

The Border Regional Authority

Údarás Réigiúnach na Teorann

Regional Planning Guidelines (2010-2022)

**Report on SEA Scoping Meeting/Workshop held with Local
Authority Planners in Athlone on 11 March 2009**



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1.0 Introduction

In addition to the statutory consultation requirements in respect to preparation of the Scoping Report it was considered appropriate to consult with a designated Planner from each of the Local Authorities within the Border Region. In this regard a Planner from each of the Local Authorities was nominated by the Technical Steering Group and invited to attend a meeting in Athlone on 11 March 2009. Prior to the meeting each Planners was requested to submit to the meeting, a Summary Report outlining what they consider to be the significant environmental issues within, and adjoining their respective Counties, that should be addressed in the Environmental Report.

In order to provide a structured approach to this task, the prior notification to the planners gave direction on the purpose of the meeting and requested that the following questions be addressed;

1. What do you consider to be the significant environmental issues within your county that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
2. What are the significant inter-county or cross border environmental issues that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
3. What is the nature, scale and extent of these issues with particular reference to any impacts on Natura Sites (SAC's and SPA's)
4. How might these environmental issues be addressed through the RPGs?

The meeting was attended by Tadhg O'Mahony from the Environmental Protection Agency who made a presentation on the level of detail and content of the Environmental Report and further advised the meeting on a way forward, see Appendix 3 for details.

See Appendix 1 for full details of notification sent to each Local Authority Planner

See Appendix 2 for copy of Agenda

See Appendix 3 - Summary Minutes of the Meeting

2.0 Purpose of SEA Scoping Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to establish the significant environmental issues that should be considered in the preparation of the SEA Environmental Report on the RPG's and how these issues might be addressed. The meeting sought to establish the nature scale and extent of the issues and whether such had an inter-county or cross border dimension.

In particular the meeting, taken in conjunction with other consultations will assist in establishing the likely significant issues to be addressed in the Environmental Report and in particular the items to be scoped in/out under the different environmental topics.

3.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Louth

Threats to Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Throughout Ireland, the principle threats to biodiversity are habitat loss; pollution; disease; over-harvesting; and alien invasive species. The uncertainties of climate change may also be included in this list. Of these, habitat loss is probably the greatest threat in Louth, although climate change and alien species may also present problems in the future. Habitats that have been converted to intensive grassland or forestry are generally hostile to wildlife while rising sea levels may inundate existing coastal habitats. Specific activities can damage habitats, such as drainage of bogs, or excessive trampling on sand dunes. Lack of knowledge and awareness can also be identified as a significant threat that will be addressed as part of this plan.

Climate Change

It is now beyond doubt that climate change is happening and human activity is the principle agent of that change. This is witnessed by the public at large through the increasingly erratic nature of weather patterns and the severity of certain weather related events. Attention at national level is turning to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and trying to predict and adapt to changes that are already occurring.

Increasing efforts are also concentrating upon predicting how a changing climate will impact on some of our most threatened species. The result: possible gain in habitat for the corn bunting, marsh fritillary butterfly, and the red hemp-nettle; but losses for the skylark, common scoter and the song thrush. Research efforts are attempting to build a case for planning and adapting to climate change by conserving and restoring all semi-natural habitats, habitat creation, and increasing the ability of wildlife to move across the landscape by making agriculture and forestry less production intensive

Residential Development in Rural Areas

Louth County Council has always recognised and accepted the importance of rural housing in meeting local housing needs and in sustaining rural services such as primary schools, rural post offices and village shops. The Council also accepts what it considers as the legitimate aspirations of people who are born and raised in the countryside wishing to reside within their own community. As such there is a presumption in favour of granting planning permissions to bona-fide applicants for rural generated housing, subject to a number of qualifying criteria set down in both the current Louth County Development Plan 2003 – 2009 and the draft County Development Plan 2009 - 2015. There is a presumption against ‘urban generated’ housing in the rural areas of the county. Despite this, experience has shown that demand for and the granting of one off rural housing sites has continued unabated throughout the period of the current plan. The figures in the table below illustrate that the numbers of one off rural houses granted permission since 2003 are increasing. Indeed, if the numbers of applications granted permission in November and December of this year are similar to the preceding months, in 2008 there has been an increase of 124 on 2007.

There would appear to be as great or greater concentration of permissions in ‘zones’ classified as High Scenic quality both in the north and south of the county. These include the Fieldstown area, Ravensdale, Jenkinstown and Mount Oriel. Within many parts of the green belt areas of Ardee, Dundalk and Drogheda there is little evidence to suggest that there has been a lesser number of permissions granted than within other ‘less restrictive’ development control zones.

* *Source CSO 2006*

** *Figures available only for 31st October 2008. Have assumed that there will be an addition of 1/6 in current figures for 2008 in Nov and Dec.*

Year	One-off houses*
2001	404
2002	380
2003	313
2004	473
2005	504
2006	480
2007	422
2008**	546

Urbanisation

Since the 1990s there has been a sustained movement of population from rural to urban centres, leading to rapid fringe development across much of County Louth. Growth in the economy has also resulted in significant infrastructural development over the past decade, particularly road construction. This is very much the case in County Louth since the completion of the M1 motorway and its northern extension into Northern Ireland. The motorway has effectively cut the county in two representing a major severance in both physical and environmental terms. Landscapes have been affected by urban sprawl, rural housing development, and the growth of industry. The rapid increase in housing costs in towns and villages during the past decade has reduced the ability of many to afford city living, leading to migration from established areas to new development in the urban fringes, to rural areas or to more distant towns, villages and rural areas, including Northern Ireland. These developments, most of which comprise low-density housing, are contributing to the urban sprawl and increasing both short and long-distance traffic volume on Louth’s roads, resulting in higher levels of engine emissions.

Settlement Coalescence

Unrestrained ribbon development has the potential to hasten a pattern of development known as coalescence. Essentially this means that two or more distinct settlements, either villages or towns are permitted to grow on their respective fringes to such an extent that the boundaries of each begin to merge together. In time, the settlements lose their distinct characters and take on the appearance of a single unit.

Such patterns are normally associated neither with large urban conurbations however rural forms do exist and are not to be encouraged in the interests of proper planning. County Louth contains a number of examples of such forms of development.

Ribbon Development

Louth County Council recognises that uncontrolled and excessive 'one-off' urban generated housing in the countryside is not sustainable in the long-term and accepts that measures need to be put in place to regulate this form of development. A concern arises that if urban generated rural housing is permitted at the level it has taken place, particularly over the last decade, then irreparable damage will be done to the environment and the legitimate aspirations of those brought up in the countryside to continue to live within their own communities will be jeopardised.

