

## Community Stakeholder Input for *The Nore Vision* – Interests and Concerns

This document is an unedited record of the interests and concerns of resource users, interest groups, members of the community and political representatives. The opinions expressed in community workshops were varied and wide-ranging, but the themes covered remained remarkably consistent across the stakeholders consulted in different parts of the catchment. One comment encapsulated many of these:

*“Our legacy is very poor compared to what we inherited.”*

Below the interests and concerns are presented under the headings of various themes that emerged in the workshops. The main themes (principal headings) were identified in *every* stakeholder workshop.

### Water Quality

- There is widespread concern over **pollution** and the standard of **water quality** throughout the catchment, with 40% identified as poor quality. This is a concern for all consumers and recreational users.
- Excessive **abstraction** is identified as causing **lower levels of water** in the River; during dry periods the water is too low for fish and other wildlife, and reduces the potential for water based recreation. It will also have impacts on ground waters.
- **Conservation** of water quality and quantity is needed, with **rational use of water** resources, especially as the human population increases.
- The impacts of **overdevelopment** are also a concern. For example, development is surpassing the investment in infrastructure i.e. sewage plants.
- **Flooding** also creates problems of increased effluent, debris and sediment in the River. For example, with increased flooding, the water table is higher which results in waste water and septic tanks overflowing into rivers as a result (leading to contaminated farmland and drinking water).
- Problems are identified with **land drainage**. Loss of bogs (through drainage and turf cutting) and (policy-led) drainage of farm wetlands has increased run-off and contributed to flooding and erosion.
- A **lack of information** about the causes of problems with water quality was noted, with specific questions arising, such as
  - Whether there is raw sewage still going into the River at Bennettsbridge, Thomastown, etc.?
  - Is there data available on improvement with the new Rathdowney sewage and waste water level?
  - Is there still **heavy metal contamination** (such as mercury) in the riverbed from the Stonearch chemical spill in the 1980s?
- Concerns over the effects of pollution on water quality include:
  - General concerns over waste water treatment such as-
    - there is a lack of **investment in infrastructure**;
    - **urban waste water treatment plants** (these need upgrading in terms of capacity – e.g. Callan has grown two-fold since 2005);
    - storm drains and sewage treatment/**sewage overflow**;
    - the **level of sewage treatment** undertaken;
    - the need for **removal of phosphates**;
    - inadequate handling of **industrial effluent** from food processing units;
    - **domestic treatment systems** of one-off houses in rural areas;
    - **diffuse pollution**; with run-off from farms and contamination from households (ineffective treatment systems, overuse of detergents, etc.) both identified as a cause of excess nutrients entering the River (**eutrophication**).
  - Problems of **plastics and litter** in the water.
  - Problems of **hormones** (from human medications) entering the water, and feminising fish populations, etc.
- The **role of authorities** in pollution control (e.g. conducting farm inspections) was questioned given the various general concerns raised above, and the County Councils’ contributions to pollution of the River

which have not all been fully addressed. Lack of action to solve issues such as plastic micro-beads was also raised.

