

Minutes of the fortieth meeting of the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee held on Wednesday, 7th December 2005 at 10.00am in Sperrin House, Magherafelt.

Present

Prof Brian Wood (Chairman)
Mr John Scovell
Cllr Mary Baker
Mr Brian Cassells
Alderman Sydney Anderson
Mr Conor Corr
Dr Arthur Mitchell
Cllr Danny Kinahan
Mr Denzyl Dinsmore
Mr James Smyth
Mr Ken Bell
Mr Archie Gibson
Alderman Cecil Calvert
Mr Conor Moore
Cllr Danny Kinaghan
Cllr Norman Badger

In Attendance

Mr Stephen Foster
Ms Kathleen Conlon
Mr Bob Davidson
Mr Seamus Burns
Ms Caroline Marshall

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Billy Mullen, Mr C W Dickinson, Mr Darrell Stanley, Mrs Elizabeth Meharg, Cllr John Smyth, Cllr Walter Greer, Rev Kennedy, Alderman Stephen Moutray (Craigavon Borough Council) and Mr Gerard Lavery.

2. Election of Chairman

Mr Ken Bell nominated Mr Brian Cassells as future Chairman. Arthur Mitchell seconded this and the members agreed that Mr Cassells should take up the post from the March 2006 meeting.

3. Chairman's Remarks

- a. Members were informed of the recent death of Mr Newell McCreight and agreed that his passing would be a great loss to the Committees and working groups, particularly in terms of his interest in angling and water quality. A minutes silence was held in his honour.
- b. Members were informed that the 12th January 2006 had been highlighted for the joint meeting focusing on Water Quality and that this meeting would most likely take place in Antrim Civic Centre in the morning. Water Services CEO will provide an overview with presentations on Waste Water Treatment Works upgrades, Abstraction proposals etc.

Members were informed that Rivers Agency would not be giving an overview of water level management at this meeting. A hydrological modelling study was being carried out on the river basin and RA felt that it would be timelier to present to the

Committee when modelling work was complete. Members expressed their disappointment but agreed that a presentation on water level management and the results of the water level modelling would be most welcome.

ACTION 49: Presentation to be arranged on water level management and recommendations of the hydrological modelling study.

4. Minutes of the last meeting – 14th September 2005

The minutes were then proposed by Mr Jim Smyth, seconded by Mr Ken Bell and agreed by members.

5. Matter Arising from last meeting

The following matters were considered:

a. Water Abstraction on Lough Neagh

Members were informed that several meetings had taken place between a representative of Water Service and the working group. Issues discussed included:

- The need for water to be valued and conserved,
- the need for individual planning applications for the works at the abstraction plants at Castor Bay and Moyola,
- the need for max instant, daily and annual flows to be set,
- the welcome for lower abstraction levels than available,
- the need for environmental, not just 'economic' issues to be considered when setting acceptable leakage levels,
- the possibility of impounding water for times of drought and,
- the need for isolation of sensitive ecological systems such as Portmore Lough,

Members were informed that, whilst RSPB has some concerns in relation to the data used to model future rainfall, the working group was satisfied that the abstraction proposals would have no significant detrimental impacts on the ecology and management of the Lough. Members supported the findings of the working group, appreciated that there would be further opportunity to ask questions of Water Service on 12th January 2006 and supported the future isolate of sensitive ecosystems from the water level management regime on Lough Neagh.

ACTION 50: Letter of support for the isolation of sensitive wetland ecosystems from Lough Neagh to be sent to RSPB.

b. Water Level Management

As discussed in 3b.

c. Lough Neagh Resources

Members were informed that a reply letter had been received from the Minister's Private Secretary reiterating that the designations and EU Directives were adequate to protect the relevant resources of the Lough and appreciating the potential benefits of local ownership and management of the relevant resources.

Members were informed that the working group had met twice, that a SWOT analysis had been carried out and that a draft paper was anticipated for consideration at the March LNAC meeting. The Working Group recommended that the paper should be considered and finalised before a meeting was requested with the Minister. Members agreed.