Much of the dispersed rural housing which exists within the rural area of County Louth is characterized by extensive residential ribbon development along both local but also regional roads. Such development is problematical in a spatial sense particularly in a small county such as Louth. Any development allowed to grow alongside a rural road will generate traffic and pedestrian movements that can lead to accidents that could have been prevented. Vehicles turning into or out of premises cause particular problems, especially when the vehicles have to cross an opposing stream of traffic. Pedestrians crossing or walking along the road near such developments are also frequently involved in accidents. Ribbon development also causes problems in terms of servicing in that the utilities such as water, gas and electric have to be extended far beyond the limits of settlements to provide for a relatively small population merely fronting a road. Similarly, public transport is at a disadvantage when serving ribbon development due to the long distances involved and the low potential client base. Finally, many examples of ribbon development are characterized by dwelling designs which have been exported directly from urban areas and which are, as such, highly unsuited to the rural environment.

Greenfield Development / Hedgerow Loss

In general development in County Louth is not significantly impacting upon designated ecological sites as these are afforded protection through European designations. However, localised adverse impacts on some designated sites may be occurring as a result of individual developments both in the form of multi unit housing development and one off dwellings. When development occurs on greenfield sites in the County, there is inevitably an impact on existing flora and fauna. With development natural and semi-natural habitats are replaced with artificial surfaces resulting in a loss of flora and fauna.

Developments on greenfield sites often results in a loss of important hedgerows. The significance of this loss of flora and fauna as a result of greenfield developments depends on whether the loss of habitats or species is of importance when taken combatively across County Louth.

Flooding

Floodplains and wetlands are essential for flood control, pollution control, water supply, and peat lands also serve as vital carbon sinks that could help address climate change. Locating development in an area at risk from flooding (a floodplain) can lead to property damage, human stress, hardship and ill-health, problems obtaining property insurance and consequential demands for the expenditure of local authority or central government resources on flood protection works. The construction of protection works at the time of the development, or at a later date, will incur significant additional costs and will not provide absolute immunity from the risk of flooding. Development located in an area prone to flooding can therefore increase flood risk and/or necessitate heavy expenditure on flood protection works.

In times of flood, a river can flow not only through its normal channel but also along its floodplains. Any constriction of the natural flow path can restrict flow, 'back-up' the river and lead to increased flood levels upstream. The construction of buildings or houses, and particularly embankments for infrastructure or protection, in or across a floodplain can therefore not only put the development itself at risk of flooding as described above, but can also increase the flood risk for land and properties upstream.

Whilst County Louth does not have significant areas of wetland, it does possess significant areas of floodplain particularly in the environs of both Dundalk and Drogheda. The county as a whole is at risk from several sources of flooding including river and estuarine flooding however the most significant threat posed by flooding is by way of coastal flooding particularly during storm surges

Invasive Species

A number of invasive, non native species of both flora and fauna are present throughout the County. Invasive species are defined as plants or animals which did not originally occur in Ireland, before human colonisation of the country and which are also expanding their numbers and distribution so as to cause a competitive threat to such native fauna and flora. Many species such as the Norway Rat have been here for centuries and are no longer considered non native. Other more recent arrivals to Ireland such as the Zebra Mussel are considered both non native and furthermore, in this case, pose a direct threat to aquatic ecosystems and human activities by blocking water pipes and boat engines and affecting our native fish species.

Terrestrial plants

Gunnera. Also known as giant hogweed, this plant has known poisonous qualities and is found across the County.

Japanese knotweed. This plant has been found along the Flurry River and in the environs of Dundalk

Himalayan Balsam. This is common in the northern extremities of the Cooley Peninsula

Aquatic Plants

Didemnum is an invasive tunicate that has been recorded in Carlingford Lough.

Marine plants

Spartina anglica. This plant is widespread in saltmarsh areas close to both Drogheda and Dundalk.

Soil

Radon

The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) has undertaken a comprehensive review of the relevant data on radiation exposure in Ireland. Where no national data have been identified, the RPII has either undertaken its own research or has referred to the international literature to provide a best estimate of what the exposure in Ireland might be. This has allowed the relative contribution of each source to be quantified. This new evaluation of 2008 is the most up-to-date assessment of radiation exposure and updates the assessment previously reported in 2004. The survey indicates that the bulk of the Cooley Peninsula together with an area west of Dundalk incorporating the villages of Knockbridge and Tallanstown to the County Monaghan border exceed the reference level.

Water

Water Supply

County Louth struggles to meet water supply demands in certain areas. Significant supply constraints currently exist in Dunleer, Tullyallan, Clogherhead /Termonfeckin and Omeath and these have been prioritised for attention. The existing distribution network is adequate in most areas with upgrading of older pipe assets in Clogherhead and parts of Blackrock and the provision of additional storage capacity in the Smarmore / Blakestown, Clogherhead and Omeath area, also being prioritised. Within the large urban context there are very significant supply issues associated with Drogheda. Much of the demand placed on the town actually emanates from beyond the County in neighbouring East County Meath. This area witnessed a huge pace of development during the 'Celtic Tiger' era and services have yet to match the level of demand created.

Ground and Surface Water

River Basin Management Plans

County Louth straddles two River Basin Districts; the Neagh Bann and the Eastern River Basin District. However the bulk of County Louth lies within the Neagh Bann River Basin district and is administered as part of the NS Share River Basin District Project.

Draft Neagh Bann River Basin Management Plan 2008

Within the Louth portion of the Neagh Bann RBD, 64% of river ecological status is 'Moderate', 12% is 'Good', 2% is bad and 14% is poor. None of the surveyed rivers achieved 'High' status. With regard to coastal waters both Outer Dundalk Bay and Carlingford Lough achieve moderate status whilst the Mourne Coast (east of the Cooley Peninsula) achieves Good Status. The remaining Louth Coast south of Dundalk to the boundary with the Eastern RBD has a status yet to be determined. Throughout the County Louth portion of the Neagh Bann RBD, groundwater status is good. With regard to surface water chemical status, only Outer Dundalk bay has poor status with the Louth Coast, coastal waterbody yet to be determined.

The County Louth portion of the Neagh Bann RBD draft plan contains a number of basic and supplementary measures which aim to achieve a number of key objectives with regard to rectifying deficiencies in waterbody status. For surface waters, the core objective is to prevent deterioration, and in particular maintain high or good status. For groundwater's, the core objective is to limit pollution inputs and prevent deterioration. In restoring good status the core objectives for surface waters are to improve waters where necessary in order to achieve at least good status. For groundwater's, the core objectives are to improve quantity and chemical quality where necessary to achieve good status. With regard to chemical pollution the core objective is to reverse increasing pollution. In order to achieve these objectives a number of basic and supplementary measures must be taken. The basic measures are required by law. The measures include; cost recovery for water use, promotion of efficient and sustainable water use, protection of drinking water sources, control of abstraction and impoundment, control of point source discharges, control of diffuse source discharges, authorisation of discharges to groundwater's, control of priority substances, controls on physical modifications to surface waters, controls on other activities impacting on water status and prevention or reduction of the impact of accidental pollution incidents. The eleven measures are based on eleven EU directives on water protection. A large number of supplementary measures are also proposed. These include measures which should be considered where the basic measures may not be sufficient to achieve the core objectives. The supplementary measures are targeted at those areas where problems have been identified. Thus urban and industrial discharges have ten (10) supplementary measures, Wastewater from unsewered properties has seven (7), Agriculture has four (4) Landfills, quarries, mines & contaminated lands have two (2) and forestry has twenty (20).

