

River meeting 19 September 2025
Cork Biodiversity Hub
Notes from the Meeting by Julie

In attendance:

Pat Tuite, Colette Finn, James Little, Bilge Karaman, Malgo Rzata, Kim Ling Morris, Tom MacSweeney, Aoife Desmond, Eithne Lynch, Maria Young, Pauline Cudmore, Louise Jordan, Usna Keating, Chris Moody, Caroline Crowley (online) Julie Forrester

BIO REGIONAL WEAVING

Caroline Crowley reported on Thursday's meeting with Sarah Prosser at The Centre for Sustainable Co-Operative Studies, UCC. (about creating bioregioning networks)
Bioregioning is landscape level restoration method that has been tested in the global south and is now being rolled out globally, and intended to be a movement away from the extractive model towards human culture. Sarah Prosser has been sharing what's happening in SE Ireland with a view to adapting it to other regions in Ireland. Bioregioning begins with understanding our region at the geological level and working upwards understanding its influence on the biosphere our landscape of rivers and soils, and what we understand to be the natural world, to human interactions - agriculture and human settlements and networks. It is noted that our use of county boundaries do not match the geological or biosphere- bioregioning attempts to look back at how human connections evolved before county boundaries.

There are strong natural relationships between West Cork and South Kerry (Cork City = The Dingle peninsula) and Sarah Prosser has been invited to advise on how we might build networks in this bioregion. Many of the groups proposing to return to a more caring model for the natural and social economy are funded by philanthropy and we need to increase awareness and the interest of businesses who will understand and support the development and investment in the bioregioning model.

There are in every region groups who are working at local and grassroots level and the bioregioning model gives a coherency that will establish partnerships and reinforce networks that will enable us to develop scale and become politically relevant.

Looking at farming, water and energy in collaboration, presenting individual as well as local and regional interests.

An example of this is Birdwatch Ireland, and the work of Paul Moore who is already engaged in mutual arrangements with farmers. "Our Farm" in Watergrasshill is another example and an initiative that is supported by Sarah Prosser's Group.

Sarah Prosser will be visiting our Group next **Friday 26th September at 11 am** in the Biodiversity Hub. Today we tested the zoom connection and we have invited groups who cannot attend in person to tune in to the session online.

BLACKPOOL FLOOD DEFENCE SUBMISSIONS

Chris Moody shared a presentation on the OPWs Flood scheme in Blackpool.

Chris led us through numerous sites on the Bride that has been engineered to accommodate city expansion. The river has been straightened and bridges have been widened, the river has been culverted and disappears underground in extensive parts of Blackpool to such an extent that we would not know a river is there. The OPW's plan proposes to build more flood containment walls, culverts and 'landscaped' areas.

The river wildlife and biodiversity corridor is at risk.

Chris reminds us that otter holts and resting places should be protected under EU laws but in practice they are not.

Officially a derogation licence is needed to establish the impact of a development on the river fauna. The OPW say they don't need a license as they won't be disturbing holts or roosts.

Plans address lighting but take no account of the impact of culverting the river on other elements of the food chain that play a vital role in the ecosystem.

It is normal practice for the OPW to make decisions before the impact is considered. River management is seen first and foremost from an engineering perspective and advisors are from engineering firms.

Rivers are allowed to become dumping grounds and drains so they can divert the problem/solution to one of human waste and culpability.

Insurance is a huge driver in flood management. The people of Blackpool need to get insurance.

Earlier plans had agreed to include a retention lake but this was left out during the works.

The OPW conceded on 7 points suggested by Chris (I didn't catch these!)
The OPW conceded on these points because if they fought and lost a case it would set a president.

The EPA didn't contribute to the Scheme.

Inland Fisheries contributed to Cork City Development Plans on heritage grounds, the historic value of the river.

A Recent example of successful retention can be found in the Clonakiity Scheme, a big field near the Dunnes Stores has been given over to from a temporary lake holding 300,000 cubic metres of water. A sluice gate controls the flow of the water through the town.

Attempt to limit the negative impact of engineering on the environment

Damage has been done by building on a flood plane - engineering must deal with heritage works.

In Glanmire trees have been removed from the banks as they can fall and cause blockages at bridges etc.

It is the Glenamought river, and not the Bride which is the biggest contributor to water flow in Blackpool.

Upstream storage will require concrete embankment and fencing

The OPW need to address storage of water on Farmland, which is the opposite of historical management, which was always about drainage. Getting the farmers on board.

Flood scheme costs - the current estimate is 22 million with 219 properties affected.