- Specific concerns were raised, e.g.
  - At Mount Juliet's Jock's Weir pumphouse, where the County Council pumps water from the Nore to a concrete tank that serves Stonyfort, Thomastown and Bennetsbridge, there is no treatment of the water;
  - There is still raw sewage going into the River from the industrial estate and the town (Callan). This must be resolved so the River can thrive for people and wildlife.
- It was noted that nature has its own indicators for poor quality water and pollution, such as the presence of salmon or behaviour of cattle. Cattle are good natural indicators of water quality. They will always go to the cleaner sources and prefer to drink from a stream. However, when I put mains water supply to troughs in the fields 20 years ago (along the River), the cattle all went to drink from the troughs instead of the River. Since then, the sewage plant has been improved ... but is it adequate?
- **Forestry** – Identified as one of the top four pressures on water bodies<sup>i</sup>. **Management practices** in forestry, and particularly in **conifer plantations**, are not addressing negative impacts on water quality, including:
  - increased soil acidity (particularly associated with conifer plantations which are most widely planted);
  - sedimentation, often caused by big machinery used at timber harvesting and other operations, and which is not sufficiently mitigated through adequate sediment traps and lagoon;
  - the impact of forestry (practices) in loss of the sponge effect in the uplands; water is coming off the land really fast from run-off through drainage channels;
  - reduced water levels in streams and rivers.
- **Households** - Excessive and unnecessary use of **detergents** and **bleach** was identified as a problem, and there is a low level of awareness about this. The problem is exacerbated by the low price of detergents for washing machines, dishwashers, etc.
- **Agriculture**
  - The **expansion** of the dairy sector following removal of milk quotas, greater intensity of farming (increased livestock numbers) under government policy (Harvest 2020, Food Wise 2025), and associated nutrient enrichment, are all concerns. Incentives for intensification are in conflict with environmental objectives.
  - Loss of the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) and the less effective subsequent **agri-environmental scheme** (Green, Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme or GLAS) mean fewer environmental benefits.
  - The GLAS requirement for a set back from the River means that it is no longer a recreational facility.<sup>ii</sup>
  - Requirements on farmers, such as seasonal deadlines on hedge cutting and slurry spreading lack flexibility. "**Calendar farming**" or standardised regulations are not necessarily suited to local situations, which need local solutions.
  - Cattle accessing streams and rivers do damage to water quality.
  - Continued need for **information and education** for farmers. E.g. farmers are conscious of pollution, especially **slurry spreading** out of season, but do they all know that they should not be doing it just before or after rain? It's not in the farmers' own interests as (soil-fertilising nutrients in the slurry) ends up in the River or polluting their own water supply. Similarly, do all farmers distinguish between "soiled water" versus "slurry" and know that these should be separated?
  - Farmers and landowners face a range of challenges, including:
    - Reduced farm viability along the riverside due to flooding;
    - An uncertain policy environment;
    - A lack of respect for farmers and landowners.
  - Road washing, slurry agitation, drainage, afforestation, etc. – need to **raise awareness** amongst farmers of the significance of these activities for the River.
  - Over-use of **pesticides** and **herbicides**.

## Flooding

- Flooding is a significant concern in the catchment:
  - occurring **annually** and with **serious impacts** for communities, businesses, agriculture, infrastructure and water quality along the River and its tributaries;
  - Floods are **lasting longer**, while 100-year flood events are happening **more frequently**;
  - **Flash flooding** is becoming more common, with **less time for advance warning** of rising water levels.
- The **speed of water** downstream (through Bennettsbridge and Thomastown) has increased dramatically since the flood relief scheme in Kilkenny was put in. The flooding problem has just been pushed further downstream.
- Bog was working (as a sponge) up to 30 years ago. Then bogs drained for forestry in Slieve Bloom. Loss of natural floodplains and the drainage of wetlands between Freshford and Kilkenny that used to hold water, affects the volume of water in the River. A number of **pinch points** along the River specifically need to be addressed, e.g. Thomastown, the Ballyragget area.
- Development is flagged as an issue. For example, the **impact of motorways**; built across the floodplain (near Castletown), it forces the River to back up and flood.
- Current OPW proposals are seen to be addressing the symptoms but not the cause, e.g. in Inistioge.
- There is **inadequate management** of the waterways, streams and drains. There is **no catchment approach** to flooding amelioration or management which is imperative, nor any clear **responsibility** for the management of the results of flooding, such as fallen trees carried downstream and blocking waterways.
- **Flood mitigation** – The potential of natural flood defences and mitigation measures needs to be considered. No “soft engineering”<sup>iii</sup> options are being presented, only hard engineering proposals for flood measures. We can’t keep building higher defences; hard engineering must be complemented with natural solutions. Pilot schemes are needed to assess natural water retention methods which are controversial at present. For example, investigating how much native forestry will help with flooding downstream, and the use of a “farming water” approach. Look at experience elsewhere such as the UK Environment Agency “River Restoration”.<sup>iv</sup> Smaller measures are also necessary, such as leaving the roots when trees are felled to help stabilise the bank.
- Forestry - more **native broadleaf planting** is needed for flood mitigation (water retention).
- **Flood management measures are not seen as fit for purpose** - The solutions currently proposed to the flooding that is occurring are not realistic or suitable for villages or towns.

