



OPW Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works

JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PETITIONS

Petition No P00036/18 - "Save Fermoy Weir"

COMMITTEE HEARING ON WEDNESDAY, 3 JULY 2019

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE OPW

COMMISSIONER MR JOHN SYDENHAM

I would like to thank the Chairman and the Committee Members for the opportunity to address the Committee today in relation to the matter of the weir on the river Blackwater in Fermoy.

While the OPW acknowledges that the weir is in need of repair and that its poor condition is causing difficulties for river users, it is important to be clear at the outset that the OPW does not have any responsibility for the weir.

The weir was previously in the ownership of the Town Council of Fermoy, and since the dissolution of the Town Council, it is owned by Cork County Council. The responsibility for the maintenance of the weir in Fermoy therefore lies with that Local Authority. Prior to any flood relief scheme works commencing at this location, investigations revealed the poor underlying condition of the weir. There

are photographs available that show this. The OPW understands that the last major repairs completed on the weir structure were as far back as the 1960's, with the only repair works taking place recently being the temporary fish ladder repairs, completed in 2012. Maintenance and repairs to the weir were identified as being required for a long time, with plans for capping and strengthening the weir drawn up as far back as 2008. However these works were not carried out at the time and because of the lack of proper ongoing maintenance, upkeep and repair work the condition of the weir deteriorated over time. The impact from trees floating downstream had a high chance therefore of causing damage to the weir structure. Once breaches occurred the lack of cohesion meant further deterioration was likely, if not inevitable.

The OPW position in relation to the damaged weir is clear. The OPW rejects any allegation that the damage to the weir and the mill race wall in particular occurred during and as a result of the flood relief works in Fermoy.

I can confirm that the works which were carried out in constructing the Fermoy flood relief scheme did not interfere with the weir in Fermoy in any way and did not undermine the structure of the weir, or result in any damage to the mill race wall or to any other property.

The Fermoy North and South flood relief schemes involved very little interference with the Blackwater River as the embankments and walls are largely set back from the river. There were no works required or undertaken on Fermoy weir as part of either the North or South flood relief schemes for the town.

It is the OPW's position that the deterioration of the weir in recent years is due to other factors such as large trees and other debris being washed downstream over many years. The in-river works as part of the flood relief scheme maintained a

clearance between the works area and the weir, thus avoiding scheme works impacting on the weir.

As I have indicated, the construction of the Fermoy Flood Defence Works was not a contributing cause to the damage that has occurred to the existing weir. The Flood Scheme works were completed away from the weir. The breaches identified in 2018 are away from the location of the in-river temporary sheet piles used during the flood scheme. These sheet piles were used as a temporary risk mitigation measure during construction and placed in a manner to ensure there would be no risk of damage to adjacent structures. The stone placed in the river as a working platform during construction was placed at a remote distance from the weir - a minimum distance of 3m and up to 7m away from the weir at the location of the main breaches recorded in 2018. Furthermore, the permanent sheet-piles installed along the line of the new flood defence walls at O'Neill Crowley Quay were, at a minimum, 10m away from the location of the first main weir breaches as recorded in 2018. The buildings along O'Neill Crowley Quay are at a similar distance away from the permanent sheet-piles as the weir and did not suffer any structural damage during the work.

In conclusion, the OPW is satisfied that the evidence and expert advice available to it in relation to the manner in which the flood relief works and associated temporary works were organised and carried out, supports its position that those works were not a contributory factor in the damage to the Fermoy weir.

I would like to thank the Chairman and Members again for the opportunity to address the Committee this afternoon.