

SWAN Recommendations for Public Participation Mechanisms in the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government 3-Tier Water Governance Proposal

In response to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's (DECLG) three tier proposal for water governance, SWAN is making a recommendation for public participation mechanisms within this. SWAN's recommendation is derived from the original comprehensive 2010 proposal it made to the DECLG on the necessary reform of water governance in Ireland, and is based on the same fundamentals for best practice in public engagement. SWAN does not see this recommendation as ideal, but rather a pragmatic response to the likely governance landscape as presented by DECLG. To be effective, the proposal should be delivered as part an integrated catchment management approach which provides a collaborative, adaptive and integrated planning framework¹.

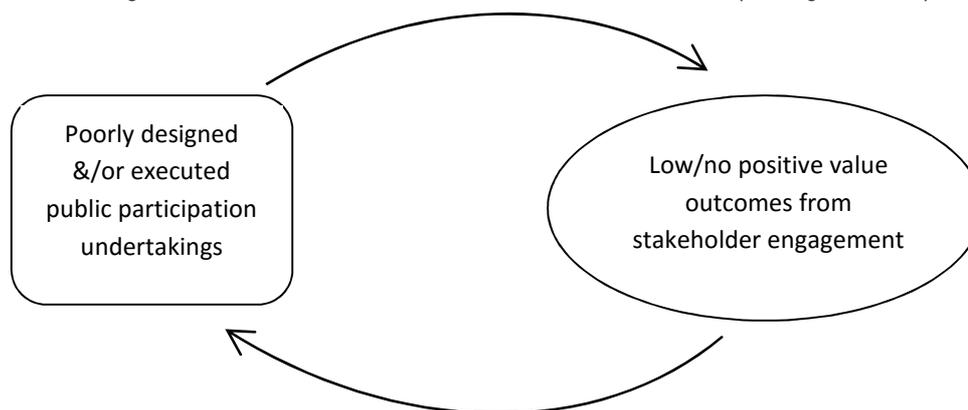
Before presenting the various elements of this recommendation, it is useful to review why public involvement in water governance is desirable, and to consider some of the key criteria that must be met if such engagement is to be effective.

1. Why engage with the public?

Besides a requirement in the Water Framework Directive (WFD) that the public be informed, consulted *and* actively involved in delivering the objective of "good ecological status" for all water bodies, there are a number of other valuable benefits that can be achieved through meaningful participation by stakeholders. Many detailed analyses of the value of engaging the public have been conducted². However, in summary, when done well, public participation:

- ✓ supports and enhances democratic society and accountability;
- ✓ increases legitimacy of processes and outcomes;
- ✓ generates better outcomes, as more perspectives are addressed;
- ✓ encourages positive action of citizens;
- ✓ embeds longer-enduring outcomes, and sustainable change;
- ✓ creates a culture of co-operation, growing the capacity to handle change, tensions and disputes and invest in social structures, institutions and relationships that deliver other knock-on benefits.

It is important to stress that only well planned, designed and executed public participation will deliver these outcomes. Performed badly, a cumulatively reinforced negative feedback loop occurs where little or nothing of value is added by the stakeholder engagement, and costs (of time, resources, goodwill, etc.) and difficulties encountered damage commitment on the part of both the agencies and stakeholders concerned to future initiatives. (See figure below)



Negative feedback loop of poor public participation initiatives resulting in poor results, reinforcing negative perception of value of such initiatives.

¹ Daly, D. (2013) A Healthy Catchment Initiative for Ireland: Making Integrated Catchment Management Happen. Presentation to IAH (Irish Group) Conference: Groundwater & Catchment Management, Tullamore, April 2013

² E.g. Cooper, T. L., Bryer, T.A. & Meek, J.W. (2006) Citizen-centered collaborative public management. Special issue, *Public Administration Review* 66: 76–88.

Delli-Priscoli, J. (2004) What is public participation in water resources management and why is it important? *Water International*, 29(2), 221-227

Yang, K. & Pandey, S.K. (2011) Further dissecting the Black Box of citizen participation: when does citizen involvement lead to good outcomes? *Public Administration Review* 71(6): 880–92.

It is also important to recognise the significance of the intention of any agency undertaking such initiatives. If an agency engages reluctantly; seeing it as an obligatory requirement, or as a distraction, with little potential benefit, then it is indeed unlikely that the initiative will be well carried out *or* that anything of value will result. *“Participatory tools and approaches are often used simply to extract information from stakeholders and often to dress autocratic decisions in the clothes of participatory democracy. Without the cultural and political decision to share power, participation is simply public relations at its most cynical.”*³ Moreover, as has been seen with WFD implementation in Ireland, often the governance system itself can hinder or frustrate the best efforts of officials committed to genuine public participation⁴.

Unfortunately, poor past experiences of stakeholder involvement or an absence of such participation opportunities, often results in antagonistic engagement on the part of stakeholders; looking to air or address grievances in other areas, and suspicious of the motives of the agency concerned in seeking to involve them.