Draft Eastern River Basin Management Plan 2008

The Louth portion of within the Eastern River Basin District accounts for just 1% of the County and 10% of the river basin district. The principal river catchments concerned are the Mattock and Baltray. Estuary and transitional Waters include the Boyne Coast & Estuary whilst there is a Coastal Water zone known as the Boyne Estuary Plume Zone. All the waterbodies concerned have programmes of measures (POMS) devised which, when implemented are designed to achieve good status for each water body. The programmes of measures comprise basic measures which are required by law and non-statutory measures deemed necessary. The Baltray Catchment has been assessed as moderate and is expected to achieve good status by 2015. The Mattock Catchment has also been assessed as moderate, however due to a range of agricultural and domestic pollution sources, the catchment is not expected to achieve good status by 2015. The Boyne Coast and Estuary (Estuary and

Transitional Waters) has a status classed as moderate. It is not expected to achieve good status by 2015 due in large part to the influence of a range of wastewater and industrial discharges. The status of coastal waters within the Louth section of the RBD (Boyne Estuary Plume) is high and is expected to achieve good status by 2015. Within the Louth portion of the Eastern RBD, groundwater status is poor however restoration of groundwater is expected to be complete by 2015.

As with the Neagh Bann draft RBD plan, the Eastern draft RBD has proposed a number of basic and supplementary measures which are intended to address the problems identified in the draft plan. These are detailed in the text of the environmental report. Implementation of the Water Framework Directive will have significant implications for existing farming practices, settlement strategies, relevant data availability and water quality itself.

Cross Border Issues

As part of its consultation exercise in relation to the strategic environmental assessment for the draft county development plan the Louth County Council Forward Planning Unit made contact with the relevant agencies in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) provided a detailed written response. Its principal concern related to how transboundary impacts would be considered during the environmental assessment of the County Louth Development Plan Review. As such it requested that the Environmental Report should identify existing transboundary environmental problems and should assess the likely significant transboundary effects of implementing the plan.

The Planning Service of the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment provided a detailed response. Its response was the result of a inter agency panel approach which also involved Northern Ireland Water and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The agencies had a wide range of concerns however those of particular note include:

1. The potential impact on a cross border basis of both shore based and off shore windfarms in visual and ecological terms
2. The impact of potential tidal / ocean power generation within Carlingford Lough
3. The cross border impact of wastewater treatment systems
4. The cross border impact of waste management policies
5. The cross border impact of quarrying activities
6. The impact of pollution incidents upon both the ecology and the marine economy of Carlingford Lough particularly with reference to the extensive shellfish farming carried out in the Lough.

7. The cross border impact of the proposed major redevelopment and expansion of Greenore Port. The proposed development potentially threatens the SAC designation through land reclamation
8. The reason behind the exceedences in PM10 air quality limits in Dundalk in 2002 and on a total of five incidences in 2008
9. The suggestion that the issues of ancient routeways, battlesites and industrial archaeology should be included in the SEA
10. The suggestion that landscape protection should be included in the SEA

4.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Leitrim

Issue No 1 - One-off housing in the Countryside

Leitrim is predominantly a rural county with 75% of its population living outside urban areas with a population in excess of 500, (91% of its population live outside urban areas that have a population in excess of 1,500). The issue of one-off housing in the countryside raises significant environmental issues throughout the Country and it is a particularly sensitive political issue. Within Leitrim many rural communities are under threat with declining populations and loss of community services and facilities. The social and cultural capital associated with rural communities living in the countryside needs to be recognised and supported. Conflicting issues arise between on the one hand supporting rural communities and the reasonable expectations of people wishing to live in the countryside and on the other hand protecting the environment and ensuring the vitality and viability of towns and villages that serve these rural communities.

Certain areas within the County are under pressure from one-off housing. These areas are usually found on the periphery of towns and villages, especially along approach roads. Other areas would include visually sensitive areas including areas in the vicinity of lakes and along the coastline. Issues arise in relation to pollution control, extension of services, impact on the landscape and rural character. Issues of pollution are particularly acute within the county having regard to the poor ground conditions – there is also the associated risk to public health arising from water pollution and air borne pathogens. Issues also arise concerning the increased car dependence and consequent increased carbon footprint.

Q2. This is an Inter-county and cross border issue

Q3. A proliferation of wwts serving one-off housing may impact on the integrity of SAC's

Q4 How these issues might be addressed in the RPG's

In terms of the impact of one-off housing on the landscape and rural character there is a need for each Local Authority to provide comprehensive guidance on the siting, design and pattern of one-off housing in the countryside. There should be a level of consistence in the approach to, and implementation of, the guidelines by each local authority. The capacity of rural areas to accommodate one-off house should be identified and appropriate policies applied in accordance with the document "Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2005". Further guidance is required from the EPA in respect to the provision of wwts and there should be a more consistent approach by Local Authorities in determining the suitability of sites to accommodate wwts and particularly towards monitoring and enforcement.

Impacts on: All headings 1 – 13.

Issue No 2 - Vacant Residential and Commercial Development

There is a significant level of vacant housing and commercial property spread across the county. A residential vacancy rate 29% is given for the period 02 – 06. This vacancy rate is spread relatively evenly throughout the county. This rate is likely to have increased given the level of new residential development in towns and villages

that has occurred in the interim. These developments constitute a significant resource/investment which if left unused will constitute a wasted material asset and will impact on the character and vitality of the areas where they exist. Issues of dereliction arising from abandoned or neglected developments arise.

Q2. This is an issue that is common to other counties in the Region.

Q3. This issues does not affect Natura Sites

Q4. How these environmental issues might be addressed

Where vacancy rates are high in either residential or commercial development, Planning Authorities should seek a justification as to the demand for additional similar type development in the area. Where little or no justification exists permission should be refused. Towns and Villages where public infrastructural services and community facilities are available need to be made attractive places in which to work and live.

Impacts on: This issue impacts on heading 10, Material Assets.

Issue 3. Afforestation

Afforestation is largely outside the control of Planning, however it does have a significant environmental impact. It can have significant impacts on; water quality, the landscape character, biodiversity, archaeology, damage to roads and in some instances can give rise to social isolation. The environmental impacts are particularly acute during planting and harvesting of trees when the risk of pollution is high when nutrients are released into watercourses. Excessive nutrients in natural waters can lead to the growth of algae and weeds. This enrichment of water is called eutrophication and it is recognised as a major threat to the quality of Irish waters The planting of coniferous species as opposed to deciduous species., tends to exacerbate many of these problems.

Q2. This is an issue is an inter-county and a cross border issue.

Q3. This issue may impact on the integrity of SAC's in certain instances considering the risk of pollution.

Q4. How these issues might be addressed.

There is a need for Planning Authorities to identify within their County Development Plans the capacity of landscapes to accommodate afforestation. There is a need to encourage a greater use of deciduous trees as opposed to the use of coniferous trees. Vulnerable areas in terms of visual amenities and the pollution of watercourses should be identified. Appropriate controls measures should be implemented in respect to the management of forestry, particularly during planting and harvesting. Bye-laws should be introduced where considered necessary.