## Natural Heritage: Ecology & Biodiversity

- There is widespread concern for the health of the environment and overall ecology of the River. The range of habitats along the River is seen to be degrading and species of flora and fauna are in decline. This interconnected **habitat destruction** and **loss of biodiversity** is a problem, with reports that kingfishers and otters are no longer seen in places where they were previously, curlew and corncrake are rare. Crayfish were scarce before the current plague threat. Invertebrates are much diminished, meaning there is less to feed the fish.
- Loss of **wetland habitat** (with its water attenuation role), **siltation** of the River, and **barriers** or obstacles within it (for fish and other wildlife), were all identified as problems.
- Specific localised issues were identified:
  - Cutting grass at Bishop’s Meadows is ruining the following wildlife: snipe, skylarks, linnets, bullfinches, shrew, field mice, goldfinches feeding on flower seeds, and various types of snails.
  - The impacts of washings from the coalmines is still seen in a lack of insect and fish life in the rivers.
- The River Nore is seen as an environmental resource where it has clean water, good biodiversity, etc. but it is currently being negatively affected by poor quality water, inadequate maintenance (for example of small streams and headwaters for spawning salmonids) and invasive species. Trout and salmon have been largely replaced by coarse fish. We must not lose what we have, but instead enjoy them with nature trails and picnic benches etc.

- Legislation on habitats is not strong enough. However, it is also important to protect and conserve wildlife that does not have special protections.
- **Hedgerow** removal and poor (over) management results in loss of protection for birds/ wildlife, e.g. when cut at the top and sides.
- Expertise is needed to manage appropriate planting, with the River being a corridor for wildlife. More **broadleaved trees** are needed which support biodiversity, with fewer spruce and firs which block too much light and are not good for biodiversity. “Tunnelling” of the River where trees close to each bank meet overhead, shutting out light from the River is also a problem. Funding and grants to support this is also needed.
- **Forestry** is identified as affecting the ecology and biodiversity in and around rivers:
  - Light reduction (especially when forestry is planted too close to the river’s edge) alters the river habitat.
  - **Coniferous forest** has caused a fall-off in the numbers of birds, hares and other species needing open ground.
- The **Nore freshwater pearl mussel** (*Margaritifera durrovensis*), while no longer considered to be a separate species, is a unique genetic conservation unit. We will lose this iconic Nore mussel forever through the extinction of this **unique population**. This would be very sad for the country, and particularly for the locality of Durrow, after which the taxon is named .... There are **multiple pressures** in both the upper catchment (peatland drainage, clear-felled coniferous plantations) and throughout the River, including near the River (intensive land use and land drainage). This exacerbates drought flows and peak flows, both of which negatively affect mussels, and prevent species-rich wetland riparian areas from recovering (required for juvenile mussel food). Remaining adult mussels are associated with riparian trees, but this is not the ideal situation for juvenile mussels, and thus just prolongs the time to extinction rather than contributes to population recovery.
- **Biosecurity** – The **crayfish plague** on the Barrow has an impact on local users of the River Nore.
- **Climate change** – The impact of climate change, increased flood events, drought, loss of important species.

### Invasive species

- Invasive species are a serious problem. They pose significant threats to the biodiversity of the River and its catchment, but there is a **general lack of awareness** or understanding of the issue and a poor ability to identify these species.
- In the River Nore catchment the following invasive species are identified as needing to be managed and/or eliminated: Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), Japanese knotweed (*Impatiens glandulifera*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), mink (*Neovison vison*) and zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*), barbel species of fish.<sup>v</sup>
- Tackling elimination of invasive species **requires a catchment-based approach**, including awareness-raising and provision of information on how to appropriately and effectively control or eliminate particular invasive species.

### Cultural & Built Heritage

The industrial heritage of the Nore is our interventions that have shaped and manipulated the River. The Nore fed Kilkenny up to 150 years ago; food came in on barges, along with anything people couldn’t grow or make themselves.

- **Industrial heritage** (mills, weirs, bridges, quays, viaducts, walled river at Derrylahan, underground walled channels, etc.) is not respected and is increasingly forgotten about and there is **no management** of most historic features. A proportion of this, at least, needs to be used and restored otherwise there is a real risk that it, along with **unique features** and internal workings, may be lost through neglect.