There is a real challenge for all parties where there is no strong track record of positive public engagement to change this experience and achieve the potential benefits for all concerned. However, in relation to securing good ecological status for Ireland’s waters, it seems clear that *“the functioning of government requires public support both for a common perception of a problem definition and for the nature of the likely solutions”*⁵ As water is a common, shared, resource affecting all our society, and in which every member of the public is a stakeholder, it is abundantly clear that only a collaborative response will achieve the desired objectives under the WFD. This is equally true in relation to related areas on water management including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Integrated Coastal Zone Management and flood risk management under the Floods Directive. It is therefore incumbent upon the DECLG to invest in the development of strong and effective public participation in this area.

2. How can we engage effectively with the public?

To be valid, public participation needs to facilitate the achievement of genuine results that are congruent with the objective of the engagement. In this case, this is the ability of the public to have influence in achieving “good ecological status” in Ireland’s water bodies.

Assuming a desire to engage meaningfully with the public, there is an extensive literature on the characteristics of successful public participation⁶, as well as on the detailed structures and processes that may be involved as appropriate, including an integrated catchment management approach. However, it is important to recognise that skill and experience is required to design processes suited to each unique context, and that this investment in skilled professionals is necessary to realise the full value of the engagement.

It is widely agreed that a number of core criteria need to be met to enable effective stakeholder participation:

- * early engagement, that is well-planned and designed, so that participation is not rushed or compromised, and involves initiatives appropriate to the task or objectives set (type of engagement, timing, organisation, resources, etc.);
- * clear objectives, establishing a common understanding of the nature and potential of the engagement, and of all parties’ roles involved in the process, and hence realistic expectations as to possible outcomes;
- * appropriate mechanisms, structures and processes, that *genuinely* facilitates the participation of those affected (stakeholders), and enables them to influence the outcome(s);
- * open, transparent processes, that have been well publicised in advance, and characterised by efficient and effective communication, including good feedback to all parties;
- * flexible processes and mechanisms that can be responsive to uncertainties, and allow for learning and change by all parties;

³ Harrison, A. Schmidt, G. Avis, C. Hauser, R. (2001) WWF’s preliminary comments on Public Participation in the context of the Water Framework Directive and Integrated River Basin Management. WWF European Freshwater Programme, WWF

⁴ *Getting it Right ✓ or Getting it Right ✓? Ticking boxes vs. delivering genuine public participation in water management in Ireland.* SWAN presentation to The joint meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making of the Aarhus Convention & the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water & Health on ‘Public Participation in Environmental Decision Making: Focus on Water and Health’

⁵ J.F. de Leeuw, Director General, LNV, in Dirven, J.M.C & Kusiak, L.J.H. (1999) *A concern and a dream*, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (LNV), Cabinet Directorate, The Hague, The Netherlands

⁶ e.g. Grant, A. & Curtis, A. (2004) Refining Evaluation Criteria for Public Participation Using Stakeholder Perspectives of Process and Outcomes *Rural Society*, Vol 14 ,no.2 . 142-162;

The Co-intelligence Institute. (2008) The principles of public participation. http://www.co-intelligence.org/CIPol_publicparticipation.html;
Jansky, L. & Uitto, J.L. (eds) (2006) *Enhancing participation and governance in water resource management: conventional approaches and information technology*. United Nations University Press.

- * adequate resources to conduct effective public participation, and to enable stakeholders to fully realise the potential of each engagement opportunity;
- * evaluation of operation and outcomes, to inform improvements in how engagement continues.

Beyond such over-arching requirements, delivering effective public participation demands a consideration of the unique context in which it occurs. In relation to water governance and management a number of questions need to be addressed.

Who should be involved?

This is more complex than perhaps it first appears. In the first instance this is because of the low level of awareness of water issues amongst the general public which means that they often do not identify themselves as stakeholders. Since there is both a requirement in the WFD Directive (amongst others) to involve stakeholders, and a huge potential dividend from doing so, this would suggest that it is imperative that a comprehensive public awareness campaign be carried out as an urgent priority to address this information deficit. Until there is a greater awareness of the WFD and water issues, generating interest and involvement amongst the general public will be difficult, and providing mechanisms for stakeholders to engage at that scale is unlikely to prove productive.

Secondly, the public agencies concerned often do not recognise the potential of public participation, and for these it is not subsequently embedded within their deliberations on governance structures and mechanisms. As a result they do not identify the relevant stakeholders or encourage them to engage, so that outcomes will not achieve the potential benefits and may indeed enflame situations.

However, there are pockets within society where there exists a high level of awareness, and considerable expertise, in relation to water issues. In a number of cases individuals and sectors have actively engaged in participation exercises on WFD implementation (e.g. consultations and Advisory Councils) to date. It is reasonable to assume that these and others with expertise (specialist professional bodies, academics and technical experts, etc.) would wish to be included in an increasingly integrated and productive manner in the future.