Headings affected

This issue impacts upon all headings 1- 13.

Issue 4. Agriculture – Slurry spreading

Having regard to the poor ground conditions within the county, wetter summers and changes in farming systems there is significant risk of ground water and surface water pollution. For many farmers within the county farming has become a part-time activity, cattle are being kept for longer periods indoors, facilities for slurry storage have increased and heavier farm machinery is interfering with soil conditions. These factors have combined and pose a significant risk of pollution from the spreading of slurry. In ecologically sensitive areas there is a risk to the biodiversity of the area.

Q2. Inter-county and cross border issue

Q3. This issue has the potential to impact on Natura Sites, eg pollution of rivers designated as an SAC.

Q4. How these environmental issues might be addressed

There is a need to ensure that Development Plans contain adequate policies and objectives in respect to certain agricultural activities including the identification of environmentally sensitive areas. There is also a need to operate strict pollution measures including the implementation of the River Basin Management Plans and the operation of development management measures and monitoring.

Headings affected

Impacts on headings 1, 3,4,5,6, and 7

Issue 5 Urban Design

Towns and Villages throughout the county are a resource in term of their heritage value and in the provision of employment opportunities and the provision of a range of infrastructural services and community facilities. The pace and scale of development in more recent times has placed pressure on the urban form and character of many of these centres. In many instances the level of residential development has not been matched with a commensurate level of employment creating opportunities and community facilities and amenities. In certain instance new developments have not integrated well with the existing character and urban form of these towns and villages.

Q2. This is an Inter-county issue

Q3. This issue is unlikely to impact on Natura Sites

Q4. How these issues might be address

The Draft Guidelines Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas and accompanying Manual has pointed towards best practice in terms of urban design and are a welcome reference. There is a need for development plans to take a plan led approach and adopt the design principles set out in the Guidelines. The use of master plans and design briefs, design statements for sensitive site or large scale tracks of lands should be considered. The urban character and heritage of towns and villages needs to be protected and enhanced. National Guidelines in respect to Sustainable Urban Development that would complement the Residential Guidelines may be worth considering. In certain cases the release of zoned lands has been difficult and where this occurs within the core of the urban area it poses a particular challenge in

terms of achieving sustainable urban forms. The sequential test should apply in order to positively discriminate in favour of the release of lands at key locations.

Headings affected

Impacts on headings 10 and 11.

Issue 6. Municipal and Private Wastewater Treatment Plants

Many wastewater treatment plants within the county are under pressure to adequately treat wastewater. Some of these plants are located in environmentally sensitive locations. The removal of phosphates is a particular concern. Issues arise in respect to ensuring the proper maintenance of privately operated plants. Within the county there are a number of the smaller scale urban centres where the pipe network has recently been installed under one contract while the treatment plants have yet to be completed under a separate contract. The pressure on public finances places the completion of these schemes under threat in the short term at least. Issues of pollution arise and also the vitality and viability of these centres arise.

Q2. This is considered to be an Inter-county issue

Q3. This issue has the potential to impact on SAC's

Q 4. How these issues might be addressed

Public investment needs to continue to be provided to ensure that existing systems can accommodate existing and future needs. Public investment is also required to complete a number of schemes in certain towns and villages throughout the county. Larger scale private wastewater treatment systems should only be provided in unserved areas in limited cases and only where there is a strong justification.

Headings affected

Impacts on all headings 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7

Issue 7. Cruising and Boating

Cruising and boating are important recreational and tourism activities on the Shannon waterway and the Shannon-erne navigation. However, these can give rise to certain localised water problems including discharge from on-board toilets, physical disturbance by boat wakes and potential engine oil spillage.

Q2. This is an Inter-county and cross border issue

Q3. This issue would not impact on any Natural Sites within the county but might impact on NHA's

Q 4. How this issue might be addressed in the RPG's

There is a need to ensure the provision and maintenance of pump out facilities and to monitor boating activities, implement regulation in regard to speeding

Headings affected

Impacts on headings 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 10

Issue 8. Energy Efficiency and Climate Change

Climate change is becoming one of the greatest challenges facing society today, an issue which affects all citizens at a local, national and international level. Each Local Authority has along with other interested parties a responsibility and a role to play in addressing the risks posed by climate change.

There are effective alternatives to fossil fuels that can meet the energy requirements of the Country while still reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Ireland has the potential to generate a significantly higher proportion of its power requirements from renewables like wind, water, tide, solar and biomass (wood pellets/wood chip).

At a National level, Part L of the National Building Regulation has just been revised and the effects of this will make homes and buildings more energy efficient. It is the first step to making Irish homes and buildings carbon neutral.

Also, new Planning and Development Regulations introduced in 2007 provides exemptions on the provision of certain small scale renewable energy technologies eg. solar panels and wind turbines. Grant support from Sustainable Energy Ireland highlights the Government's commitment to encouraging and facilitating greater uptake of renewable energy technologies even in a domestic context.

Q2. This is an Inter-county and cross border issue

Q 3. This issue has the potential to impact on Natura Sites

Q 4. How this issue might be addressed in the RPG's

Local Authorities along with others need to become evermore proactive in encouraging, facilitating and developing sustainable solutions to addressing the risks posed by climate change. County Development Plans need to develop policies and objectives that encourage such solutions. In particular each Local Authority should commit itself to producing an Sustainable Energy Plan, which would include a land use strategy in respect to the capacity of the landscape to accommodate windfarms and where necessary incorporate the recommendations of the Energy Plan into the respective County Development Plans, as appropriate.

Headings affected

Impacts on headings 1, 3, 4, 5, and 9.

Other Issues

Waste Management

5.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Donegal

Following our meeting in Athlone on the 11th March I can clarify the following as issues for consideration in the preparation of the scoping of an SEA:

Marine environment:

- The Islands – many of the islands are covered by Natural 2000 sites, some with international protection [SPA] and give rise to issues in the following areas: Biodiversity; Landscape; Heritage; Water.
- Inland waters – the issues raised in the RBM documentation is relevant here.
- Ports – The principle fishing port of Killybegs has national and regional recognition.
- Aquaculture – the juxtaposition of shellfish growing areas to protected habitats [L. Swilly; L.Foyle; Mulroy Bay].
- Off Shore exploration – potential impacts arising from possible future shore based activities.

Transport:

- Strategic importance of A5 Dublin-Derry road and route selection. Route selection issue may arise where potential routes coincide with habitats in the area of Lough Foyle river system.
- Investigation of potential rail linkages – Letterkenny – Derry; Letterkenny – Sligo.

National Park:

- The habitats of Glenveagh NP have to be considered regionally in terms of Biodiversity; Fauna; Flora; Cultural Heritage and Landscape.

Rural Housing:

- This is a strategic issue across the local authorities in the region.

Linked Gateway of Letterkenny – Derry:

- There are potential impacts to be considered in relation to the development of the North West Gateway Initiative on habitats associated with the Swilly and Foyle catchments arising from increased in urban populations, transportation issues etc..