- Lots of the cultural and other heritage (e.g. folklore, field and townland names, access, etc.) along the River is **undocumented**. This should be discovered and identified, so that people can see what heritage we have. (For example, the Cataracts Stream “Tobar na Suile”, Atha Bawn.) The local bridge here was falling down after years of farm vehicles bumping it when taking water from the stream. People who moved into the area wanted to keep the well/stream and so restored the bridge *with* a place for the farmers to pull up to access the water (near Urlingford).
- Our **natural heritage** also needs to be recognised, documented and valued. This includes areas with unique geology and the cultural and built heritage associated with these, like the coalmines.
- Help people recognise the heritage that we have; the importance of the Nore for transport of food, goods and people, with markers at significant spots and accessible information.

## Access

- **Lack of safe access** to the River, particularly outside urban areas, is a widely identified issue.
- Access is recognised as necessary to **facilitate recreational activities** in, on and beside the River.
- Traditional access points should be investigated and confirmed wherever possible. For example, there is confusion, legal arguments and disputes over ownership and rights of access.
- Landowners and farmers are faced with several **challenges**:
  - responsibility (**liability**) for accidents and fear of prosecution (“Wicklów case”);
  - people **dumping** rubbish into the River (or on the land nearby);
  - **maintenance** of fences, stiles, etc. Some landowners say that what they are currently being paid to maintain access and walks is wholly inadequate. If this work is done properly it ends up **costing** the land owners, so that they effectively *pay* for having walkers on their land.
- **Permission** for access from landowners can be hard to obtain and some are shutting off traditional access routes. Personally, I have huge problems with opening my lands to the public. 99% of the public are fine ...Horses have been killed on my lands. How do I open up my lands to the public but at the same time keep out the undesirables? I have to do a litter pick early morning any day I have a corporate outing.
- In many places, access is difficult or impossible because of excess vegetation.
- **Visual access** to the River is also problematic:
  - Linear Park walk (~1.5km) has only 3-4 points where you can see the River in the summer as it is so overgrown. This “tunnelling” is a problem along about 60% of the Nore from Ballyragget to Inistioge.
  - I used to bring kids to the River to see trout, otters, etc. but you can’t see anything now.

## Recreation

- Greater **interest** is needed in the River for its under-utilised amenity potential: for walks, birdwatching, tourism, swimming, boating, cycle trail, nature and heritage study and appreciation, etc.
- **Support** is wanted for provision of amenity and recreational facilities along the River.
- Adequate safe **access** needs to be provided for recreational activities which requires addressing the concerns of landowners related to provision of access, as well as necessary infrastructure. (See related access issues that need to be addressed in order to facilitate enhanced recreational opportunities.)
- Significant potential for water sports for all ages is identified, but a **lack of physical facilities** (and access) means this is not realised.
- **Swimming** - up to 30 years ago, you could swim anywhere in the Nore and swimming in the River was commonplace in the past, but far less now, and there is little culture of this. Traditional bathing areas on the White Horse river (Mountrath) are no longer used. Castletown is the most popular outdoor swimming area in Laois. People come from as far away as Portlaoise, families with picnics. A safe swimming area is a priority but children can get stuck in the build-up of silt behind the weir. Quality safe swimming areas like the Thomastown pool are needed along the River and its tributaries. Paudie Begadon’s swimming hole (nearest swimming spot to Urlingford) is an important spot for youngsters who walk back to Cullahill from the pool on summer evenings.