The degree to which individuals or groups and their representatives engage, and how productively, will depend on the opportunities provided and their own capacities. It is essential that the relevant stakeholders are engaged, appropriate to the tasks involved in governance at each of the Tiers. To be effective, public participation needs to be established at all levels of planning and river basin management⁷, and it is important that connections be established, developed and sustained between stakeholder engagements undertaken at different levels, as each is valuable and should inform one another.

How should stakeholders be involved?

The full potential of the WFD definition of active involvement should be applied, in order to identify the most effective way of securing the benefits of public participation. The HarmoniCOP Handbook⁸, set out an indication of what “active involvement” can mean:

“The public may:

- | | |
|--|---|
| * <i>have discussions with the authorities</i> | * <i>be involved in taking decisions</i> |
| * <i>help to determine the policy agenda</i> | * <i>participate in implementation</i> |
| * <i>help to develop solutions</i> | * <i>become fully responsible for (part of the) river basin management”</i> |

Initially it is important to ensure that mechanisms for stakeholder participation are realistically capable of delivering good quality engagement, in order to generate positive experiences and capacities of engagement amongst both the public and the relevant implementation bodies. As benefits from collaborative engagement are secured, so the value of this will become apparent to all parties, and improved opportunities for stakeholder engagement emerge.⁹

The vehicle for stakeholder engagement needs to be appropriate both to the level or scale at which this is happening, and to the stakeholders concerned.

⁷ RhineNet (2008) A guide to public participation according to Article 14 of the EX Water Framework Directive (WFD): RhineNet Project Report. RhineNet, European Water Protection.

⁸ HarmoniCOP (2005) *Learning together to manage together: improving participation in water management*. HarmoniCOP, Osnabruck

⁹ See, Arnstein, A. (1969) A ladder of community participation. *Amer. Inst. of Planners Journal*, 35, 216-224

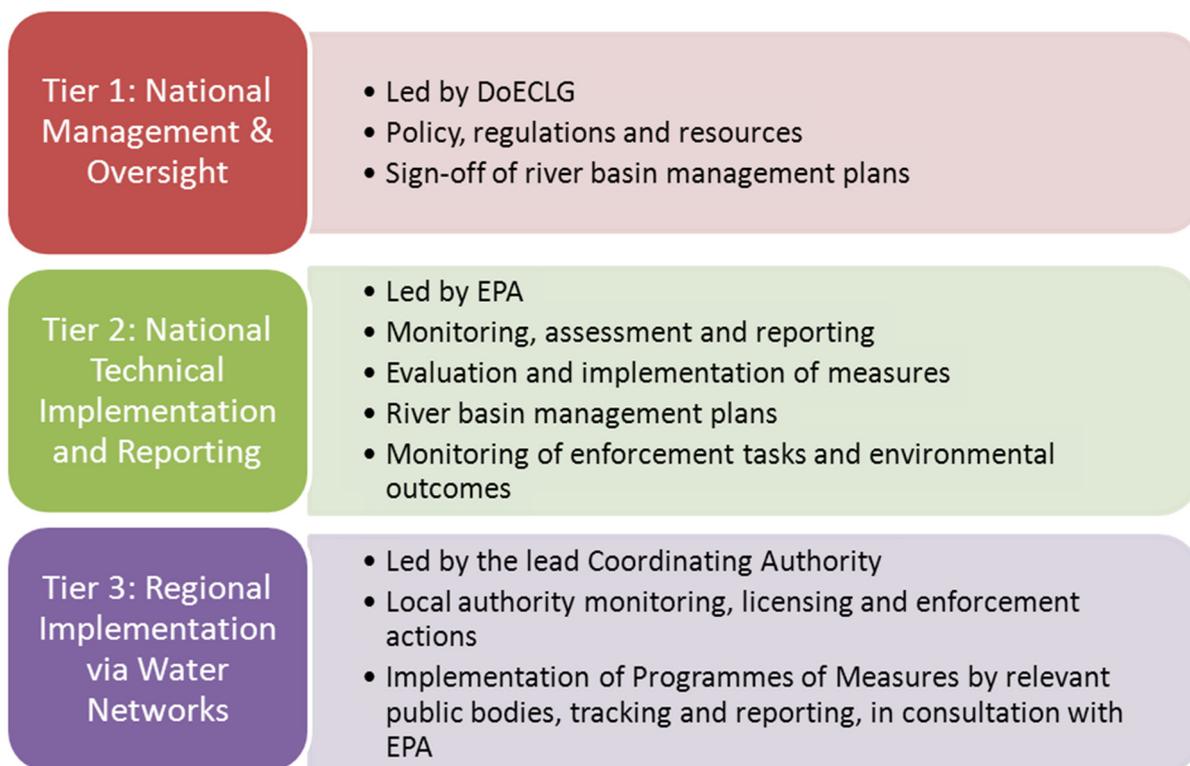
When should stakeholders be involved?