Flooding:

- Increased development pressures are likely to impact on the habitats through increased flood risk necessitation consideration of proactive flood risk management policies that are consistent across the region.

Cross-Border policies:

- The trans-boundary nature of many strategic projects and their potential impacts on habitats highlight the need to align policy approaches. While many potential impacts are likely to be assessed on a project basis, the parameters for the scoping of environmental impacts are regional by virtue of scale.

These issues are those that are particular to Donegal. I haven't included those matters that were raised commonly by the participants at the meeting in Athlone. I have a range of GIS data that might be of use in the scoping of the SEA and if you can advise of the format needed I'll see if these can be forwarded to you. Our current preferred format are Mapinfo tables.

6.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Sligo

1. What do you consider to be the significant environmental issues within your county that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
 - requirement for the protection, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity – including designated SPAs, SACs, NHAs, landscape and built heritage (protected structures and archaeology)
 - water quality – to be addressed by RBD Management Plans – the ER should use information from RBDMPs
 - continuing development of one-off rural housing relying on septic tanks, with unknown consequences for the groundwater. Sligo's rural housing policy, especially in Rural Areas under Urban Influence, has not achieved a significant reduction in the development of new one-off housing within 10 miles of Sligo.
 - need for expanding the runway at the Regional Airport in Strandhill, affecting a designated SPA/SAC/NHA
 - need to provide a bypass for Sligo City, as part of the Atlantic Road Corridor (??)
2. What are the significant inter-county or cross-border (transboundary) environmental issues that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
 - a. cross-county border designated areas – SPAs, SACs, NHAs – 1, 4, 5
 - b. river basin management – 1, 4, 5, 7, 12
 - c. abstraction of water from Lough Gill – 4, 5, 7
 - d. landscape protection – especially water bodies and elevated areas along the Leitrim boundary – 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12
 - e. co-ordination of the rural housing policies of counties Sligo and Leitrim especially in areas served by regional roads R286/278/288 (Dromahair to Sligo and Newtownmanor to Sligo) – 2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12
 - f. the possibility of a Sligo Bypass crossing County Leitrim ???
3. Are these environmental issues likely to impact negatively on existing Natura Sites (SACs and SPAs)
 - 2.a – adequate protection through Development Plan policies/objectives should ensure that no designated sites suffer any negative impact
 - 2.b – RBD Management Plans should ensure that no designated sites suffer any negative impact
 - 2.c – impact unknown/uncertain
 - 2.d – encroaching of development on elevated areas and lake/river shores would most likely have a negative impact on those areas
 - 2.e – probably no impact/uncertain
4. How might these environmental issues be addressed through the RPGs?

Through strategic policies requiring neighbouring counties Sligo and Leitrim to co-ordinate their development plan policies relating to the protection of the natural

heritage, especially landscape and water bodies, including groundwater. Evidence of compliance with these RPG requirements should be included in the development plans, e.g. as a subsection or appendix.

In addition to identifying the environmental issues, can you please indicate which of the following headings are likely to be affected by the environmental issues identified:

1. Biodiversity
2. Population
3. Human Health
4. Fauna
5. Flora
6. Soil
7. Water
8. Air
9. Climatic factors
10. Material Assets
11. Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological
12. Landscape
13. the interrelationship between the above

6.1 Suggestions from the Heritage Officer of Sligo County Council

Biodiversity – Site-based (cross-county border implications)

- Protection, conservation and enhancement of Natura 2000 sites SACs, SPAs.
- Protection, conservation and enhancement of NHAs
- Protection, conservation and enhancement of Geological Heritage Sites – possible future expansion of Marble Arch Caves Geopark into the wider Breifne Area and areas of Sligo contained therein.
- Protection, conservation and enhancement of landscape features of ecological importance as per Article 10 of the Habitats Directive – this particularly applies to river corridors, networks of small woodlands, wetland sites and significant hedgerows with high nature conservation value.

Sites which may have potential transboundary effects would include Benbulbin Complex cSAC 623, Crockauns pNHA 2435, Lough Gill cSAC 1976 (drinking water for Sligo).

There are also potential significant effects with regard to developments occurring within the wider catchments areas that flow into the wider Sligo Bay Complex of cSACs and SPAs including Sligo Bay, Drumcliff Bay and Ballisodare Bay. In this regard, habitat loss, reduced water quantity and reduced water quality would be key issues.

Consideration must also be given to *ex situ* and in-combination effects of any proposals that may affect Natura 2000 sites and at present Sligo Local Authorities do not maintain a register of granted or proposed developments that may affect designated sites – this should be done.

It would be useful to know the environmental limits operating in the plan area with regard to current and proposed water abstraction from surface and ground waters, current and proposed ability of water bodies to assimilate wastewater outputs and any potential significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (SACs and SPAs)

Biodiversity - Species protection (cross-county border implications)

- Species occurring within the plan area which are listed as Annex species in the Habitats and Birds Directives. Particularly species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive which require Section 23 derogations.
- Also species of conservation concern that are listed in Red Data Books and in the Flora Protection Order.

In some cases, habitat protection will not be enough for protection of certain species and species-specific action will be required. Habitats and species do not have regard to administrative boundaries.

Landscape (cross-county border implications)

- Landscape character assessment and historical landscape character assessment + application of same.
- Regional strategies for windfarm sites etc.

Architecture

- Continuing to survey to update and review RPS and ACAs on an ongoing basis by NIAH and local authorities.
- Employment of Conservation Officers to manage this area of planning
- Increased funding for conservation grants for local authorities to assist owners/occupiers in maintaining structures

Archaeology (possible cross-county border implications)

- Appropriate policies for protection of the archaeological heritage as per legislation and conventions.
- Provision for protection of archaeological landscapes as ACAs pending legislative change under the National Monuments Acts.

Support for and implementation of:

County Sligo Heritage Plan 2007-2011

County Biodiversity Action Plan as per government policy.

Input from the Environment Section of Sligo County Council

The significant environmental issues in County Sligo are detailed in the Western River Basin District 'Water Matters' Report and include:

- protection of drinking water sources, shellfish waters, bathing waters
- pollution from sewage discharges (municipal and commercial)
- pollution from onsite wastewater treatment plants
- pollution from agriculture and forestry
- invasive alien species
- dangerous substances
- quarries

Issues detailed in the River Basin Management Plan should be integrated into the RPGs.

7.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Monaghan County Council

1. What do you consider to be the significant environmental issues within your county that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?

