

**Opening Statement**  
**to**  
**An Cathaoirleach**  
**&**  
**Members of the Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and**  
**Energy**  
**on**  
**Our Lady's Island in Co. Wexford**

**EPA Commissioned Report**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2025**



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## **1 Introduction:**

Lady's Island Lake or Loch Tóchair (Tóchair =causeway) is an important natural heritage site on the south Wexford Coast. The site is protected by two overlapping areas including an SPA or Special Protection Area, designated in 2010 for terns and several species of waterbirds, and an SAC or Special Area of Conservation designated in 2018 for habitats including coastal lagoons, reefs, and vegetated shingle.

Lady's Island Lake is one of the largest lagoons in Ireland, measuring 340 hectares (840 acres). Under the Water Framework Directive, Lady's Island Lake lies within the Ballyteigue – Burrow Catchment and the Kisha 010 sub basin.

The Kisha 010 sub-basis is approximately 7339 acres, with approximately 4,734 acres (Clear Report) draining into Lady's Island via twelve feeder streams and other sub drainage systems.

No conversation about Lady's Island Lake would be complete without mentioning Our Lady's Island, one of the most ancient shrines of Our Lady and one of the oldest of pilgrimages in Ireland. Although there is no record of Our Lady's pilgrimage until the coming of the Normans a tradition has always existed in the Barony of Forth, that it was a place of pilgrimage from the earliest days of Christianity in south Wexford.

## **2 Problem**

The two most challenging management issues, currently impacting on Lady's Island Lake are:

- Improving water quality and
- Controlling the water level in the lake

Water quality in Lady's Island Lake has been poor since at least the early 1980's, over forty years ago. The most recent research report on the status of Lady's Island Lake, published by the Environmental Protection Area (EPA), prepared by AQUAFAC and co-funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) confirms the long-understood reality that the lagoon and its feeder streams are badly polluted. Agriculture is clearly the main pressure with large inputs of nutrient (nitrogen and phosphorus) run-off from land causing severe pollution and damage to the ecology of Lady's Island Lake.

The CLEAR project which brought the subject report to publication in January of this year has outlined that a 5-to-7-fold reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to Lady's Island Lake will be necessary to return the lagoon to its earlier condition.

Wexford County Council (WCC) welcomes this report as it further highlights the creeping deterioration of the Lake's water quality over the past forty years, confirms that the main issue is with current agricultural practices and points to a considered way forward in an effort to reverse the Lake's poor water quality status.

Agriculture within the sub-basin draining to Lady's Island Lake consists of seventy-two farmers. There are thirteen farmers where their primary enterprise is tillage. There are sixteen farmers where their primary enterprise is dairy. There are twenty-four farmers where their primary enterprise is beef. There are six farmers where their primary enterprise is sheep, and the remaining thirteen farmers are equine related or specialise in hay/silage for sale. There are only seven farmers in derogation/stocked above 170kg Org N/ha. Of the above farmers, there are approx. fifty-six farmers draining to

Lady's Island Lake. This figure was calculated using the catchment extent figure from the Clear Project Report and the 2022 LPIS data received from DAFM.

The catchment is known for its early potatoes, the famous Carne potatoes, known right across Ireland, including varieties such as Homeguard, Premier and British Queens (almost ironic when remembering An Gorta Mór).

The agriculture practices problem clearly outlined in the EPA report and as evidenced over many years, is not the 'fault' of the farmers involved, all of whom are operating substantially within the rules and advice for application of nutrients as per Department of Agriculture Controls.

### **3 Actions**

Since 2018 WCC has conducted thirty farm inspections under planning application requirements, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits and through environment complaints. A further ninety inspections of septic tanks were conducted under the National Inspection Plan between 2018 & 2022, of which sixty-three failed the inspection. There were twenty-one systems found to directly discharging to surface waters in the catchment area. Six septic tank failure cases remain open and are being actioned by WCC.

The small wastewater treatment plant serving the beautiful village of Lady's Island caters for a population equivalent of 182 persons (Uisce Eireann December 2024) and generates nutrient inputs of less than 0.5 tonnes / annum of Nitrogen and less than 0.1 tonnes / annum of phosphorus. The total annual inputs from all sources, (principally agriculture) amount to sixty tonnes of Nitrogen and 1.8 tonnes of phosphorus. Thus, less than 1 % of the nitrogen inputs arises from the wastewater treatment plant. Notwithstanding the relatively miniscule nutrient inputs from the wastewater treatment plant WCC has twice upgraded the plant including phosphorus reduction.

WCC carried out sampling in April of this year of all twelve feeder streams and at a discharge point from Moorlands on the southwest of the lake. The results show that eleven out of thirteen sites exceeded the Nitrate-N limits for surface waters. It also revealed that eight out of thirteen sites exceeded the Ortho-phosphate limits for surface waters.

## **4 Solutions**

The EPA CLEAR report suggests a series of remedial techniques which WCC agrees with, including the

Fencing of watercourses

Provision of water troughs

Buffer zones to drainage outlets

Hedgerow Planting

Native Woodland Planting

Elimination of cattle drinking points

Sediment traps

Settlement ponds

Riparian zones

Arable grass margins

Farm roadway works.

Soil sampling and Nutrient Management Plans

Additional advice for farmers on their specific enterprises, farmyard design, land topography and land use.

WCC is suggesting a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Scheme or similar national scheme to be co-funded or funded directly by the Department. The Duncannon EIP scheme is included in the Appendices which has delivered measurable success within the Duncannon drainage catchment area.

The Duncannon EIP scheme which was commenced in 2018 (interrupted by Covid) and finalised in 2023 was a voluntary scheme that addressed the sources of pollution, went above and beyond the Nitrates Directive, whereby individual farmers were paid grant amounts for works carried out, examples of works as set out above, and were also paid on an annual reward basis contingent on specific outcomes.

## **5 Costs**

Based on the costs outlined in the Duncannon EIP, a similar scheme for Lady's Island would cost in the region of €2.25m

This does not include biomanipulation or dredging of the lakebed.

The cost of the proposed pipelines(s) to control water levels in Lady's Island Lake is estimated at €2.5m. The salinity of the waterbody is critical in this respect.

Whilst the nutrient inputs from the wastewater treatment plant are, as discussed previously, small, the cost of removing the wastewater inputs to the lake and bringing the wastewater to Tagoat would be in the region of €5m - €6m. This assumes that the proposal to pipe effluent from Tagoat to Rosslare Harbour (currently being progressed by UE) goes ahead. At present, given the pollution issues at Lady's Island, this action would not be Value for Money in resolving the pollution problem at Lady's Island Lake.

WCC welcomes the recent focus on the pollution of Lady's Island Lake and the invitation to address and interact with the Joint Committee. We sincerely hope that this recent focus will lead to a practical and workable solution. It will take the expertise of the various environmental and agricultural bodies working together to solve the problem and of course adequate funding. Wexford County Council is happy to lead on such a solution.

Thank you.

## **4 Appendices**

Lady's Island Feeder Streams Report 2009

Life Application 2018

Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities (EIP) Final Report 2023

Comparison of sample results from 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009 against 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025.