The public need to be involved immediately. As outlined above, there is an urgent need for a public awareness campaign to alert the public to water issues and enable them to determine their level of interest and desire to become involved. Simultaneously, mechanisms for stakeholders to engage need to be provided. These need to recognise and respond to the nascent interest amongst those previously unaware of how they are affected or of their ability to get involved. There also needs to be meaningful engagement for those who are already well-informed, have considerable expertise and/or experience, and are able and willing to engage deeply. Such mechanisms must enable citizens to influence outcomes as appropriate; for example through input into the development of policy and implementation on particular management challenges, or direct actions. This requires a variety of means of engagement at a range of levels, reflecting in this case the 3-Tier government proposal.

As familiarity with collaborative engagement increases, and positive outcomes are demonstrated, the potential for involving the public will be recognised and opportunities increased. As a result, it is appropriate that additional structures and processes for public participation should be anticipated as required within a relatively short time frame.

3. DECLG's 3 Tier Water Governance Proposal

The diagram below briefly outlines the DECLG 3 Tier proposal for water governance, in response to which SWAN makes its recommendation. While the recent RBD Boundaries Report has been considered in the development of this recommendation, the status of the proposals it contains remains uncertain at this time. Therefore it is not assumed that the proposed administrative areas will necessarily be as the Report suggests.



4. Proposals for Public Participation

Outline SWAN proposals for the public participation elements in the new water governance structure, and their relationships to the Department's proposed governance tiers, are summarised in the diagram on the following page. SWAN also proposes the addition of a 4th tier in public participation, which is included in the diagram and detailed later in this document also. It is important to note that some of these elements would be developed sequentially for reasons outlined above. The second timeline diagram illustrates the likely progressive development of the different elements. Further details are given below of the purpose, membership and operation of these different elements as well as an indication of whether they would be initiated immediately (Phase I) or at a somewhat later date (Phase II).

Tier 1: National Management & Oversight

(M= multiple structures)

Tier 1

- Led by DECLG
- Policy, regulations & resources
- Sign-off of RBM plans

Public Participation (Phase I)

Public Participation (Phase II)

Tier 2: National Technical Implementation & Reporting

- Led by EPA
- Monitoring, assessment & reporting
- Evaluation & implementation of measures
- RBM plans
- Monitoring of enforcement tasks & environmental outcomes

National Stakeholder Water Forum

- Stakeholder groups representatives.
- Bring sector expertise to inform efforts to achieve “good status” of Ireland’s waters.
- Scrutiny of implementation, environmental outcomes achieved & enforcement undertaken
- Ability to establish sub-groupings with particular expertise/relevance to consider specific areas of concern
- Clear mechanism for recommendations to Tier 2.
- No dedicated places for elected members.

Tier 2

Issue specific Water Forum Working Groups

- Members of National & Regional Water Forums, as appropriate, plus seconded experts.
- Mechanism to collaborate with relevant expert personnel in EPA & make recommendations. **M**

Tier 3: Regional Implementation via Water Networks

- Led by the lead Co-ordinating Authority
- Local authority monitoring, licensing & enforcement actions
- Implementation of Prog. of Measures by relevant public bodies, tracking & reporting, in consultation with EPA

Regional Stakeholder Water Forum M(3)

- As for Tier 2 but with regional focused brief to assist in sector-specific challenges in implementation
- Realistic expectations & clear role needed,
- Mechanisms for communications, recommendations, feedback

Tier 3

National Annual stakeholder meeting

- Representatives from delivery partners & other stakeholder initiatives, Regional Water Forum & Tier 3 administration
- Opportunity to share experiences, highlight issues, agree collaborative actions, etc.
- Single reporting mechanism to Tier 3 and Regional Water Forum

Proposed 4 Tier Water Governance Structure

Recommended public participation elements for Water Governance and WFD implementation

WMU Stakeholder Delivery Partners **M**

- Network of approved stakeholder initiatives with focus on good ecological status for water fundamental to groups’ purpose, working alongside authorities to deliver WFD objectives, with clear communication & collaboration mechanisms

Tier 4

Network of Groups involved in water projects

- Linking all stakeholder groups engaging in water-related works, informing on WFD & related measures, sharing experience, promoting joint efforts, etc. **M**