LNAC members highlighted that most of the designations had a terrestrial focus and may prove lacking in conserving water based features.

LNAC members were informed that the working group had concerns about the sand extraction industry in terms of its viability and sustainability as an industry and in terms of its impact on natural heritage features. It was highlighted that the Lough Neagh Partnership had discussed this issue at its last meeting and that liaison should be maintained between the two organisations.

After discussion, members recommended that a study should be carried out on the impacts and implications of sand extraction in terms of Lough Neagh. It was appreciated that such a study would have an NI wide remit. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to DETI/DRD in this regard and that the Management Committee should take this issue forward.

ACTION 51: Letter to be sent to DETI/DRD recommending that research be carried out into the local environmental, economic and social implications of the Lough Neagh sand extraction industry.

ACTION 52: Management Committee to pursue the preparation of research into the local environmental, economic and social implications of the Lough Neagh sand extraction industry.

ACTION 53: Liaison to be maintained with LNP over research into the sand extraction industry on Lough Neagh.

d. Insurance for Advisory Committee

Members were informed that EHS and the Departmental Solicitor's Officer still saw no reason why the LNAC members needed insurance. After discussion it was agreed that a letter should be sent to EHS asking if there would be an increase in its insurance premium if the LNAC was added and if so what was the reasoning.

ACTION 54: Letter to be sent to EHS asking if there would be an increase in its insurance premium if the LNAC was added and if so what was the reasoning.

e. Travel payments for members

EHS is still researching this issue.

f. Derrywarragh Bridge

Mr Ken Bell alerted members to the complicated position and potential abandonment of the project to raise Derrywarragh Bridge. Following discussion, it was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Minister to highlight the very real concerns over the possible abandoning of the project and the need for cross agency / integrated action to seek a

solution to current difficulties. It was also agreed that the LO should keep a watching brief on this issue.

ACTION 55: Letter to be sent to the Minister highlighting the need for action and assistance in implementing the Derrywarragh Bridge project.

ACTION 56: LO to keep a watching brief on the Derrywarragh Bridge project.

6. Liaison Officer's Report – December 2005

Members' attention was drawn to the December 2005 report. In particular, the following:

a. European Eel Review (item 37)

Members were informed that the European eel stock is in serious decline and that an EU Directive is recommending that management plans must be in place by July 2007 which can guarantee 40% escapement of mature eels. If the management plan is unacceptable to the EU then a ban on fishing from the 1st to the 15th of each month could be enforced. DCAL is currently consulting relevant parties and is drafting a management plan for the Lough Neagh system to highlight that there is currently 40% escapement.

During the discussion, the following issues were highlighted:

- The importance of the Lough Neagh fishery in terms of local jobs, the local economy, local culture and therefore the need for cross departmental discussions and solutions etc,
- The need for a tailor made solution to the Lough Neagh situation
- The need for a river basin approach to the issue with all interested parties involved in one discussion forum.
- The inability to allocate EU funds to a particular fishery which may disadvantage another commercial operations.

Members agreed that a letter should be sent to DCAL seeking its views on its role in sustaining the Lough Neagh eel fishing industry and highlighting the need for a forum involving all the eel fishery interests in the system.

ACTION 57: Letter to be sent to DCAL seeking its views on its role in sustaining the Lough Neagh eel fishing industry and highlighting the need for a forum involving all the eel fishery interests in the system.

Members also agreed that DCAL should be asked to present the draft eel management plan and that the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Association should be invited to attend for this presentation.

ACTION 58: DCAL to be invited to present the draft eel management plan to the Advisory Committees.

ACTION 59: Lough Neagh Fishermen's Association is invited to the DCAL presentation on the eel management plan.