- More trails, woodland and extended **walks** are needed (for example from Durrow to Ballyragget and further downstream). Walks, cycleways, nature and heritage trails would generate interest in the River and can also be used by anglers. Explore the potential for combining walkways with related attractions like wildlife sanctuaries.
- However, vegetation growth must be managed so that the River is more visible. Walks (and other amenities/facilities) must be developed with natural flooding in mind and be able to withstand these events and remain usable afterwards.
- Specific localised issues were identified, e.g.:
  - There is little done to develop the **potential** of the River, e.g. walking Abbey Meadow and Motte near Callan, where the water quality, lack of fish and low use of the River does not encourage interest.
  - There is concern that the development of the proposed amenity site at the Old Brewery should not turn into a concrete jungle. It should be a sensible, safe design, with safe access (incl. for wheelchairs) for boats, etc.
  - Natural local river amenity often is not utilised. For example, people get drunk at the Millennium Park by the River in Freshford. Although ideally suited to young families, it is not used as there are no bridges near it and it is relatively inaccessible.
- Increased recreation and appreciation of the River is positive, but there are associated **risks**, such as contamination with the crayfish plague, greater risk of unintentional and incidental damage, litter, etc. These will need to be planned and provided for.
- **Fish populations** - There is **depletion of salmon and trout stocks**, with serious decline from the plentiful stocks of 30 years ago, due to poor water quality, overfishing and climate change. In addition:
  - **Man-made obstacles** for fish migrating upstream need to be addressed, for example at Castletown and The Basin where there is a complete barrier of 8 ft and an inadequate fish ladder.
  - **Siltation and drying out of small tributaries and spawning grounds** have reduced fish populations.
  - **Tributaries are blocked** and not open for fish to return to spawn.
  - There is a **lack of information** on what can and is being done to conserve and increase salmon and trout numbers.
  - There is a need for informed anglers to operate **appropriate catch and release practices**.
  - Disparate community groups not working together effectively (when it comes to fish interests).
- **Fishing** has also declined with some abandoning the sport for a range of reasons: some never resumed fishing after the ban was put in place between Green's Bridge and John's Bridge some 20 years ago; some have given up because the levels of stocks are too low; and fewer take it up possibly because it is seen as an old-fashioned sport. In some areas, it is mostly coarse fishing.
- The River is tidal up to the bridge in Inistioge and therefore has considerable **boating** potential, e.g. bringing barges up to the bridge:
  - Work is needed to make the River more navigable [as mentioned under Maintenance, blockages make the River un-navigable].
- It is important to increase education and awareness of **safety matters** around the River. Lifebuoys need to be in place and maintained but are vandalised.

## Tourism & Economy

- The River has potential to support the economy; through creation of sustainable businesses around tourism (walks, fishing, kayaking, etc.). But tourism needs joined-up thinking so that it does not threaten wildlife, water quality or built heritage.
- There is interest in the ability to carry out commercial operations in locations close to the River and in proximity to the city: farming, team building and tourism accommodation.
- There is a negative impact on tourism due to the lack of fish for angling.

## Energy

- The River was identified as a potential source of sustainable energy production; with local communities able to benefit through production of their own energy (or revenue from energy production), with schemes sympathetic to the area (i.e. sensitive to local conditions).

## Governance

- There are **too many agencies** involved (NPWS, IFI, Co. Councils, OPW, etc.) which leads to **red tape** and too many surveys.
- There is a **lack of joined-up thinking**, e.g. between different state agencies and between state agencies and communities or other groups. There are clear conflicts in terms of policy, e.g. between the EU Water Framework Directive requirements and the policies and advice of the Department of Agriculture. There is also a challenge in multiple users coming together and a need for more of the good practice that *does* go on, for example, cross-sector partnership between anglers, canoeists and walkers.
- There is **no overall plan**; damage has occurred piecemeal and solutions are piecemeal and not effective. For example, the following (which fall under the control of different government agencies that do not work effectively together) adds up to cumulative damage:
  - Cattle in the River in one spot,
  - Gravel extracted in second spot,
  - Water extracted in third spot,
  - Etc., etc., etc.
- The River is **not managed using a catchment approach**, despite widespread acknowledgement that this is necessary to address the challenge of it being a shared space of stakeholders with different interests and priorities. The main river channel is part of a complex system, yet we only respond to the symptoms of mismanagement rather than the cause. Typically, our response involves hard engineering. In a climate-changed and carbon-neutral Ireland, this is not sustainable.
- There is a lack of clarity on what agency (or group, or individual) has **responsibility** for what. Having **no single authority** governing watercourses, or single point of contact to go to on matters relating to the River, contributes to the difficulty in organising management actions, e.g. removal of weeds, fallen trees. There needs to be clarity on what agency has what responsibility and they should carry out their duties. Often action does not happen as things fall between stools (IFI, NPWS, KCC, LCC, TCC, etc.). For example, the OPW set up the Goul Drainage Committee involving farmers, councillors, and others along the River to keep it as it was (maintain it) once it was handed over from the OPW. This group notified OPW of issues that came up and looked for funding to fix them. The Committee met about twice a year and covered areas in Kilkenny, Laois and Tipperary. Since 2014, it is no longer in existence and no replacement has been notified.
- There are concerns around the **knock-on effects** of town development, overdevelopment and inappropriate development, unfortunate building near rivers, land reclamation, tourism development, etc.
- **Forestry** work is now all contracted to people from elsewhere, so there are **no local contacts with Coillte**, and no sense of social responsibility.