The following elements are significant issues in Co. Monaghan:-

- a. Proliferation of one off housing in the landscape and resultant effluent issues arising from
 - poor waterlogged soils/ sub surface rock – numerous dwellings in landscape impair visual amenity and the cumulative impact of individual effluent disposal systems in gley soils and sub surface bed rock.
- b. Compliance with effluent treatment conditions – there is no proactive system in place to
 - regularly inspect installation and performance of individual systems
- c. Urban sprawl and ribbon development – the areas of strong urban influence are limited
 - around the main towns. This could also encourage ‘leap frogging’ of restricted area and thus increase commuting distances.
- d. Intensive agricultural activities – run off from excessive slurry spreading on poor soils and
 - inadequate storage of effluent continues to create problems
- e. Hedgerow removal – loss of hedgerow to provide visibility splays for one off rural housing
 - and lack of proactive enforcement of unauthorised removal of hedgerows to be retained around rural housing
- f. Lack of focussed land use planning – intensity of one off housing and intensive agriculture
- g. Diesel laundering washings – expense of fuel has resulted in an increase in this activity in
 - the border area.
- h. Illegal dumping of wastes – landfill charging costs has resulted in an increase in this activity
- i. Draining/infilling of wetlands – advances in machinery and drainage have made it cheaper
 - to carry out large drainage works and also to transport and disposal of topsoil from development sites.
- j. Effective implementation of Water Framework Directive
- k. Effective implementation of River Basin Management Plans – Co. Monaghan lies within to
 - international river basin districts
- l. Depletion of water resources – increases in population and water usage has placed a strain
 - on water resources
- m. Water quality in lakes – eutrophication and phosphorous pollution arising from agricultural activities and one off housing effluent disposal

- n. Ground water quality - pollution arising from agricultural activities and one off housing effluent disposal
- o. Cumulative impact of development on habitats – loss of hedgerows, wetlands, green field habitats, etc.
- p. Environmental scarring resulting from new roads (eg. N2)
- q. Public waste water treatment plants at full capacity in some towns – risk of surface water pollution
- r. Environmental scarring from mineral extraction – numerous rock quarries in the Co. Monaghan. There is also the prospect of gold mining.
- s. Need for greater awareness of sustainable building methods and encouragement of use of sustainable energy sources – general public unaware of availability and useability of sustainable building methods and energy sources
- t. Air pollution arising from greater commuting distances and times – improvements in transport networks facilitates travelling greater distances and shorter times.

2. What are the significant inter-county or cross border (transboundary) environmental issues that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?

The following elements are significant inter county / transboundary issues:-

- b. Compliance with effluent treatment conditions
- d. Intensive agricultural activities
- g. Diesel laundering washings
- h. Illegal dumping of wastes
- i. Draining/infilling of wetlands
- j. Effective implementation of Water Framework Directive
- k. Effective implementation of River Basin Management Plans
- l. Depletion of water resources
- m. Water quality in lakes
- n. Ground water quality
- o. Cumulative impact of development on habitats
- p. Environmental scarring resulting from new roads (eg. N2)
- q. Public waste water treatment plants at full capacity in some towns
- s. Need for greater awareness of sustainable building methods and encouragement of use of sustainable energy sources
- t. Air pollution arising from greater commuting distances and times

The following are also significant:-

- Lack of harmonisation of designated sensitive sites
- Need for co-ordination and sharing of habitats and species data
- Assimilation of landscape heritage protection

3. Are these environmental issues likely to impact negatively on existing Sites (SAC's and SPA's)

The following elements are likely to impact negatively on Natura sites:-

- a. Proliferation of one off housing in the landscape and resultant effluent issues arising from
 - poor waterlogged soils/ sub surface rock
- b. Compliance with effluent treatment conditions
- d. Intensive agricultural activities
- e. Hedgerow removal
- g. Diesel laundering washings
- h. Illegal dumping of wastes
- i. Draining/infilling of wetlands
- j. Effective implementation of Water Framework Directive
- k. Effective implementation of River Basin Management Plans
- l. Depletion of water resources
- m. Water quality in lakes
- n. Ground water quality
- o. Cumulative impact of development on habitats
- q. Public waste water treatment plants at full capacity in some towns
- r. Environmental scarring from mineral extraction

4. How might these environmental issues be addressed through the RPGs?

- Direction from RPG to require co-ordinated approaches in respect of landscape and habitat protection policy
- Direction from RPG to require commonality of designations of habitats and sensitive areas
- Common approach set out in RPG in respect of construction/demolition waste management/disposal
- Greater cohesion of planning policies in respect of impacts upon landscape and water quality
- Clear guidance in respect of implementation of Water Framework Directive
- Clear guidance in respect of implementation of River Basin Management Plans, particularly in respect of trans-boundary and trans-region basin districts.
- Co-operation in utilisation of shared water resources

5. In addition to identifying the environmental issues, can you please indicate which of the following headings are likely to be affected by the environmental issues identified:-

14. Biodiversity **YES**
15. Population **To an extent**
16. Human Health **YES**
17. Fauna **YES**
18. Flora **YES**

19. Soil **YES**
20. Water **YES**
21. Air **To an extent**
22. Climatic factors – **Monaghan is a nitrogen emissions hotspot due to intensive agriculture**
23. Material Assets **YES**
24. Cultural heritage, including Architectural and Archaeological **NO**
25. Landscape **YES**
26. the interrelationship between the above **YES**

8.0 Key Environmental Issues in County Cavan

What do you consider to be the significant environmental issues within your county that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?

1. Biodiversity

- Habitat Destruction/alteration/reduction/segregation
 - o Development on greenfield area
 - Cumulative loss of natural habitat, replacement of natural habitat with semi-nature and artificial surfaces, segregation/fragmentation of habitats, loss of hedgerow – rural housing, land reclamation, intensive farming, road developments
 - o Development on floodplains/ wetland areas
 - Drainage of wetlands, construction on floodplains, drumlin county synonymous with lakes, construction on lands used by migratory birds, run-off from developments into water courses, removal of hedgerow, culverting of streams, increased recreational use of natural assets (e.g. lakes), development along lakes and riverbanks resulting in a reduction in ecological connectivity between habitats. Disruption of hydrological regime – problems for groundwater, lakes and subsequent drinking water
 - o Hedgerow removal and Woodland removal
 - While the hedgerows are generally species rich in comparison to neighbouring counties, however large areas have been removed due to the narrow nature of roads or agricultural practices
 - o Erosion and Pollution
 - Soil erosion and impact on water quality, aquatic flora, fauna, fish; run-off from agriculture, domestic, industrial and municipal effluents – eutrophication, fish kills, salmonid species stock reduced due to their sensitivity
 - o Invasive Non-native Species
 - Significant threat to terrestrial flora and fauna, aquatic species – cause major ecological changes, damage to habitats, impacting on the native species where they become established, financial implications, long term effect on the environment (e.g. filter feeding zebra mussels, phosphorous storage in lake sediments).
 - o Climate Change
 - Implications for biodiversity – impact on habitats, species distribution and patterns, temperature variations may eliminate species etc.

