

Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committees

**Liaison Officer's Report – September 2006**

1.	<p><u>Water Levels – Justification for Review (LNAC 69 &amp; LBAC 81)</u>          Working Group met on 25<sup>th</sup> August to consider. Agreed that the 'An Overview of the Management of Lough Neagh Water Levels' paper needed to be updated. This is currently being redrafted and the revised version will be tabled at the next LNAC and LBAC meetings. Members reviewed a Draft Justification Report, made comments and will consider a redraft at their next meeting in the light of the updated Overview document.</p>
2.	<p><u>PPS 2 and Development in the Wetlands (LNAC 70)</u>          A rep from Planning Service will be present at the next LNAC meeting to provide a review of PPS2 - Nature Conservation and will hear the views of the LNAC and take questions on development within the Wetlands.</p>
3.	<p><u>Advisory Committee Insurance (LNAC 71)</u>          Mr Graham Seymour forwarded a letter of comfort for Advisory Committee members in relation to insurance cover. As the Advisory Committees are implementing projects, there may be a real need to have insurance cover.</p>
4.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Management Strategy (LNAC 72)</u>          The Chairman and the LO met to discuss a process for trying to encourage implementation of the recommendations within the LNMS. It was agreed that the list of recommendations should be reviewed and updated and that meetings should be set up with relevant implementing bodies.</p>
5.	<p><u>Safety &amp; Navigation Working Group (LNAC 73)</u>          Meeting to consider markers and dredging to take place on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. The draft report is attached. An update of the Working Group recommendations will be provided at the next LNAC meeting.</p>
6.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Navigation Authority (LNAC 74)</u>          A meeting is to take place on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006 between LNAC reps, Paul Sweeney; DCAL Permanent Secretary, and DCAL Officers to highlight the need for a navigation authority. Verbal feedback from the meeting will be given at the next LNAC meeting.</p>
7.	<p><u>PPS 14 response (LNAC 75 &amp; LBAC 85)</u>          The Draft response was amended and forwarded to DoE. The LO will provide feedback as and when.</p>
8.	<p><u>Sustainable Recreation Strategy (LNAC 76)</u>          Meetings and discussions have been held with Judith Annett and the other team members in relation to finalising the document. Comments received from Committee members and other stakeholders have been fed back to Judith who is now finalising the document. A copy of the final document will be sent to all LNAC and LBAC members and will be placed on the website. The recommendations contained within the draft are already proving very useful in terms of steering development around the Lough and on Lough Beg.</p>
9.	<p><u>Binevenagh AONB (LBAC 78)</u>          EHS confirmed the criteria for designation as follows:          1. Is it currently of outstanding natural beauty of at least national importance?          2. Does it have a coherent and distinctive identity?          3. Does it justify special management measures?          Land must meet all three criteria.</p>