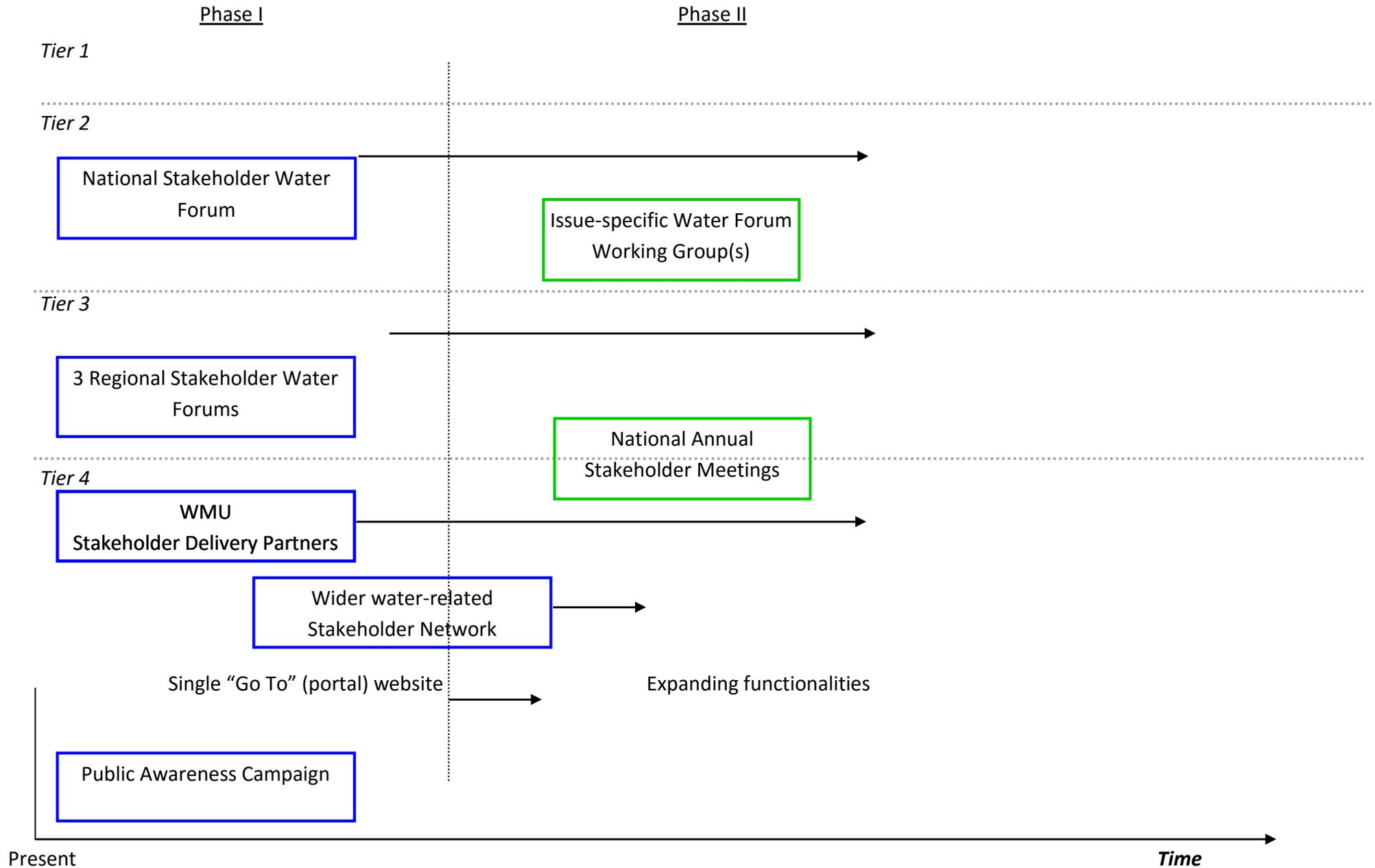
Public Awareness Campaign

- Relevant for individuals, communities, enterprises, sectors, and promoting citizen involvement

Single “Go- to” (portal) website

- (Begun at public awareness campaign), with information on water, WFD & implementation, supporting active involvement at household & community level, with links through to local stakeholder initiatives, etc.

Approximate timeline for various elements of public participation



Tier 2 proposals (National level)

National Stakeholder Water Forum (Phase I)

This body would involve representatives of stakeholder groups or sectors, such as environmental NGOs, academics, civil society/community, agriculture, industry/commerce, SMEs, marine interests, recreation, consumers, youth, that have demonstrable experience, expertise and interest in water issues. Representation would be made up of 5-7 members from each of the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social). There would be no dedicated seats for elected representatives on the Forum.

Members of the Forum would undertake to apply their knowledge and expertise (both in their sector's interests and in water issues) to inform and support efforts to achieve "good ecological status" across Ireland's waters. The Forum's objective would be to support WFD implementation efforts through collaborative engagement with the EPA (who will be leading this 'tier'). In participating, each member would undertake to work constructively in the interests of this objective. The Forum would receive regular timely communications from the EPA on implementation, environmental outcomes and enforcement action, with clear opportunity at regular scheduled meetings to develop positions in relation to matters raised, and mechanisms to permit responses including recommendations as part of a two-way dialogue. As familiarity with the working arrangements and potential for the Forum to provide support to the EPA grows, it is envisaged that the Forum would have an increasing role in developing solutions (measures), and in taking decisions between these and on the operation of these WITH the EPA. Such a development requires the building of trust between both bodies, and evidence of positive outcomes from collaborative efforts, but has the potential to significantly enhance WFD implementation.

In addition, the Forum would receive communications from Regional Water Forums (Tier 3) and from stakeholder initiatives (proposed Tier 4, see below), and could in turn communicate these, or their deliberations on these, to the EPA, as well as make responses to these bodies.

The Forum would have the ability to establish limited-term Working Groups with particular expertise/relevance to consider specific water issues of concern (see below).