2. Population and Human Health

- Population growth and infrastructure constraints
 - increases in population impacts on biodiversity, water quality, landscape and cultural heritage and which would impact on human health
 - poor water and waste infrastructure incapable of meeting demand, resulting in shortages of water supply and poor quality water serving urban areas

- Waste discharges from municipal sewers entering groundwater/drinking water – water supplies that are not ‘safe and secure’
 - All development is dependent on water supplies and demand is increased
 - Urban runoff as a source of pollution in water courses.
 - Air Pollution
 - Settlement patters which result in long commute times, poor quality of life
 - Amenity Space
 - Open spaces are increasing coming under pressure for development
 - Road Safety
 - Pressure on road infrastructure, increased accidents if not maintained
 - Waste Generation
 - Waste to landfill would increase in the absence of appropriate measures for reducing, reusing and recycling are not implemented, thus impacting on human health
 - Waste food acting as a draw for wild animals – e.g. ‘urban foxes’, disruption of normal feeding patterns
 - Greenfield site development
 - Development on Greenfield sites impacts the quality of the natural environment, fragmenting habitats, destroying them and thus impacting on human health in the long term
- Landscape and Soil
 - Impact of development
 - Impact on soils, geology – extractive industries, wind energy developments, forestry practices, agricultural development, rural dwellings, industrial and commercial and road projects and other major infrastructural projects
 - Soil Erosion
 - Removal of vegetation due to agri activities, forestry practices, construction works on Greenfield sites
 - Loose soil is washed away impacting on water quality, fisheries
 - Excess nutrients on land which is saturated results in run-off to surface water – eutrophication and pollution of water supplies
 - Loss of subsoils, topsoils and mineral rock being extracted
 - Large industrial processes can result in land contamination and intensive landuses such as landfill
 - Visual impact
 - Cumulative effect of one-off rural dwellings, larger developments such as wind energy, extractive industries, forestry, agriculture, industrial and commercial developments and road projects
 - Rural Housing policy facilitating local housing need, siting and design which minimises impact on the landscape
- Water
 - Pollution – harmful substances in the water from a range of activities – agriculture, municipal treatment works, domestic wastewater treatment

- systems, forestry, construction projects, industry, landfills, motorised boats, spillage incidences
 - Eutrophication – over concentration of plant nutrients particularly phosphorus due to human activities
 - Capacity of lakes differs – shallow lakes are particularly sensitive
 - Changes to ecological balance of a water body which will impact on human activities and reduce biodiversity
 - A number of lakes ‘at risk of not achieving good status’ under WFD
- Agricultural industry and agri wastes
 - Intensive farming enterprises – build up of nutrients in the soil, post saturation results in run-off
 - Excess nutrients are a waste product
- Municipal WWT and Domestic WWT
 - Population growth in a county of dispersed rural population has resulted in growth of dwellings requirement individual wastewater treatment systems
- Groundwater contamination
 - Exposed to higher concentrations of pollutants in the layers of rock and soil, slow movement of water through the aquifer.
 - Security and safety of drinking water supplies, aquifer characterisation, vulnerability and source protection
 - Impact on fisheries
- Forestry
 - Establishment of forestry in sensitive upland areas, marginal lands in close proximity to surface water can impact on fisheries through erosion of soil and sedimentation
- Flooding and Drainage
 - Development in floodplains and development in close proximity to water courses - contamination of supplies, siltation and changes in drainage patterns which impacts on wider area and biodiversity
 - Drainage of wetlands, channel management, boat movements, water abstraction, water shortages – impacts ‘down stream’
 - Storm water storage, quality of hard and soft surfaces in urban areas
- Conservation of water
 - Monitoring of leakages and reduction of same
- Climate Change
 - Seasonal variances in flood occurrences or incidences of drought.
- Invasive Species
 - Major ecological changes and damage to habitats where established
 - Loss of native populations
 - Economic implications
- Air and Climate
 - Emissions
 - Localised air pollution

- Transport patterns – commuter
- Impact on quality of life and health
- Noise pollution
- Light pollution
- Development design
 - Energy consumption
- Destruction of habitats
 - Loss of biodiversity, trees and bogs which act as carbon sinks

Material Assets

- Roads Infrastructure and Landscape
 - Major implications for landscape, biodiversity and air quality
 - Facilitates the use of private vehicles thus contributing to air emissions, disrupts landscapes, habitat fragmentation
 - Deficiency in sustainable travel access
- Greenfield development
 - Habitat fragmentation and segregation
 - Extractive industries draw on non-renewable resources
 - Large wind energy/ extractive industries and impact on roads infrastructure
 - Cumulative impact of smaller scale developments on the landscape
- Insufficient water supplies and wastewater treatment
 - Growth in population and capacity of infrastructure to cater to demand
- Cultural Heritage
 - Damage to archaeology
 - Loss of undiscovered archaeology and removal of in-situ artefacts due to Greenfield developments
 - Development in urban areas
 - Loss of character from protected structures or protected streetscapes

What are the significant inter-county or cross border (transboundary) environmental issues that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?

All of the above are significant at an inter-county and transboundary level.

- Water – ground and surface – catchment approach – commitment to WFD
- Tourism (geo-tourism)
- Ecological Corridors on a Regional basis
- Waste
- Landscape Character – commitment to Landscape Convention
- Infrastructure
- Biodiversity Conservation and enhancement
- Energy supply and consumption

Are these environmental issues likely to impact negatively on existing Natura Sites (SAC's and SPA's)

Yes, cumulatively there is a likely significant impact on Natura 2000 sites.

How might these environmental issues be addressed through the RPGs?

Lower level plans filtering through down to individual projects to take account of local biodiversity whether within designated or non-designated sites in designing projects and consideration of in-situ and ex-situ impacts. – AA will examine this in Natura 2000 sites.

Promotion of ecological corridors and linkages in the Border Region (both large scale to very small scale).

Biodiversity in the wider countryside – not limited – enhancing biodiversity from one-off houses to shopping centres to roads projects, species rich

Cross border projects on Invasive Species (e.g. zebra mussel)

Promotion of Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans.

Regionally important landscapes – landscape convention, mineral resource protection and examination in relation to designated sites or otherwise.

9.0 Conclusion

The meeting/workshop raised a wide range of environmental issues of strategic importance under each of the topic headings. Opinions were offered during the course on how these issues might be addressed in the RPG's. Recurring issues included surface water quality, groundwater quality, water conservation, waste management, human health & quality of life, population increase, infrastructure needs, loss of biodiversity, use of natural resources, energy conservation, urban air quality, traffic management, climate change, flood risk & coastal protection, landscape, loss of agricultural land and cultural heritage. Issues in respect to water quality, biodiversity and settlement patterns feature strongly in the submissions. Issues in respect to climate change and flooding are gaining prominence.

The transboundary impacts of the implementation of the RPG's in respect to Northern Ireland will be given particular consideration during the SEA process.

Whereas Air and Noise emerged as less significance issues it is considered appropriate that these issues should be 'scoped in'

In general terms the issues raised and proposals forwarded as a result of the meeting are considered to be relevant to the SEA process. Accordingly it is appropriate that these issues should be dealt with either directly or indirectly in the Environmental Report and will inform the making of RPG's.

This meeting taken in conjunction with other consultations and other considerations will assist in establishing the items to be 'scoped in/out' under the different environmental topics.