## Regulation & Enforcement

- There is not enough enforcement, and too few enforcement officers, so regulations provide little deterrent.
- EU Directives are not seen as credible as they are not enforced and are blunt instruments.

## Maintenance

- Maintain and preserve the visually pleasing appearance of a clean, healthy and fine-looking river.
- However, there is no clarity about who has **responsibility** for maintenance of the River, which seems to vary in different locations, and to deal with:

- erosion of riverbanks and adjacent land, with deposition / accumulation of land on opposite side of the River<sup>vi</sup>;
- land drainage;
- drain clearance;
- reinstating floodplains;
- care and maintenance of river tributaries and minor streams in catchment;
- problems with maintenance of, and access to, weirs as well as with ensuring that they do not disadvantage fish stocks;
- siltation (at bridges, mill races, etc.);
- overgrowth, blockage of water ways and spawning streams;
- hanging trees;
- trees in the River;
- hazards in the water;
- obstacles to fish migrating upstream to spawn;
- unsuitable planting;
- storm events and associated impacts;
- flooding resulting from lack of maintenance;
- damage from pollution;
- lack of vegetation management;
- re-establishment and maintenance of wildlife corridors along the River;
- blockages making the River un-navigable. For example, Castletown to Ballyragget – river channel choked with debris → unpleasant for kayakers → poor impression;
- preservation of bridge structures, which are falling and decaying, particularly because of increased traffic and HGVs.

The impossibility of getting these issues dealt with efficiently causes real problems and frustration. Different arrangements have existed in different parts of the catchment historically. Maintenance needs to be carried out on an ongoing basis. Taking action as an individual, landowner, etc., is not acceptable in many cases, and specifically where the River is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC, e.g. in Co. Laois and Kilkenny). In addition, in the headwaters (e.g. the Bilboa, Bournea and Slieveardagh areas) there are numerous small streams and tributaries that need to be looked after.

- A wide range of **approaches to maintenance** of the River has been taken historically, but there is no clarity on what measures are appropriate or allowable, and who can carry these out. There are concerns that reasonable maintenance may be prohibited by certain state agencies, and more destructive methods involving heavy machinery may be favoured over more sensitive and appropriate techniques.
- There are frustrations over **hurdles** put in place of positive community proposals such as Blueways to keep the River healthy and beautiful as an amenity for the locals and visitors.
- ‘Clean it, dredge it, let water flow as quickly as possible’ is not an answer. We do not want a channel like a canal to rush the water straight to the sea. **Don’t just dredge and deepen** channels as a response to flooding. We need measures to slow the River down from the uplands all the way to the estuary.
- Maintenance needs to be catchment-wide, co-ordinated and consistent so that negative side-effects are not felt (e.g. by downstream communities).
- **Landowners** need to be involved in the maintenance of the River.
- Freshwater pearl mussel and flora and fauna get priority over human beings. Pearl mussel – anywhere upstream of Durrow – **inhibits maintenance**, leads to build-up of debris, silt. Fisheries (IFI) are not able to clear bridge arches and sluices (in Castletown) as this was not permitted by NPWS because of freshwater pearl mussel downstream. Establish the situation with pearl mussel with a clear report e.g. some work can impact on the pearl mussel, other work won’t impact on the pearl mussel (in contrast to the current blanket restrictions).

## Funding & Regulations for Community Groups

- Demands on community and voluntary groups wishing to carry out works on or around the River are a problem, with “too many hoops to jump through”:
  - there are inappropriate regulatory requirements which are complex, sometimes contradictory, can be costly and involve dealing with multiple state agencies to obtain permissions for works and in carrying them out;
  - obtaining funding is extremely challenging for local groups, requiring sophisticated and specialist inputs, and with low levels of support available for this;
  - there is uncertainty of funding streams from year to year;
- Opportunities are lost because of the difficulties for community and voluntary groups in obtaining support.
- There is an unbalanced funding environment vis-à-vis enterprise support.<sup>vii</sup>
- Not tapping into largest dairy company in Western Europe for more financing assistance (Glanbia).

## Culture & Attitudes

Public ignorance, apathy, lack of respect and underlying contempt for the water environment were all identified as concerns that resulted in damaging or anti-social behaviours.