There would be clear criteria set out for membership of the Forum, and applications/nominations would be sought publicly. The selection process would be transparent, with each member of the Forum demonstrating proven competence in areas which can contribute towards the attainment of the Forum's (and WFD) objectives. A maximum of 3 members of the Forum (one in each of the three pillars) could be selected from Northern Ireland, in recognition both of the presence of the two International River Basin Districts, and the possible value of the contributions these members may bring.

The Stakeholder Water Forum would be supported by an independent facilitator, who would also liaise with the EPA in relation to communications, and there would be provision for the Forum to initiate additional, innovative, mechanisms for public participation when appropriate.

Issue-specific Forum Working Groups (Phase II)

The National Implementation Stakeholder Forum would have the ability to establish Working Groups of limited duration to examine specific issues. As with the Forums, the Working Groups' objectives would be to assist in addressing challenges in the area of particular concern, in order to support the effective implementation of the WFD, through the application of their skills and expertise. These Working Groups would liaise closely with the relevant expert personnel in the EPA.

Membership of these Working Groups could be drawn from both the National Water Stakeholder Forum and the Regional Forums, and could also include co-opted members, in order to establish the best possible degree of expertise in the area concerned.

Tier 3 proposals

Regional* Stakeholder Water Forums (x3) (Phase I)

The Regional Forums would be established and constituted along similar lines as the National Forum, but would have the more focused brief to assist in addressing sector-, and region-, specific challenges in implementation at Tier 3 level. They would work with the WFD Office in their respective Region.

To carry out their task the Regional Forums will receive regular reports from the relevant Regional RBD Offices, be given the opportunity to discuss matters of concern at regular scheduled meetings (with others arranged as necessary), reach positions on these, and communicate their deliberations to the Regional RBD implementation teams. A focused and productive dialogue between the WFD Office and the Forum would be fostered (this involves intention and effort from all parties). Specifically, the public participation officers at each Regional Implementation Office¹⁰ would be responsible for facilitating dialogue and meetings between groups of Forum members and relevant Tier 3 officials (e.g. local authority staff), concerned with a specific water management issue, where solution-focused discussions will aim to secure improved implementation results through pragmatic collaborative action.

The Regional Water Stakeholder Forums would receive communications from stakeholder initiatives within the Region and in time would participate in the National Annual Stakeholder Meetings, particularly considering feedback from these. The Forum would act as a mechanism through which issues raised can be taken up with the Regional WFD Office and addressed. It is important that this communication is a two way dialogue, with timely feedback to stakeholder groups. Facilitating this dialogue and communications would be a function of the public participation officers proposed in the RBD Boundary Report if these posts are established. Staff in these positions must be suitably skilled and experienced in public participation.

Representation on the Forum will be made up of 5 members from each of the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social). Each member must clearly demonstrate their ability to contribute valuable skills and experience, with proven competence in areas which will assist in the attainment of the objectives of the Forum. There would be no seats for elected representatives as their input comes in the approval of plans at local authority level. However, opportunities for dialogue with elected representatives would be provided.

** The term "Regional" is taken from the DECLG "3 Tier Water Governance Proposal" document. It is as yet unclear whether this aligns with the proposal Regional Assembly areas, but these Forums should be considered to relate to the administrative areas as ultimately determined.*

International River Basin Districts (IRBDs)

It is not clear at present how the IRBDs will be addressed in the proposed 3 Tier governance system. When this is known, SWAN will be in a position to recommend a means of involving the public in WFD implementation. However, *whatever* the administrative arrangements decided, tangible support is needed for cross-border collaborative stakeholder initiatives (as discussed in the section below). Consistency in approach and management can be delivered locally in such cases, if careful investment is made in these initiatives, so that work to secure WFD objectives can be carried out; for example, in the development of a compatible Rivers Trust model similar to that being expanded in Northern Ireland. (Provision for public participation in IRBDs is not specifically referred to in the preceding diagram, for the reason explained above. However, IRBDs ARE addressed through the Stakeholder Initiatives discussed below.)

Tier 4 proposals

It is proposed that a separate Tier (4) be recognised, specifically focused on stakeholder action in support of delivering WFD objectives as part of an integrated catchment management approach. Within this are included both significant delivery partnerships with groups that have achieving good water status as one of their primary purposes, as well as a wider communications network with all catchment stakeholder groups that engage in positive actions for local aquatic environments.

An integral part of mobilising this work is the roll out of an effective public awareness campaign. Both the awareness campaign and the ongoing stakeholder initiatives require to be supported by a "go- to" website facility, with expanding functionalities, which shares information on all aspects of WFD, water management, the activities of involved State agencies and of stakeholder projects on the ground.

These coherent elements of Tier 4 are set out below.

¹⁰ Ó Breasail, S. & Mills, P. (2012) A Review of the Number and Boundaries of River Basin Districts and Administrative Areas for WFD Implementation. Report to the Department Of Environment, Community and Local Government and to the Environmental Protection Agency.

