

Taoiseach will ‘personally intervene’ to reverse Lady’s Island Lake disaster

Environmental crisis unfolding at Wexford site

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An Taoiseach Micheál Martin has vowed to “personally intervene” to reverse an “ecological disaster” unfolding at Lady’s Island Lake in Wexford.

The largest lagoon of its type in Ireland, it is home to a unique ecosystem and is described as one of the most important ornithological sites in the country hosting increasingly rare birds like terns, tufted ducks, wigeon, teal and pochard.

But all of this is under massive threat. An increase in nitrogen and phosphorus levels in the lake means that the unique ecosystem there has gone from “near pristine” conditions in the 1970s, to the verge of complete collapse.

Pollution from agricultural practices in the area are said to be the sole biggest contributing factor to the steady decline of Lady’s Island’s unique ecosystem, which now teeters on the edge of total collapse.



An aerial view of Ireland's largest saltwater lagoon Lady's Island Lake. Photo: Niall Carson/PA

In a recent Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy, Wexford County Council stated that the 56 farmers currently draining into the lake are largely compliant with current regulations set out by the Department of Agriculture. While the committee meeting set out that Wexford County

Council would lead a multi-agency emergency response in a bid to try and save the unique habitat at Lady's Island, Green Party Leader Roderic O'Gorman questioned how things had reached the point of collapse before a course of action was decided upon. Speaking during Leaders Questions on Wednesday, he

said: “This is not some new environmental catastrophe; this problem has been in the making for more than 40 years and has been allowed to continue. All the various enforcement and accountability arms of the State, including local authority inspections, Teagasc and other mechanisms, failed to protect Lady's

Island Lake.” He then asked if the Taoiseach would task the Minister for Agriculture to take the lead.

“Will he agree that it must be a priority to reverse the pollution of the lake? In light of the absence of sufficient action for more than four decades, a solution needs force and the political clout a senior Cabinet Minister brings in order to bring together the relevant stakeholders and ensure that they deliver.”

“Will the Taoiseach task the Minister with ensuring that action is taken to stop an ecological disaster that is unfolding in real time and in full view of us all?”

The Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, agreed that the reversal of pollution at Lady's Island must be a priority and that a “specific action plan” should be developed with the involvement of the Minister of State responsible for biodiversity.

“I know it is not the Deputy's intention to apportion blame, but he is clearly saying that farming is creating the nutrient run-off into the lake,” Mr Martin continued. “Clearly, the solution is going to have to involve neighbouring farmers. I will engage with the Minister of State, Christopher

O'Sullivan, the Minister, Martin Heydon, and the Minister, Darragh O'Brien, and ask them to come together to coming up with a plan to deal with this issue.

“It is possible to get a good outcome, but an action plan involving all stakeholders has to be developed with a view to getting the outcome the Deputy correctly identified. It is not satisfactory to have ecological devastation at such an important site for a range of reasons.”

Deputy O'Gorman said that a different approach was required, one with political leadership and accountability to the fore.

“The damage here has been building for four decades and the existing processes just have not worked,” he said. “In place of a thriving ecosystem, we are going to end up with a toxic goo lagoon. If we fail to act, we do not have far to look to see what is next for Lady's Island Lake. Lough Neagh is already described as toxic due to the algal bloom it experiences each summer.”

The Taoiseach said that he was committed to finding a solution. “I will personally intervene to see if we can get an action plan put together to start the process of reversing this,” he said.