Public consultation is cosmetic.

An upstream storage solution was never presented to the public

In 2016 upstream storage was a cheaper option, estimated at 10 million euro while the culvert was estimated at 12 million, current 2025 costs have almost doubled to 22m

The Save Our Bride Otters Campaign has had an impact:

The impacts on biodiversity and the environment are now recognised as being permanent, significant and negative

The SUBMISSION DEADLINE is 10th OCTOBER

Chris will set out objections to the OPW scheme in bullet points for us to compile individual responses which will carry more weight than a generic one

CRAG member can choose their own priorities from the bullets and list these in order.

Notes

All the concrete surfacing at Blackpool shopping centre should have had accommodation for run off - there was meant to be an below ground retention tank under the car park - this did not get built.

Other SUDs packages could be put in place - rain gardens and soakage solutions

ESKER BOX

Usna introduced us to the Esker Box available from the Central Library Grand Parade. As not all equipment may be needed for a project Cork City Council propose to create smaller kits on loan for specific purposes. It is important to upload findings to The National Biodiversity Database. www.biodiversityireland.ie Citizen's reports yielded the recent capture of the predatory Asian Hornet in Cork and destruction of two nests

HOUSEKEEPING

One member was not aware of the structure of the group. Maria clarified that she is chairperson, Julie is Secretary and Jenny is Treasurer as proposed, elected and formalised at our seventh River Group meeting on Friday 28th June 2024. It was agreed that these would be revolving and non hierarchical roles. All of our meetings are minuted by a volunteer in attendance, and the memos are sent out after every meeting. Please refer to these if in any doubt.

NOTES to the group re

Water Heritage Day Event 24 August

Pauline Cudmore proposed an event for Heritage week and applied for funding from LAWPro for publicity and signage. The proposal was for a kick sampling event in Ballincollig for Water Heritage day. During the organising for this event it transpired that another event proposed by the Environmental office of Cork City Council was taking place in Ballincollig Park during Heritage Week. The CRAG proposal proposal to carry out kick sampling on the river would be duplicating on plans already in place. Meanwhile we found out that we were successful in our application for a grant of €500 from LAWPro for signage and publicity for an event. Well done Pauline.

And so we changed tack, and held a fantastic event on Water heritage day, Sunday 24th August, at the Biodiversity Hub. Pauline delivered an informative talk about water invertebrates as indicators for water health. This was followed by a creative session facilitated by Julie Forrester where participants were invited to create ceramic pieces based on the creatures from Pauline's talk. With the expectation that the finished tiles will be included in The Biodiversity Hub's ceramic mural. The event was joyful and fun and well attended, another successful CRAG event brought together in super quick time. All of this work was voluntary and so we had no overheads.

The LAWPro grant for CRAG Signage and Publicity

With all of the changes and the to-ing and fro-ing we discovered that this was a more complicated decision than it first seemed. We had first to establish an Instagram and a Facebook page as these would have to be accessible in any printed signage. We are planning for a popup sign containing all of our contact information. This took time to co-ordinate.

Maria and Julie have asked James and Bilge, who have already kindly contributed the website for the group, to set up the accounts. The LAWPro grant will be spent on this process and the resulting signage. We trust the group approves of this decision. We will inform LAWPro about the changes.

The Chairperson and Secretary do all of the background administration and follow up for CRAG - we are in conversation at least once week - please understand that we are not able to consult with everyone in advance of actions proposed by individuals at group meetings - we do our very best to follow through and keep everyone informed as we go along.

Please find information below about **OPW works in Blackpool**.

Points from Chris shared previously in mailouts to the group
(we are awaiting the 7 bullet point - **thanks Chris**)

The scheme is composed almost entirely of hard defences. Walls and massive concrete trash screen upstream of Blackpool Village and the total covering over of 350m of River Bride flowing through Orchard Court and in front of the church.

The environmental impact report makes it clear that there will be a permanent significant negative impact on otters, bats and fisheries.

Extensive culverting is an outdated and brutal practice. Inland Fisheries describes the proposal as the 'Sterilization of 350m of viable salmonid habitat'.

Upstream storage, an option for Blackpool in the options report would be a much better long term, climate change adaptable solution for Blackpool.

The EIAR (non-technical summary) can be seen here - https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Blackpool_FRS_Vol_1_EIAR_Non-Technical_Summary.pdf

Submissions made during the last consultation can be found here including our own <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-public-expenditure-infrastructure-public-service-reform-and-digitalisation/collections/submissions-received/>