WMU Stakeholder Delivery Partners (Phase I & II →)

Support for water-focused stakeholder initiatives that deliver WFD objectives at sub-catchment level effectively supplements measures specified in the River Basin Management Plans, adding considerable potential for Ireland's progress towards securing WFD objectives.

It is important that such initiatives be clearly focused on water and aquatic environment quality. They will be established on a not-for-profit basis and, while they might generate both direct and indirect economic benefits (via enhanced ecosystem services etc.), it is vital that these be achieved as a result of (i.e. are dependent upon) the attainment of good ecological status. In essence, local communities would be enabled to identify pressures on their local water resources, to develop appropriate responses to these, and to participate in delivering these solutions practically. Where possible, it is recommended that cross-border synergies and consistency should be sought.

These "delivery partners" will be locally-based (although they may be part of national organisations), and clearly "bottom up" in nature. They may be existing or new groups, but each will share a clear priority in their objectives and activities to achieve good ecological status water **AND** they will be able to demonstrate that they hold no objectives that compete, or conflict with, securing WFD objectives in their area. It is likely that they will have one or more water bodies that are a focal point of the group's attention, and they will demonstrate a clear appreciation of wider water-related issues.

At present the River Trust model, which is very successfully applied in the UK, is not widely used in Ireland. However, this model may well represent opportunities for cross-border co-operation and delivery of shared goals for water status, and subsequently be of interest in other areas of the country. Support for the establishment of Rivers Trusts (similar to that which is in place in Northern Ireland) could assist groups in building capacity, professionalising organisational structures and sourcing outside funds etc., benefiting from River Trusts' extensive expertise and experience in collaborative integrated catchment management. Similarly, networks of coastal units, or groups concerned with groundwater may be appropriate to local circumstances (both hydrological and social).

To be recognised as a Tier 4 Delivery Partner, a group will be required to submit an acceptable project proposal. As part of this, each group must set out a plan with clear aims and objectives, which will be assessed against straightforward key criteria, by a panel of relevant experts. Plans should include proposals for the following:

- a land use survey, clearly identifying pressures on waters within the relevant WMU(s), and linked to WFD plans;
- engagement with, and openness to, all stakeholders in the sub-catchment (including land-owners), seeking to secure buy-in from all parties;
- engagement / collaboration with relevant authorities;
- flora & fauna survey & water quality monitoring;
- actions to achieve and/or maintain good ecological status;
- clear identification of resource allocations of voluntary support & commitment, e.g. local volunteer working parties, FÁS workers, monitoring & recording duties, etc. and staff time where required (possibly shared between Delivery Partners);
- training (in aquatic environment ecological, water quality, sampling, SSRA score, macro-invertebrate index, etc.);
- communication and awareness-raising efforts, including links with schools and media.

Successful groups will undertake an agreed evaluation of performance, relative to WFD objectives. These plans and evaluations will be available publicly.

Plans will be of a minimum of 1 year's duration, and a maximum of 3 years. They may involve collaborative elements with other groups (also submitting plans in the tender process). The tenders are not to be considered in competition with one another, but evaluated against whether they demonstrate compatibility with WFD objectives. Financial assistance will be necessary to realise the project aims and objectives. The level of support extended to any one group will reflect the extent of work involved and the value of this in meeting WFD objectives as assessed against pre-determined indices established by the expert panel.

WFD Offices will need to provide:

- a good communications system & working relationships between the relevant authorities and stakeholders (everyone living in the catchment);
- links to higher tiers of both public participation and administration (as set out in this proposal), that also provide the opportunity to make inputs on policy.

It is vital that the regional Water Networks (Tier 3) and all the local authorities involved in these recognise the stakeholder delivery partners as central to the new integrated catchment management approach and appreciate how collaborative or complimentary actions might create efficiencies or added value, especially in the current budgetary climate.

Where a prospective Delivery Partner initiative seeks such funding then it must demonstrate that it operates with financial and operational probity; be established as a limited company or co-operative, with charitable status, not operate in deficit, and provide copies of annual accounts be submitted to the Regional WFD Office, etc.

A wide range of personnel within existing public bodies may be able to provide assistance to these groups, and also to secure shared objectives through collaborative efforts. Such individuals would include local authority Heritage Officers, Environmental Awareness Officers, IFI staff, etc.

It is envisaged that an initial 3-5 pilot projects be initiated in the first year of operation of the revised water governance structure.

Public participation officers (in WFD Regional Offices)

The role of the (Tier 3) public participation officers needs to be clearly set out, and unequivocally dedicated to the facilitation and support of public participation both at Tier 3 and Tier 4 levels, as described in this document and individuals recruited to these posts should have demonstrable skills and experience and a proven track record in facilitation and support of public participation. They should be involved in all of the elements outlined here, and in facilitating the necessary bilateral communications and interactions between stakeholder groups and relevant Tier 3 Water Networks and local authority staff that are mutually beneficial in supporting the delivery of WFD objectives.