- b. Ramsar Boundary Review
Members received an update on the work of the working group and agreed the principles by which the working group should undertake discussions with EHS. Members highlighted their concerns in relation to current and potential rate of loss of valuable habitat, if the timescale in seeking a solution does not match the work plan / timescales/issue priority of EHS. It was agreed that solving this issue should be a priority.
- c. Future Consultations
Members' attention was drawn to the live consultations highlighted in item 42 of the LOR. Members agreed to inform Caroline if they wished to be involved in the drafting of comments.
- d. Wintering Duck Numbers Update
Members were informed that follow up work was being done to seek explanation for the declining numbers of wintering wildfowl on Lough Neagh. This involves analysing WeBS data for the Lough, comparing regional, national and international trends, impact of zebra mussels etc. Members were informed that Ian Enlander, EHS was willing to update them as and when. Stephen Foster gave a brief overview of some of the 04/05 WeBS counts. Species numbers causing concern are Bewick's Swan, Pochard and Tufted Duck. Members agreed to keep a watching brief on this issue.

ACTION 60: LNAC to receive presentation on research into wintering wildfowl populations when available.

- e. Water Framework Directive
Members agreed that the form seeking information on 'Significant Water Management Issues' should be completed and forwarded as appropriate.

ACTION 61: WFD 'Significant Water Management Issues' form to be completed and forwarded.

- f. Lough Neagh Partnership Projects Report - September 2005
Copies were tabled. Additional copies are available from Sperrin House on request. Members welcomed the significant progress made by the LNP and congratulated staff and directors.

7. **'Zebra Mussels in Lough Neagh – Actions and Implications**

Mr Bob Davidson gave an overview of the implication of the discovery of 5 adult Zebra Mussels at Kinnego in Lough Neagh in November. A paper copy of the presentation is available from Sperrin House on request. The following are some of the issues raised during the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- The mussels found have bred and larval stages have been found in the system
- 1 adult can produce up to 1m eggs/yr
- The larvae attach to a hard substrate and to each other
- They are filter feeders and remove the algae from the water column, which has knock on implications on the food chain, plant life etc.

- The potential impacts on Lough Neagh and on the Lower Bann are unknown, but modelling studies will be done.
- The larval stages can move downstream with the current, but it is also likely that they will also be transported upstream on navigating boats etc.
- The impact on the eutrophic nature of the Lough is unknown, although there are a number of scenarios
- Perch tend to co-habit, whilst roach are disadvantaged as the mussels eat the algal food of the young roach.

EHS will continue to work with the Zebra Mussel Control Group, raise awareness and in general implement the ZM Strategy.

Action 62: LNAC to keep a watching brief on the impact of zebra mussels on the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann system.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business

9. Date and Venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the LNAC will take place on **1st March 2006** at 10.00am.

Actions from Lough Neagh Advisory Committee meeting held on 7th December 2005

Action	
49.	Presentation to be arranged on water level management and recommendations of the hydrological modelling study.
50.	Letter of support for the isolation of sensitive wetland ecosystems from Lough Neagh to be sent to RSPB.
51.	Letter to be sent to DETI/DRD recommending that research be carried out into the local environmental, economic and social implications of the Lough Neagh sand extraction industry.
52.	Management Committee to pursue the preparation of research into the local environmental, economic and social implications of the Lough Neagh sand extraction industry.
53.	Liaison to be maintained with LNP over research into the sand extraction industry on Lough Neagh.
54.	Letter to be sent to EHS asking if there would be an increase in its insurance premium if the LNAC was added and if so what was the reasoning.
55.	Letter to be sent to the Minister highlighting the need for action and assistance in implementing the Derrywarragh Bridge project.
56.	LO to keep a watching brief on the Derrywarragh Bridge project.
57.	Letter to be sent to DCAL seeking its views on its role in sustaining the Lough Neagh eel fishing industry and highlighting the need for a forum involving all the eel fishery

	interests in the system.
58.	DCAL to be invited to present the draft eel management plan to the Advisory Committees.
59.	Lough Neagh Fishermen's Association is invited to the DCAL presentation on the eel management plan.
60.	LNAC to receive presentation on research into wintering wildfowl populations when available.
61.	WFD 'Significant Water Management Issues' form to be completed and forwarded.
62.	LNAC to keep a watching brief on the impact of zebra mussels on the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann system.

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