

PRESS RELEASE

Reforming the Common Agricultural Policy to protect our water environment

The Common Agricultural Policy should be reformed to give much greater protection to water quality, a report published today (Thursday 26 November) by An Fóram Uisce suggests.

This new research report to An Fóram Uisce argues that reform of CAP could lead to a direct improvement in water quality.

It was prepared for An Fóram by Dr Charles Larkin, Director of Research at the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath. A fundamental conclusion from the Larkin Report is that CAP reform should be underlined by the principle of *public money for public goods*.

It acknowledges the complexity of reforming the CAP to ensure that ecosystems are supported and that climate change is mitigated while ensuring that households have access to affordable, sustainable and healthy food.

It recognises that for many low-income farmers the reality is that it is “hard to be green if we are farming in the red”. But it also acknowledges that cheap food can come at a price to the land and to our water. The report follows in the wake of the [EPA State of the Environment](#) analysis published yesterday which identifies agriculture as the most significant pressure impacting on the water environment in 53% of catchments. The EPA state that ‘*we need a decade of action*’ Existing policies determine how our food is produced and are impacting on the quality of our waters, our biodiversity, and are contributing to climate change, the Larkin report says.

The CAP provides financial supports to farmers and for rural development to ensure a secure food supply across Europe. Since 1992 these supports have included requirements for pro-environmental and sustainable farm practice. A review of CAP measures for water quality in 2019 questioned the effectiveness of these supported measures. It recommended that direct CAP payments should be reconsidered in order to better support less profitable farms implementing farming practices beneficial for the environment and water resources.

In Ireland, farming systems have different dependencies on CAP subsidies. For dairy farmers 22% of their overall incomes comes from CAP subsidies, whereas for some sheep farmers it can be all of their incomes. This means that many farms are not economically robust and are therefore sensitive to changes in CAP policy and payment structures.

To get a better understanding of what is needed to help farmers implement practice to improve water quality, An Fóram Uisce had commissioned Dr Larkin to carry out his rapid evidence assessment on how water quality returns might be optimised from the reform of CAP in Ireland. A fundamental question is how to achieve this while adhering to the principle of *public money for public goods*.

To explore this topic further and to facilitate a discussion on what support measures are needed to achieve environmental outcomes, Dr Larkin will present his research findings at a webinar on **4th December at 10am**. Alan Matthews, Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy at Trinity College Dublin; Professor John Fitzgerald, Chair of Ireland’s Climate Advisory Council; Dr Lee Ann Jackson, Head of Agro Food Trade at the OECD and Dr Michele McCormack of the Agricultural



Catchments Programme at Teagasc will respond to Dr Larkin's findings. Following these presentations, there will be an opportunity for a Q&A moderated by Dr Tom Collins Chair of An Fóram Uisce.

Dr Collins commented that "Farmers and landowners are the guardians of the landscape. Farm practice has the potential to provide a wide range of environmental and public benefits such as good soil health, good quality reasonably priced food, flood mitigation, climate change mitigation, biodiversity enhancement and the protection of our water resources. But the farmers need support in this endeavour. We are looking forward to the webinar and to the feedback to the Larkin Report. This will help inform the members of the Forum in preparing our own response. The Forum is drawn from a wide section of society and getting consensus on these complex issues is worth striving for".

You can register for the free Webinar here: <https://bit.ly/38SILMI>

You can access Charles Larkin's report here: [Optimising water quality returns from the reform of CAP](#)

You can access a [Discussion Note](#) prepared by Dr Alec Rolston, Research Lead, An Fóram Uisce

For Further information please contact Dr Gretta McCarron on 0858085756 or gretta@nationalwaterforum.ie

END

An Fóram Uisce|The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

For further information, contact gretta@nationalwaterforum.ie

www.thewaterforum.ie

[@AnForamUisce](#)