	<p>Following an additional visit to the suggested lands which the LBAC advised should be included, EHS staff agreed that “<i>Whilst the three areas were not without merit, they would be regarded as 'debatable'. It did not seem to me or to others in the Department that they offered a strong case for inclusion on grounds of essential identity with the core of the AONB (Binevenagh), for reasons of intrinsic natural beauty and need for special planning and management. It is not enough for an area to meet one of the above criteria, it has to meet all three.</i>”</p> <p>The AONB was formally launched at the beginning of August.</p>
10.	<p><u>Fallen Animals and bank Erosion Publicity material (LBAC 79)</u> Applications for funding have been made to allow for publication of this material. Information will be placed on the website in the mean time.</p>
11.	<p><u>Hutchinson’s Quay Coarse Angling Stands Working Group (LBAC 80)</u> The developer has not provided further details as initially indicated therefore there has been no need to call this working group.</p>
12.	<p><u>Gate Opening at Portna (LBAC82)</u> A letter was written to Rivers Agency to seek clarification of the gate opening regime at Portna. The current system (1,4,2,3) received back was circulated to relevant members and as a consequence, a working group meeting was called between relevant members and Rivers Agency and DCAL staff. All present agreed that in the short term the sequence of 1,3,2,4 would be the most facilitative to all needs, allowing elver passage on the east bank and angling on the west bank. DCAL staff highlighted that it is carrying out a detailed review of gate sequencing and that a consultation document will be available for all stakeholders in the near future. It was agreed that a working group should be reconvened to discuss DCAL’s recommendations.</p>
13.	<p><u>Maintaining favourable habitat (LBAC 83)</u> The Management Committee has not met since the last Advisory Committee meeting and has not commented on this issue. It will be placed on the next agenda.</p>
14.	<p><u>Harbour Biodiesel proposal (LBAC 84)</u> Verbal update will be given at the next LBAC meeting.</p>
15.	<p><u>Zebra Mussels</u> DoE produced draft Position Paper on Zebra Mussels in Lough Neagh. LO distributed this to members, compiled a response and forwarded to EHS. As well a detailed comment, the overarching comment was - stop talking and start acting to prevent spread to other areas. The position paper will be distributed to members and placed on the website when available.</p>
16.	<p><u>Eel Review</u> Feedback from the Question and Answer session on 15<sup>th</sup> June has been good – “great to hear about situation and now have greater understanding of issues and needs of eels and the fishery”. Feedback on the EU’s response to the Eel Basin Management Plan will be given to Committee members as a when available.</p>
17.	<p><u>Travel Expenses for Committee Members</u> A budget allowance to cover membership attendance, for those that do not receive it elsewhere, has been included in the funding request for the next Committee term.</p>
18.	<p><u>Sand Extraction (LNAC Action 65 &amp; 66)</u> QPANI gave a very informative presentation at the last LNAC meeting. Details are available from Sperrin House.</p>
19.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Wetlands Biodiversity Action Plan</u> The Biodiversity Officer continues to provide technical expertise to project developers and his input has significantly increased the quality of natural heritage applications to the</p>

	<p>LNP. Steering Group meeting continue to take place and work towards the preparation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan progresses. The following habitats have been highlighted as potentials for Habitat Action Plans: Lowland raised bog, Species rich Hedgerow, Wet woodland, Fen, Purple moor grass, Reedbed, Floodplain grazing marsh, Lowland meadow, Rivers and streams and Eutrophic standing water.</p> <p>The following species have been highlighted as potentials for preparation of species Actions Plans: Barn owl, Common Tern, Curlew, <i>Dyschirius obscurus</i> (ground beetle), Irish Damselfly, Irish hare, Lapwing, Pollan, Redshank, Tree Sparrow, Whooper Swan, Bats and Invasive species.</p> <p>The habitats and species need to be finalised and draft plan written.</p> <p>The LO will give an update at the next meeting.</p>
20.	<p><u>Tree Sparrow Project</u></p> <p>Funding has now been secured from LNP and all Councils. An awareness raising drive is underway and the Biodiversity Officer has received favourable feed in terms of volunteers to monitor numbers, erect boxes and manage feeding stations.</p>
21.	<p><u>Wetlands Wildlife Recording Project</u></p> <p>Applications to LNP and Better Belfast successful. Recording equipment will now be purchased and available for use – binoculars, camera and telescope.</p>
22.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Baseline &amp; GIS</u></p> <p>Still waiting for data to be uploaded on to a computer at the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, where the GIS will be available for public usage. Application to the LNP was successful and one has been submitted to EHS for match funding to have a separate GIS system in the Liaison Office.</p>
23.	<p><u>North Coast Personal Water Craft Club</u></p> <p>LO met with George McFarland, Chairman of this club now operating out of Benone. The club is interested in operating on the Lower Bann. George expressed an interest in making a presentation at the next LBAC meeting.</p>
24.	<p><u>Lower Bann Erosion Report</u></p> <p>Carrying out survey of River banks to update the 1998 LBAC Erosion Report. This will assist in highlighting the areas/landowners where LBP funding could best be targeted.</p>
25.	<p><u>Waterways Museum</u></p> <p>LO met with consultants carrying out work on the establishment of a Waterways Museum at Oxford Island. A workshop session is planned for mid September.</p>
26.	<p><u>Ramsar Boundary</u></p> <p>Review of PPS 2 imminent. Working Group will meet to consider content and way ahead for securing the future for the Ramsar site.</p>
27.	<p><u>Antrim Marina</u></p> <p>Council finalising proposals in the hope of being able to deliver a new marina at Antrim. The preferred location is off-line near the toilet block/cafe in Loughshore Park.</p>
28.	<p><u>Lough Neagh &amp; Lower Bann Management Committee</u></p> <p>There has been no meeting since the last LNAC and LBAC meetings.</p>
29.	<p><u>CAAN</u></p> <p>LO attended Countryside Access and Activity Network Meetings. Minutes available from Sperrin House.</p>
30.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Partnership</u></p> <p>The fourth round batch of projects has been assessed and recommendations for funding made. Letters of Offer will be prepared. 36 applications were received and there was not enough funding to offer all the projects that met the threshold.</p> <p>The new Marketing Officer, responsible for implementing the Strategy is due to start next week.</p>

