

Minutes of the forty-first meeting of the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee held on Wednesday, 1st March at 10.00am in Sperrin House, Magherafelt.

Present

Mr Brian Cassells (Chairman)
Mr Archie Gibson
Mr Billy Mullan
Prof Brian Wood
Mr Conor Corr
Mr Conor Jordan
Cllr Danny Kinahan
Cllr Ian Milne
Mr Jim Smyth
Mr John Scovell
Cllr Mary Baker
Cllr T Walter Greer

In Attendance

Ms Caroline Marshall
Mr Matt Peach
Miss Rachel Forde

1. Developing of Canoe Trails in Northern Ireland

Matt Peach gave a PowerPoint presentation on the development of canoe trails in NI. He highlighted that the Lough Erne Trail has been up and running since last summer, that the Blackwater is being implemented at present, that the Lower Bann and Lough Neagh trails would hopefully come on stream in the near future and that a web site would be available shortly. Members asked questions and indicated their support for the development of canoe trails on the system. The Chairman congratulated Matt on his achievements to date and wished him future success. Paper copies of the presentation were distributed. Additional copies are available from Sperrin House on request.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Arthur Mitchell, Mr C W Dickinson, Cllr Cecil Calvert, Mr Conor Moore, Mr Denzyl Dinsmore, Ms Kathleen Conlon, Mr Ken Bell, Cllr Seamus O'Neill, Alderman Stephen Moutray and Alderman Sydney Anderson.

3. Chairman's Business

(a) Brian Cassells thanked Prof Brian Wood for the expertise with which he chaired the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee from its inception and for the wealth of knowledge and expertise that he has shared. The Chairman added he looked forward to Prof. Woods continued input as a member.

(b) Members were informed that Cllr Basil McCrea had joined the Committee as a representative from Lisburn City Council.

- (c) The Chairman introduced and welcomed Miss Rachel Forde as the Advisory Committees' Administration Officer.
- (d) The Chairman reported that a fax had been received from Rev Kennedy concerning item number 34 in The Liaison Officer's Report headed 'EU Eel Review'. This letter was read to members and the Chairman highlighted that Rev Kennedy was concerned that the LNAC was interfering with the management and administration of the commercial eel fishery. During the ensuing discussion, the following issues were discussed and agreed:
- liaison between all stakeholders is beneficial,
 - the LNAC has a remit to advise central and local government on issues concerning the ecology of the Lough and River,
 - given the current status of the EU population there must be sensitivity around all issues concerning eels,
 - the LNAC is not aiming to interfere in the management or administration of the commercial eel fishery, merely to ensure that the commercial fishing industry continues to be viable in economic, social and environmental terms,
 - the LNAC strongly supports the contribution that the Co-op makes to the local economy and society,
 - DCAL's offer of presenting the Draft Eel Management Plan to the LN/LBAC should be taken up when appropriate and
 - a letter should be written to the Co-op offering the Committee's support

ACTION 63: Reply to be sent to the letter of 1st March 2006 from the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd.

4. Minutes of last meeting – 7th December 2005

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from last meeting

The following matters were considered:

(a) Travel Expenses for Members

Billy Mullan again pointed out that members should receive travel expenses for their attendance at meetings. It was reported that the issue had again been discussed at the LN/LB Management Committee meeting where EHS again highlighted that it does not pay travel expenses to members of non-statutory committees. Brain Cassells informed members that it would be inappropriate for the Advisory Committee members to make a decision to pay expenses from its available budget. It was highlighted that the Lough Neagh Partnership and Sperrin Tourism pay travel expenses. It was agreed that members may have an opportunity to discuss the issue directly with Mr Graham Seymour, Director of Natural Heritage, at the proposed joint meeting. It was agreed that Caroline should inform Mr Seymour of this approach beforehand.

ACTION 64: Caroline to inform Mr Graham Seymour of the intention of members to question him in relation to the payment of travel expenses to AC members.

(b) Water Level Management & Hydrological study

Members were informed that the consultants had finished the hydrological modelling work and that a joint meeting would be called in the near future to disseminate this information and provide an overview of water level management to the Advisory and Management Committees.

(c) Water Abstraction Sites - Planning Applications

Caroline informed members that Seamus Burns and she had looked at the planning applications submitted from Dalriada Water, in relation to the upgraded water abstraction plants around the Lough and had commented as appropriate. Caroline indicated that most of the comments were in relation to improvements for biodiversity e.g. planting of native species, grassland management and habitat creation, but that Sustainable Urban Drainage, potential for public access and navigation issues were also mentioned. Caroline indicated that a meeting would be requested with Dalriada Water.

(d) Sand Extraction Study

Members were informed that this matter had been discussed at the Management Committee meeting which took place on 15th February 2006 and that the outcome was to ask QPANI to make a presentation to the LNAC and then for the LNAC to highlight areas of concern and gaps in knowledge.

Conor Jordan informed members that: -

- Sand Traders are currently engaging with University of Ulster to commission a study into the impact of discharges into the Lough at their sites. The terms of reference will be agreed with the DOE's Water Management Unit. The study will supplement the previous RPS study on sand plant discharges on Lough Neagh commissioned by the sand traders in 2001.
- Sand extraction on Lough Neagh needs to be viewed in the context of overall mineral extraction in NI. There is no regional mineral requirement plan for NI and Mr Jordan voiced the opinion of the QPANI that a regional plan would be an effective base line to evaluate the future of mineral extraction in the future.
- Mr Jordan pointed out that an aerial geological / land use survey was currently underway which may be of use in terms of understanding land use issues in NI.
- In answer to queries concerning illegal quarry operators Mr Jordan pointed out that the Aggregate Credit Levy Scheme has provided for the closure of illegally worked mineral reserves across NI.
- In terms of understanding the Lough Neagh Sand Industry Mr Jordan considered that a request for a presentation on sand extraction from the QPANI would be well received.

