mary Farrell welcomed everyone to the meeting break and advised that a member of the public would be observing the meeting.

1. Matters arising from Minutes and Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meetings dated 25th February 2021 and 22nd April 2021.

Both sets of minutes were proposed by Cllr. Jim Moore and seconded by Cllr. Donal Kenny. A question was raised regarding an update on funding received for coastal protection works at Seaview, Kilmore. Gerry Forde replied that the Council has received funding for a detailed design by consultants that will cost in the region of €40,000 and funding for a coastal protection scheme is expected to follow from the OPW.

2. Presentation – Coastwatch by Karin Dubsky and Mick Berry

Karin Dubsky thanked the Committee for giving Coastwatch the opportunity to address the CCBDENV SPC Meeting and she informed the meeting that the County Council had commissioned consultants to carry out a study on the Inch River. A member of Coastwatch has monitored the river for over a period of a year on a daily basis and the information may be helpful to the study. She introduced Mick Berry, Regional Co-Ordinator for South Wexford for Coastwatch and further advised that she herself is the overall National Co-Ordinator.

Karin is a Marine Ecologist, working for decades on Citizen Science projects. The presentation intended to cover issues of national importance and local importance to Co. Wexford.

Karin gave a Power point presentation that focused on the following areas:

- Citizen Science Projects.
- Coastwatch Surveys as an example.

- Wexford Coastline value highlights
- Coastal pressures and concerns.
- Challenges and Issues arising from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Crises.
- Opportunities with Citizen Science & Marine Spatial Planning.

It was noted that “Citizen Science” is the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the public typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists.

Coastwatch Surveys started in 1987 as an Irish Times survey and it became an annual survey first to 5 and then 23 European countries. The idea of a coastal survey is that citizens take on 500m of shore and survey at low tide in autumn and record what they see. Litter items are organised from large to micro – large landfill materials are most frequent because of erosion and people leave large items on the shore to try to halt erosion e.g. earth and stones or demolished out-houses etc. Household furnishings are regularly dumped over sea cliffs.

New EU legislation will affect some types of plastic litter in the future. Rope related litter is the most frequently found item on Irish shores previously it was bottles. Virtually no oil and tar pollution were observed in the 2020 survey, a positive development. Small litter such as plastic bottles, cans, bottle lids, shopping bags and wet wipes which have only appeared in last few years and are increasing in volume. Last Autumn Coastwatch looked at COVID-19 litter; wet wipes, masks, bleach bottles and single use plastic gloves were commonly noted.

Karin explained that there have been changes in biodiversity and values with species from warmer waters being found in Ireland in recent years. Honeycomb worms have been discovered by a volunteer from Wexford and it has been officially confirmed – the largest known area in EU. Two types of seagrass have been found (*Zostera marina* & *noltii* and there are also newts, frogs and lizard as well as otter cubs in County Wexford and around Ireland. Much coastal biodiversity is threatened due to pesticides and herbicides. Along the Ballymoney coastal trail it has great biodiversity with no spraying of pesticides or herbicides. There is 2.6% of the coast in co. Wexford in marine protected areas (MPA) that are particularly valuable for biodiversity. Action is needed to protect and restore our shores.

Seagrass used to exist on land and moved back to sea which it is very important for biodiversity and fishing grounds. Research in several countries has confirmed that carbon is stored in seagrass beds. It is noticeable at St. Patrick’s Bridge, Kilmore Quay. Invasive seaweed has overtaken seagrass in several places and Coastwatch are now looking for potential support from Wexford County Council for monitoring and to help to protect Seagrass habitats.

County Wexford has opportunities for eco-tourism and education tourism. Last year a meeting was held in Duncannon facilitated by Wexford County Council with Minister Malcolm Noonan to look at a potential Waterford Estuary Management Plan under the forthcoming Marine Spatial Plan. A Regional Plan for Waterford Estuary which is the second largest estuary in country is expected and local authorities will need to receive funding in this regard.

Cllr. Mary Farrell thanked Karin for her informative presentation and stated that the Council could consider future co-operation with Coastwatch. A discussion ensued after the presentation and the following queries were raised by the Committee Members and responded to by Karin and Mick.

- The issues caused by wet wipes being flushed into public wastewater systems creating technical problems and ultimately generating pollution on the coast and in the sea and various solutions such as bans, biodegradable wipes and levies were discussed.
- The influx of sargassum seaweed algae (invasive species) causing problems for the establishment of seagrasses.
- The extent of plastic bags and fragments being ingested by marine seabirds and animals and the importance of environmental education to help address these problems and the extent of aquaculture waste found in surveys of the Wexford Coast.
- The possibility of Government funding for establishing designated areas for seagrass to be protected and to act as carbon sinks for emissions.