Network of groups involved in water-related projects

It is important to accommodate groups of different (often smaller and more local) scales, and those that engage in water-related initiatives although water issues may not be one of their principal interests. (e.g. Tidy Towns groups; residents' associations) It is vital to tie in the efforts of such groups, so that they can benefit from the experience of others, and optimum results can be achieved for water bodies. Monitoring can accurately assess the efficiency and effectiveness of such initiatives.

A national network (and database) of all stakeholder groups engaged with water issues should be created, and a register of all their water-related initiatives may accessed via the website (see below). It was seen as important not to discourage smaller groups where water may be one of a range of interests, as well as working with key delivery partners for whom water concerns are fundamental. There should be a register of all initiatives established, and an annual conclave for networking etc. between groups. In addition, an award for achieving "good status" should be developed, whether in tandem with an established award system (Pride of Place, Tidy Towns, etc.) or independently. There should be specific recognition for innovative ideas and initiatives, whether these originate from Stakeholder Delivery Partners or other stakeholder groups.

Public Awareness Campaign (Phase I)

As with most common and environmental goods, each citizen is a stakeholder in relation to water, although the level of their interest may vary. However, it has been recognised that the general public in Ireland needs to be informed about water issues in order to identify their stake in this area, irrespective of the extent to which they subsequently choose to

actively engage in it. Similarly, any worthwhile public participation initiative must identify potential stakeholders to be invited to participate, in order to then apply the appropriate mechanisms to enable them to engage.

Thus the conduct of an effective public awareness campaign on water is a pre-requisite to wider public engagement in WFD implementation. Without it, the DECLG will have failed to take the most fundamental step to engage the relevant stakeholders, and arguably negate all other participation measures that may be put in place.

The WFD is concerned to deliver “good ecological status” in our waters, it represents a process and tools by which EU member states are to achieve this, but the focus of attention is on water and aquatic environments. It is these that the public needs to be more aware of, rather than the WFD itself.

The Public Awareness Campaign must be relevant to individuals, communities, enterprises and different sectors of society; raising awareness not just of the water-related concerns, but also of people’s ability to act to address these. The public awareness campaign should be linked with the initiation of a single “Go To” water website (see below) that fosters open information on water, integrated catchment management, WFD implementation, stakeholder action, etc.

National Annual Water Stakeholder Group Meeting (Phase II →)

As stakeholder awareness grows, and grass roots initiatives become established (whether formal Delivery Partners or those for whom water may be one of a range of interests), it is vital that these projects have the opportunity for dialogue with others, and also that other interested parties can take part. For this reason it is recommended that there be a National Water Stakeholder Group meeting hosted annually. Responsibility for organisation of this independently facilitated event will rest with the regional WFD offices (working together), in consultation with the Delivery Partner projects.

This allows for a sharing of concerns and responses regarding water matters, discussion of possible (joint) responses, communications from and to the WFD Offices about actions under WFD implementation, and development of collaborative/co-ordinated actions between WFD Offices and stakeholder initiatives.

Tier 3 RBD staff would attend these meetings, as would members of the Regional Water Stakeholder Forums where possible, given that these will be individuals giving their time freely on a voluntary basis.

Single “Go To” Portal Website (Phase I & II →)

A single website which is accessible to stakeholders interested in engaging to different degrees is a vital, efficient and cost-effective means of raising awareness of water issues and the WFD. However, it can be far more than that. It can:

- communicate the importance of our aquatic environments, and water quality;
- outline the issues related to water management;
- provide up-to-date information on the state of Ireland’s water bodies, and trace change over time;
- put Ireland’s performance in an EU, even global, context;
- provide information on how the WFD is being implemented, by whom and how, and give details of what progress is being made, and challenges encountered;
- provide information on stakeholder initiatives and how to get involved, from individual actions to local groups;
- provide both summary information and routes to further detailed information for those interested in any particular aspect of water issues or WFD implementation. (etc.)

As public participation increases, the functionalities of this site can be enhanced, so that it allows greater dialogue etc. There is a growing body of literature that discusses how ICT can be most effectively used to support participation initiatives¹¹ and some of the pitfalls to be avoided.¹²

¹¹ Peng, Z. R. (2001) Internet GIS for public participation. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, Vol.28, pp.889-905

¹² Hansen, H.S. & Maenpaa, M. (2008) An overview of the challenges for public participation in river basin management and planning. *Management of Environmental Quality*, Vol 19, No.1, pp.67-84

Implementation

The public participation measures set out above represent a complete co-ordinated package, where elements relate clearly to one another, and the engagement is enhanced over time as relationships are built, trust established and progress made. In concert, they represent cumulative benefits and need to be executed in full with the genuine intention on the part of all parties of fostering positive collaborative engagement.

SWAN's recommendation acknowledges the realities of the current context: the proposed 3 Tier governance structure; the present economic climate; and the weak record of collaborative approaches to water governance and management to date. In response to this, the proposal outlined here is designed to create the opportunities to efficiently deliver positive and productive engagement, building capacity amongst both the agencies and the stakeholders involved. With commitment to meaningful participation, increasing value will be achieved for all parties through the involvement of the public in water governance as part of an integrated catchment management implementation approach.