ACTION 65: QPANI to be approached with a view to giving a presentation on sand extraction to address queries than highlight the areas of concern.

ACTION 66: Letter to be sent to DETI encouraging it to carry out a survey into the aggregate needs and supply implications for NI.

(e) Insurance for Advisory Committee Members

Members were informed that this had been discussed at LN/LB Management meeting and it had been agreed that Mr Graham Seymour would send a letter of comfort to the Advisory Committees.

(f) Derrywarragh Bridge

Members were informed that a letter was sent to DCAL Minister after the last meeting, that Roads Service and Ulster Garden Villages had contributed additional funding and that work was due to start in the very near future. Members welcomed these extremely positive developments.

(g) Zebra Mussels

Members' attention was drawn to the figures for Zebra Mussels found on Lough Neagh between December and January 2006. It was highlighted that there were two cluster areas on the north shore in the Doss – Cranfield area with the other being in the south Kinnego area.

(h) Lough Neagh Partnership Presentation

Following a proposal from Conor Corr, members agreed that the LNP should make a future presentation to the LNAC on its work.

(i) Dredging of Lower Bann

Members noted that it was unlikely that strategic sections of the Lower Bann River would be dredged in time for this boating season as such an activity would be detrimental to current eel movements.

(j) Navigation Authority – Economic Appraisal

Members expressed their disappointment regarding the postponement of the economic appraisal until the next financial year on the establishment of a navigation authority and noted DCAL's confirmation that a 'Test of Likely Significance' was not needed as there would be no direct works.

6. Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Management Committee Meeting

In the absence of the representative from EHS, Caroline updated members on the following issues, discussed at the LN/LB Management Committee:-

- Travel expenses – as outlined in 5 (a)
- Navigation Authority – as outlined in 5 (j)
- Water Quality – members updated on January Seminar

- Baseline Report and Sustainable Recreation Framework – update a in 7 (a)
- Sand Extraction – as outlined in 5 (d)
- Eels – update and discussion. Management Committee members to be invited to meeting where Draft Eel Management Plan being discussed.
- Fallen Animals – discussion

7. Liaison Officer Report – March 2006

(a) Draft LNW Baseline Study, Sustainable Recreation Framework etc

Members were informed of the following:

- The Baseline (data collection) document is in draft form, final version anticipated soon, with GIS to follow.
- The draft of the Sustainable Recreation Framework is expected shortly.
- The interim review of the Lough Neagh Strategic Fund was very favourable.
- The review of the Lough Neagh Management Strategy indicated that the LNAC meetings should have a dedicated agenda section to track progress, that some recommendations were out of date, that the LNAC should be tracking and encouraging implementation more closely, that working groups should be re-established etc.

Members agreed that the baseline work would be extremely useful in providing a one stop shop for future consultants preparing reports on the Wetlands and that it would highlight gaps in existing information. Members also agreed that the recommendations should be implemented as far as resources allow.

ACTION 67: Implementation relating to the Lough Neagh Management Strategy to be acted upon.

Following a discussion on development within the southern shores Ramsar, it was agreed that a letter should be sent to Planning Service (Craigavon, Omagh, Ballymena) highlighting concern and requesting clarification of the policies used to protect the Wetlands.

ACTION 68: Letter to be sent to Planning Service highlighting concern over development on wetlands and seeking clarification of policies used to protect the Wetlands.

(b) DARD Rural Strategy

Members discussed the draft consultation on DARD's Rural Strategy and highlighted the following comments to feed back to DARD:

- Need more mention of importance of water, water based activity, angling, recreation to local rural economic activity,
- There should be mention of implications of national parks and AONBs and of information learned from the foot and mouth epidemic.

- There should be mention of the importance of the rural environment for health and well being and
- Support for sectoral approach and need for rural support networks.

(c) Antrim Marina

Caroline reported that the Safety & Navigation Working Group had a site meeting at Loughshore Park and highlighted its concerns to the consultants and Antrim Borough Council at the subsequent public meeting. Concerns included the placement of the marina in terms of negative visual impacts, potential boating access and silting problems and potential vandalism problems. Members were informed that consultants were preparing an economic appraisal and that ABC had submitted an outline planning application for the in-Lough site.

(d) Water Framework

Members were informed that issues were lodged for the Significant Water Management Issues report. The five issues highlighted by the LNAC and LBAC were: water quality, water levels, insufficient/inappropriate data, recreational activity and lack of co-ordination. Caroline gave an overview of the items discussed at the last Water Framework Directive Stakeholders meeting and highlighted that minutes were available on request from Sperrin House.

8. Any Other Business

(a) Bird Flu

Cllr Kinahan informed members that the DARD website had very little information in relation to bird flu and that more detailed information would be most useful. John Scovell informed members that there was no intention to cull wild birds.

9. Date and venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the LNAC would take place on **7th June 2006** at 10.00am in Maghery.

LNAC/ meeting/min/41-010306

Actions from Lough Neagh Advisory Committee meeting held on 1st March 2006.

Action	
63.	Reply to be sent to the letter of 1st March 2006 from the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd.
64.	Caroline to inform Mr Graham Seymour of the intention of members to question him in relation to the payments of travel expenses to AC members.
65.	QPANI to be approached with a view to giving a presentation on sand extraction to address queries than highlight the areas of concern.
66.	Letter to be sent to DETI recommending it to carry out a survey into the aggregate needs and supply implications for NI.
67.	Implementation relating to the Lough Neagh Management Strategy to be acted upon.
68.	Letter to be sent to Planning Service highlighting concern over development on Wetlands and seeking clarification of policies used to protect the Wetlands.