Gerry Forde advised that Wexford County Council staff and Consultants could meet the Coastwatch volunteer involved with monitoring the Inch River in conjunction with the ongoing Study. He also responded to the queries as follows:

- Agreed with regard that wet wipes have caused technical problems in waste-water treatment plants.
- Marine Waste – the Council were involved in a successful project at Kilmore Quay with the fishermen and BIM and collected tonnes of wet fish waste which the Fisherman brought in. The Council could look at pursuing this again.
- What conditions around St. Patricks that makes a good location? Karin stated that seagrass needs good warm water, transparency and good water flow and nutrients. Too many nutrients can create algae which would be detrimental to seagrass.

Mick Berry and Gerry Forde advised that the Coastwatch surveys were a great way for volunteers to see the coast of Wexford and to benefit from physical and mental exercise too.

3. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Update – G. Forde

Gerry Forde informed the Committee that the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy should be an agenda item for every meeting to discuss the most recent developments regarding climate action. The Council now has appointed Clare Kelly A/Executive Scientist as the Climate Change Officer and she will be attending every SPC meeting. An update report should be available for the next SPC. Cllr. Mary Farrell agreed the matter would be on the agenda of every SPC meeting going forward.

G. Forde stated that the Council's target of 33% energy use reduction by 2020 was exceeded and the outcome was 38% with credit due to the LED Public Lighting Project led by Tim Murphy, Senior Executive Engineer, Roads Department.

2. Environment Waste Enforcement – Rory O'Mahony

Rory O' Mahony gave a presentation on priorities and activities regarding Waste Enforcement to the Committee. Wexford Co. Council receives an enforcement grant of €236,000 each year from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communication which funds the Enforcement Team. The presentation outlined current activities relating to waste enforcement under the following headings:

- Priorities and enforcement activities.
- Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections (RMCEI).
- Metal theft and waste collections.

- Construction & Demolition Waste and Soil Sites.
- Mercury Regulations.
- Historic Landfill Sites.
- Anti-Dumping Initiative 2021.

A discussion ensued after the presentation and the following queries were raised by the Committee Members and responded to:

- The issue of how garden waste is managed with was raised. The availability of subsidised home compost bins from the Council's Household Recycling Centres was highlighted together with the acceptance of green waste at the Holmestown Household Recycling Centre for a small charge. Suggestions relating to the use of mulch mowers by householders was also discussed in connection with garden maintenance.
- It was also noted that under new Mercury Regulations Dentists are required to have amalgam separators in their waste-water systems. Rory O' Mahony advised that there was a high compliance response in relation to recent correspondence with dentists in this regard.
- The matter of Authorised Waste Collectors providing brown wheel bins (food & garden waste) to their customers was queried. The Committee was advised that under current Waste Management Regulations only customers within 16 agglomerations with populations > 500 must be provided with brown wheel bins as part of the household waste collection services.
- Problems relating to illegal "man in a van" waste collectors were also discussed.
- There was also discussion concerning Waste Management Licences required for old landfills such as Carcur from the EPA. This matter is being progressed.
- A query was raised regarding metal theft of solar panels and catalytic converters. It was noted that this is happening in some parts of the country and the Waste Enforcement Staff are monitoring permitted waste recovery sites in relation to these items.

4. Any Other Business.

G. Forde stated that a regional awareness campaign was currently being promoted called "Greening your Picnic" involving Wexford and Waterford County Councils encouraging people to bring home all their picnic waste and to use reusable containers when visiting outdoor locations during the summer.

Cllr. Kelly asked about the current situation on the use of glyphosate-based weed killer by the Council, if the Council is using it and if a plan can be put in place for alternative methods of weed control. G. Forde has discussed the matter with Roads Department. They have used steam type units but he will come back with clarification on the matter for the next meeting.

Brendan Cooney advised the Committee that due to the volume of environmental legislation being generated every year that he hoped to provide an update for SPC Meetings. Recent legislative changes included funding increases for septic tank grants and amendments to the good agricultural practice regulations. Any queries scan be emailed to Brendan.

Councillor Mary Farrell informed the Committee that the Litter and Waste Sub-Committee had the first meeting earlier in May.

The Sub-Committee put forward proposals in relation to publicising successful prosecutions by Wexford County Council for Litter and Waste Management, requirements for Council tenants to provide details of waste management arrangements, black-spot signage, feedback for people reporting littering and a request for a mattress amnesty at each of the 4 Household Recycling Centres in the County. She confirmed that copies of the L & WASC Minutes can be brought to the SPC.

Captain Phil Murphy advised that regarding membership of the KIMO organisation, it had been checked out. It was formed back in 1990 in Denmark for local authorities, it provides resources in advocating good marine stewardship, dealing with micro plastics original idea fishing for litter back in 2002. The Council are recommending that we should join at a very modest cost and be the first Council in country to do so. Approval for membership is required in order to proceed.

Cllr. M. Farrell welcomed the opportunity, Danny Forde proposed and Cllr. L. Kelly seconded the request to join the KIMO organisation.

Cllr T. Forde apologised for late attendance due to software connection problems.

Cllr. M. Farrell thanked everyone for attending the meeting and advised that the next meeting is scheduled for September/October.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: Mary Farrell
Cathaoirleach

Date: 4/1/2022