

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

**Wednesday 13 October 2021**

**Statement by Jack Nolan Senior Inspector, Nitrates and Biodiversity Division,  
Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine**

**Nitrates Directive and Ireland's Action Programme**

Thank you for the invitation to speak with the Committee today on the topic of the **Nitrates Directive**<sup>1</sup> and Ireland's forthcoming **Nitrates Action Programme 2022**. My colleague Bernard Harris who is an Agricultural Inspector with our Department, and is a co-chair of the Nitrates Expert Group, joins me here for this evening's discussion.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) are fully engaged in developing and supporting a new revised and strengthened Nitrates Action Programme and Nitrates Derogation in 2022 and this is a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

From a DAFM perspective, the agricultural sector is committed to stabilising and improving water quality and the review of the Nitrates Action Programme provides a timely opportunity to review the impact of agriculture on our water environment and support agriculture's ambition to stabilise and improve water quality while seeking as many co-benefits for climate, air and biodiversity as possible.

The Departments involved have built strong relationships to collectively develop a cohesive policy response in delivering and implementing policy on water quality to coincide with the delivery of the next River Basin Management Plan. The Departments are also working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in reviewing both water quality monitoring, water quality trends and investigating and understanding the pressures from nutrient, pesticides and sediment losses from agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Directive 91/676/EEC 91 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources

To develop future agricultural measures for the protection of the environment Teagasc were asked to review and model the impact of potential measures. This work concluded that a number of additional measures will further minimise nutrient losses to the environment. The Nitrates Derogation (250 kgs of nitrogen from livestock manure/ha) was considered environmentally safe based on Ireland's grass based system of production.

DAFM has been at the forefront of assessing the regulatory baseline for agriculture and has been proactive in reviewing and balancing measures to minimise the impact of agriculture on the environment;

Ireland has been a leader in the EU in protecting the environment through a strong regulation that includes both Nitrogen and Phosphorus in our regulations unlike most other EU Member States.

DAFM initiated the voluntary review of the Nitrates Derogation in 2019, the Nitrates Derogation covers 7000 farmers and is a very important facility for the livestock sector. The review introduced additional measures to improve on farm efficiencies and reduce agriculture's impact on the environment.

Additional measures have been introduced for a further 5000 farmers in 2021. These measures are being targeted to farmers to improve environmental efficiencies.

DAFM have been aligning agriculture policies and strategies to ensure a coherent approach to meeting agriculture's commitments to the environmental challenges of climate, air, water and biodiversity. Agriculture has a significant role to play in meeting environmental targets. The strong support and work being delivered by farmers to address our environmental issues must be acknowledged.

I thank you for your attention and your time today and we will be happy to take any questions from the members.

**Further info**

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine supports and protects water through a variety of schemes and programmes at national and local scale. Currently Pillar 1 of the CAP sets down baseline standards of protection for water through cross-compliance standards.

The Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is the largest scheme with a budget of €1.4bn with 50,000 participating farmers. It is Ireland's third such agri-environmental scheme and is a more targeted design prioritizing actions.

The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS). The measures provide grants for capital investment in physical assets to assist the Irish agriculture sector to respond to a range of policy challenges. LESS is essential to contributing to meeting the challenges.

Results Based Policy is to become more widespread across Europe under the new CAP regulations with member states afforded more flexibility with design and roll-out – the focus being the result. Ireland and DAFM are EU leaders in this policy area being involved in the Results Based Agri-environmental Pilot Scheme (RBAPS) and also funding several schemes and projects under the current RDP.

Most recently, DAFM has provided funding of €500,000 for the protection of drinking water to the National Federation of Group Water Schemes.

Finally, DAFM have since 2006 supported both science and research for the protection of the environment especially water through the Agricultural Catchments Programme which is currently an annual commitment of €2.5m annually.

Working collaboratively has been a key theme and has been pioneered in the development and delivery of the Agricultural Support & Advisory Programme (ASSAP) which is an innovative Government/industry initiative. This arrangement provides targeted advice to farmers but also builds strong working relationships with farmers to make environmental gains at farm level.