



**Opening Statement
of
Mr. Anthony Coleman, Director of Services,
Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
on
‘Compliance with the Nitrates Directive: Implications for Ireland’ for the
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
March 20, 2024**

Introduction

Thank you, Deputy Cahill, and the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the topic “Compliance with the Nitrates Directive: Implications for Ireland”.

I am joined by my colleagues Ruth Hennessy, Catchments Manager in the South East and Margaret Keegan, Regional Coordinator for the Midlands and East.

The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) is a national shared service which works on behalf of Ireland’s 31 local authorities to protect and restore good water quality in our rivers, lakes, estuaries, ground, and coastal water. We are funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to provide support in catchment science, community engagement and coordinate the efforts of local authorities and other public bodies to implement Ireland’s River Basin Management Plan.

While LAWPRO does not have enforcement powers, we collaborate extensively with implementing bodies to ensure effective cooperation in order to produce positive water quality outcomes, both locally and nationally.

While Local Authorities have a regulatory oversight role along with Government Departments and public agencies, responsibility also lies with individuals and the various sectors that require water as a resource including the agricultural sector.

LAWPRO currently has a team of 74 staff working across our Communities, Catchments and Farming for Water EIP teams.

Our Senior Management Team coordinate the Water Framework Directive Regional Operational and Management Committees, who oversee the delivery of measures ensuring a consistency of approach.

Our Community Water Officers are dedicated to raising water quality awareness, fostering community capacity, and promoting citizen science and work to strengthen the bonds between public bodies, and communities, including the farming community.

LAWPRO's Catchment Assessment Team undertake scientific local catchment assessments in Priority Areas for Action (PAAs) and provide evidence-based science to better target measures to improve water quality within a catchment.

We are, however, only a single cog in the wheel that is part of the larger ongoing effort to support farmers to take the necessary action to protect and restore water quality in Ireland. Other key mechanisms are compliance with basic measures, and adoption of supplementary measures through voluntary agri-environmental schemes, such as ACRES, Waters of LIFE, and the Farming for Water EIP.

Some examples of LAWPRO's work to support the agricultural sector are:

- Where agriculture is identified as a significant pressure, LAWPRO's Catchment Assessment Team directs issues to advisors in the Teagasc and Dairy Industry Ireland led Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP). These advisors then work with farmers to improve farm practices and raise awareness of the local water quality issues. To date, up to 8,000 farms have been identified by LAWPRO for targeted advice by ASSAP.
- In 2022, we collaborated with the EPA and ASSAP to prepare Catchment Referrals for Nitrogen for 1,231 water bodies (709,040 hectares of land), within and outside the priority areas for action, which the ASSAP Dairy Co-ops advisors used to better target farm visits in nitrate risky areas.

- We support ASSAP in organising farmer events (138) within priority areas for action and contribute vital water quality information to local farmer association meetings. We have presented water quality data at Irish Farmers Journal hosted events in Cork, Portlaoise, and Cavan and supported several Coop farmer sustainability events.
- LAWPRO delivers catchment science and management training to the ASSAP advisors (48), Agriculture Consultants Association (72), ACRES Cooperation project leads, local authorities (100), and public agencies.
- LAWPRO actively participates in numerous expert working groups, for example the DAFM's Agriculture and Water Quality Working Group.

Farmer engagement with the ASSAP has been successful, however, lack of funding for farmers was identified as a barrier to the implementation of supplementary measures required to protect and restore water quality.

In response to this, DAFM and DHLGH launched a competitive call under the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) initiative of Ireland's Rural Development Programme. LAWPRO in partnership with Teagasc and Dairy Industry Ireland (DII) submitted a successful bid for the Farming for Water – European Innovation Partnership (EIP). This will provide €50m in funding directly to farmers for the adoption of voluntary measures, over and above regulatory compliance to reduce losses of phosphorus, nitrogen, sediment, and pesticides to water.

- The project prioritises areas, which need most attention to protect or restore water quality and will remove the financial barrier that currently prevents some farmers following the recommendations of LAWPRO and ASSAP.
- The measures developed for the scheme will contribute to protecting and improving water quality and benefit biodiversity, flood mitigation and support ecosystem climate resilience. These will include spatially targeted actions as well as improvements in nitrogen use efficiency and nutrient management. The scheme aims to engage up to 15,000 farmers by the end of 2027 and will have at its core the promotion of water stewardship within the agricultural sector. While this targeted scheme will not solve water quality issues in isolation, it will contribute to the multi-agency industry wide effort required to protect and preserve our waterbodies for future generations, while ensuring the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

Chair, thank you, and the committee, for your attention this evening and we welcome any questions you may have.