- People were seen to have lost their connection with the River, with low levels of awareness of the River itself or issues affecting it and the local community.
- Who has a **right to use** the River is not clear, and this does not help with lack of respect.
- There is **not enough local involvement**; it is difficult to get people on the ground interested.
- A need to create a love of place in order to foster a positive relationship with the River and its environment was identified. There is an urgent need to inspire a love for our rivers at the local level and empower people to make meaningful contributions to what are typically opaque technocratic and bureaucratic processes. This involves supporting community-led initiatives and facilitating peer-to-peer learning, as well as demystifying and re-evaluating the decision-making mechanisms that many state agencies employ. Multi-criteria analysis will not be an effective methodology if it does not appropriately weight the strong views of local people.

## Rubbish & Anti-social Behaviour

- Litter, especially plastics (bottles, microbeads, bags, etc.) but also glass, baby wipes and cigarette butts, is a significant problem.
- Dumping of household and other rubbish in and alongside the River is a concern, with some clearly thrown from bridges. Dumping of animal carcasses was also reported.
- The problem of litter and rubbish in the River that is not visible from land/city footpaths is widespread.
- Once in the River, rubbish is washed down to the sea.
- There is inadequate provision of public bins to hold the waste generated in a neighbourhood with fast food outlets, etc. when people are out socialising.
- Anti-social behaviour along the River was noted; with people drinking, damage to personal property and lifebuoys vandalised.

## Education

- There is a general lack of knowledge and education about the River and its environment, particularly on:
  - The River and its catchment – people’s location within it, and interaction with it.
  - What damages the River, such as detergent use, etc.
  - Invasive species (Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, etc. and what people can do about it).
  - Litter pollution prevention.
  - Best practice in relation to (all activities in, on or around) the River.

- A general disconnection from nature, particularly among young people is worrying, and not being adequately addressed.
- We need to change attitudes from people treating the River as a sewer; educate, inform and encourage people to interact with nature, and use the River as an activity base.
- Education is needed for all elements of community from children upwards. For example, the motorway signs drew attention to rivers we never knew we had.
- There is pressure on schools (to educate kids about everything).
- **Citizen science** – More data is needed; ‘how has pollution changed over time?’, etc. Citizen science and groups such as Streamwatchers<sup>viii</sup> represent an opportunity to acquire more data. Existing data needs to be made more available, e.g., where do we get the EPA results?

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<sup>i</sup> The top four pressures on ‘at risk’ waterbodies in Ireland are agriculture (53%), hydromorphology (24%), urban waste water (20%) and forestry (16%). Source: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2018). River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2021.

<sup>ii</sup> This point relates to how access to river banks may be prevented when farmland is fenced off from rivers and how the fenced-off areas then become overgrown and so further inaccessible. For example, to participate in GLAS in areas of high status water sites or vulnerable water sites, farmers must fence off all watercourses from bovines in order to protect water quality and vegetation on riverbanks. Their farmland must be fenced off 1.5m (5ft) from the top of the riverbank. Outside of those areas, farmers can choose to opt for this action called ‘protection of watercourses from bovines’. Source: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/farmingschemesandpayments/glastranche3/GLAS3Specification031116.pdf>, accessed 18 April, 2018.

<sup>iii</sup> Soft engineering is where ecological principles and practices from the natural environment are used to address flooding and erosion along rivers and coasts.

<sup>iv</sup> See: RESTORE (2013). Rivers by Design: Rethinking development and river restoration. A guide for planners, developers, architects and landscape architects on maximising the benefits of river restoration. Bristol: Environment Agency.

<sup>v</sup> As there are not any barbel in the River Nore or its tributaries, this reference is thought to relate to coarse fish.

<sup>vi</sup> For example, The Nore Vision heard at a workshop how if one landowner keeps their part of the riverbank cleared of debris, they are more likely to experience erosion if the rest of the River is not being consistently maintained. In some cases, these responsible farmers are losing land while landowners across the River who have not cleared may be gaining land.

<sup>vii</sup> For example, participants described how the capacity of volunteers in a community group trying to access funding for a project aimed at a public good may differ from the capacity of professionals from an enterprise seeking to access funding for a private business. Recognising this difference may mean that funders would provide animation support for community groups to help them to access public funding.

<sup>viii</sup> Streamwatchers are trained volunteers who act as stewards of their local streams by collecting water quality data to help track the health of the streams over the long-term.