	The Partnership is giving consideration to its future role and remit.
31.	<u>Lough Neagh / Advisory Committee website</u> Liaison Office staff are in the process of upgrading the loughneagh.com website. It is very dated. Suggestions for the sort of information you would like to see are welcome. This site will complement the Lough Neagh Marketing website.
32.	<u>Canoe Trails</u> Progress is being made towards the implementation on the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Trails
33.	<u>Estuary Watersports zone.</u> Meeting held to discuss fact that zone comprises jetty that is used by MCA. Meeting consensus was that zone should end further up stream. No objections from LBAC membership. CHC in agreement, although formal letter not yet received. Sign to be changed by most appropriate body.
34.	<u>Lough Erne Advisory Committee</u> Parallel of Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committees has been established in Fermanagh. Liaison Officers have met.
35.	<u>Loughshore Trail</u> The Lap The Lough cycling event was held on 3 <sup>rd</sup> September and was very successful attracting between 400 and 500 participants.
36.	<u>Lower Bann Partnership</u> The Partnership was successfully launched at the end of June in Portneal Lodge. First round projects have been assessed (LBAC commented) and Letters of Offer are being finalised. The second round for applications is due to close in the near future. The Lower Bann Advisory Committee is the lead applicant in a number of application and will be involved in delivering these projects as well as in the delivery of some of the LNP led projects.
37.	<u>Cycleau Conference</u> Secured funding to contribute towards sending four Lower Bann reps to Cycleau Conference in October. Sourcing funding for LN reps. Conference will focus on the European dimension of river catchment management
38.	<u>Lagan Canal</u> Met with consultant preparing a report into the way forward for the re-watering of the Lagan Canal
39.	<u>Bathing Waters Directive Consultation</u> The main comment focused on the fact that whilst the DoE is meeting the terms of the Directive it is not meeting the spirit of the Directive. There are no freshwater sites in NI because these do not have enough 'bathers'. The Dept should consider implementing the spirit of the Directive by designating inland waters that are used by contact water sports people.
40.	<u>Review of Environmental Governance</u> Comments submitted from Committees.
41.	<u>Oxford Island NNR Management Group</u> LO attended meeting. Issues discussed include: need for comprehensive Article 6 assessments on every small project that takes place on site rather than a single assessment for them all, lack of success of new Kinnego Pond reedbed, new buoys will be placed off island next season to demarcate sports zone, new exhibition imminent and to have Lough Neagh theme, Wildlife 2000 not overly successful, considering request to have bridleway at Ox Isl.
42.	<u>Lower Bann Projects</u>

	Successful applications submitted to LBP for part funding for Lower Bann Photographic Resource, Lower Bann Sustainable Development Strategy, Lower Bann Biodiversity Action Plan and Lower Bann Baseline study. Applications submitted to EHS for match funding.
43.	<u>Rams Island Project</u> LO and Biodiversity Officer involved in initial meeting of Rams Island Management Group – very productive, great input from all stakeholders, including statutory agencies.
44.	<u>Consultations</u> Comments lodged on: Review of Environmental Governance Bathing Waters Directive, Draft Water Abstraction Regulations 2006 Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006. Comments to be compiled on: Flood Management Policy Review – comments by 6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2006.
45.	<u>Advisory Committee Staffing Issues</u> Tracey Curry is working with the Liaison Officer on student placement.
46.	<u>Future Funding of Advisory Committees</u> An application has been submitted to EHS for funding for the next term of the Committees structure.