Also, it is considered appropriate that the requirements in respect to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (Habitats Directive Assessment) should be integrated into SEA process but yet should be a separate document.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Copy of e mail forwarded to Local Authority Planners requesting their participation in the SEA Scoping Meeting

Appendix 2

Agenda for SEA Scoping Meeting

Appendix 3

Summary Minutes from SEA Scoping Meeting/Workshop held on 11 March 2009 in Raddison Hotel Athlone

Appendix 1 - Copy of e mail forwarded to Local Authority Planners requesting their participation in the SEA Scoping Meeting

Planners

I refer to the review of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region 2010 – 2022 and your nomination (by the Technical Working Group - Senior Planners in the Region), to assist in the Strategic Environmental Assessment process. Following on from my email dated 02 February 2009, you are requested to attend a meeting in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Athlone on 11th March 2009. The meeting will be held in the Goldsmith Meeting Room from 10.30am to 1pm. It is critically important that each County is represented at this meeting. Tadhg O' Mahony of the EPA will also be in attendance to provide assistance and guidance on the process.

In order to participate in the scoping exercise, you are invited to submit to the meeting, a Summary Report (max. 5 pages) outlining what you consider to be the significant environmental *issues^[1]* within, and adjoining your County, that should be addressed in the review RPGs. You will then be required to provide a short verbal presentation of your findings at the meeting on the 11 March 2009.

In order to provide a structured approach to this task, we request that you answer questions 1- 4 under:

Questions

5. What do you consider to be the significant environmental issues within your county that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
6. What are the significant inter-county or cross border (transboundary) environmental issues that should be addressed in the Environmental Report?
7. Are these environmental issues likely to impact negatively on existing Natura Sites (SAC's and SPA's)
8. How might these environmental issues be addressed through the RPGs?

In addition to identifying the environmental issues, can you please indicate which of the following headings are likely to be affected by the environmental issues identified:-

1. Biodiversity
2. Population
3. Human Health
4. Fauna
5. Flora
6. Soil

^[1] Recurring environmental issues in SEA Reports include surface water quality, groundwater quality, water conservation, waste management, human health & quality of life, population increase, infrastructure needs, loss of biodiversity, use of natural resources, energy conservation, urban air quality, traffic management, climate change, flood risk & coastal protection, landscape, loss of agricultural land and cultural heritage etc

7. Water
8. Air
9. Climatic factors
10. Material Assets
11. Cultural heritage, including Architectural and Archaeological
12. Landscape
13. the interrelationship between the above

For example : ‘Increased Rural Housing’ (proliferation of septic tanks) may fall under headings 2, 3, 7, 10, 11 and 12

Reference to the existing Environmental Reports, particularly with regard to County Development Plans, and consultation within your local authority i.e. Environment Section, may provide you with a good source of information for the above. Should you have any questions with respect to the above, please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile or this email address.

Regards

Padraig Maguire
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Appendix 2 – Agenda for SEA Scoping Meeting

Agenda

1. Outline and Review of the Regional Planning Guidelines – Padraig Maguire, RPG Implementation Officer
2. Outline of SEA process in review of RPGs, key environmental issues to be addressed at the Regional level, role of Scoping in SEA & drafting of Scoping Report – Tadhg O’ Mahony, EPA
3. Short presentation from each of the six planners from relevant planning authorities in Border Region on key environmental issues to be addressed in SEA Scoping Report
4. Discussion on key environmental issues to be addressed in Scoping Report and agreement on SEA objectives
5. Close of meeting

The meeting will commence at 10.30am sharp and will conclude at 1.00pm, followed by lunch.

Appendix 3 - Summary Minutes from SEA Scoping Meeting/Workshop held on 11 March 2009 in Raddison Hotel Athlone

Attendees:

Tadhg O' Mahony	EPA
Padraig Maguire	Border Regional Authority
Terry Savage	Louth County Council
Paudge Keenaghan	Leitrim County Council
Eunan Quinn	Donegal County Council
Mihaela Davidescu	Sligo County Council
Toirleach Gourley	Monaghan County Council
Theresa O' Reilly	Galway County Council (representing Cavan County Council)

Meeting opened with an outline of the RPG review and the associated SEA Process by Padraig Maguire, RPG Implementation Officer.

This was followed by a presentation by Tadhg O' Mahony of the EPA on the relevance, content and appropriate level of SEA required for the Scoping and Environmental Report in the RPG review. Some of the key facts emerging from this presentation include:-

- ◆ Relevant Statutory Instrument is 435 of 2004 – European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans or Programmes)
- ◆ Monitoring Section of SEA will be carried out through monitoring of RBMPs relevant to the area. It is accurate and correct to state this in the Monitoring Section of our Environmental Report
- ◆ What are the data gaps in the Region?
- ◆ What are the transboundary issues?
- ◆ An Environmental Report is being carried out on Lough Oughter. An SEA will also be required on the works on the Ulster Canal
- ◆ Border Regional Authority should do a submission to relevant RBMPs
- ◆ We need to establish the vulnerable areas in Northern Ireland that may be impacted by the new Guidelines
- ◆ In the mitigation section of the Environmental Report, basic mitigation measure should be accompanied by supplementary measures
- ◆ There is no requirement for new information in the drafting of the Environmental Report however, a new analysis of existing information is required
- ◆ The EPA suggests the following approach to RPG review:-
 - Follow RBMP/POM Catchment Approach
 - Maximise use of Existing Information
 - Standardise Approach/Format
 - Consider Contract(s) for Multiple SEA's
 - Establish Technical Working/ Advisory Group
 - Understand Environmental Obligations

- Maximise use of Resources -Avoid duplication of effort – WFD!
- View SEA as an Opportunity to enhance Guidelines
- Define the type of impact on the environment i.e. severe/moderate etc

- ◆ It is considered appropriate to state that lower levels plans will go into a greater level of detail on environmental issues

Tadhg is to consult a number of colleagues within the EPA to establish:-

- ◆ How and what datasets will be available for Regional Authorities to use in carrying out SEA?
- ◆ Baseline data should be established on a national basis as all regions are doing the same thing

Important Environmental Topics include:-

- ◆ Flooding
- ◆ Agriculture – maintaining high level agricultural land will be critically important to the Region
- ◆ Appropriate assessment – should be integrated into SEA process but yet should be a separate document
- ◆ Water – quality and drinking water
- ◆ New shellfish designated areas will be important that they are protected

When looking at alternatives in the Environmental Report, Tadhg suggests the following alternatives could be considered:-

1. Gateway/Hub settlement approach
2. Dispersed rural settlement approach
3. A combination of the above with a number of additional sub hubs

Once again, Tadhg agreed that the alternative approaches could be agreed on a National basis between all Regions

Following both presentations, planners from the relevant local authorities presented a summary of the strategic environmental issues within their county. These issues are further outlined in reports submitted to the BRA by each planner.

Summary by Tadhg O' Mahony

- ◆ A summary table should also be provided for the Scoping Report outlining the issues that have been scoped in and out during the workshop and which must be considered in the Environmental Report
- ◆ The workshop can be used as part of the formal SEA Process

A general discussion followed after which the Project Manager thanked those in attendance and this concluded the meeting.