



Minister James Browne and Minister Christopher O'Sullivan announce plans and supports for Lady's Island Lake restoration, Lady's Island, Co.Wexford. Also in photo are Eimear O'Keefe, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Eamonn Hore, Wexford County Council, Cllr Ger Carthy, Cathaoirleach Rosslare Municipal District, Cathaoirleach Cllr Joe Sullivan, Cllr Frank Staples and Catriona Ryan, NPWS. Photo: Patrick Browne

Polluted lake gets €700k in funding to support water quality management plan

Our Lady's Island Lake is currently at poor ecological status for its water quality

SIMON BOURKE

Plans to restore Our Lady's Island Lake to its former glories have begun in earnest after Housing Minister James Browne announced €700,000 in funding to support its restoration. At a special event held in the community centre in Our Lady's Island, Minister Browne confirmed that this first tranche of funding will set in motion "serious improvements" to a body of water which has previously been described as "an ecological disaster" by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"This funding will resource Wexford County Council (WCC) to coordinate a response among the government departments, state bodies and the local community in Our Lady's Island," said Minister Browne. "I am confident that by continuing

to work collaboratively, using all the tools available to us through my department's funding of initiatives under the Water Action Plan, the Nitrates Action Plan, Uisce Eireann's Capital Investment Plan and the National Biodiversity Plan, serious improvements can be made here at Lady's Island."

According to the minister, the €700,000 will support the development of a Water Quality Management Plan for Our Lady's Island with measures to address excess nutrients from agriculture, domestic waste water treatment plants (septic tanks) and urban waste water treatment plant(s) entering the lake. This will require engagement between WCC, the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory (ASSAP), the Farming for Water EIP and Uisce Éireann.

"Significant funding and support for the restoration of Lady's Island is already underway through the programmes such as those run by LAWPRO through catchment science and local community engagement," added Minister Browne.

In terms of water quality, Our Lady's Island lake is currently at Poor Ecological Status (2016-2021), and poor or bad status has been reported

by the EPA at the lake since 2009 largely due to elevated levels of nutrients.

However, Cathaoirleach of WCC, Councillor Joe Sullivan, said the council was "fully committed to protecting the lake's habitat and the species which depend on clean water for their survival".

"The joint committee on climate, energy and environment will hold a further meeting to discuss its status in Spring of next year," said Cllr Sullivan. "WCC will learn from previous projects such as the one in Duncannon, and we will listen to our farmers, agriculture sector and wider community."

As the local representative for the area, Cllr Ger Carthy, along with director of services Eamonn Hore, is leading the campaign to rectify the damage done to the lake and he said this would be a long and difficult journey for all involved.

"This won't happen overnight, it's going to take a massive effort and a massive amount of money, but we have the full commitment of the community here," he said. "But as Eamonn alluded to, I believe that in ten year's time we'll be further along the road to ameliorate the issues here."

Noting that a project to create a permanent solution for

the lake had begun 40 years ago and had been repeatedly stymied by issues with salinity testing, Cllr Carthy said those issues would be resolved by March of next year and hoped the government would "seriously consider funding that project".

Joining Minister Browne from the Department of Housing was Minister of State, Chris O'Sullivan, TD. Although a native of Cork, he revealed some strong Wexford connections as he recounted how he had been tasked with setting "the wheels in motion" on the Our Lady's Island project.

"This place is very special to my heart, my wife is from Wexford, from Adamstown," he said. "Birding and birdwatching is also a passion of mine, and Co Wexford is a mecca when it comes to birdwatching."

"In May of this year, James called me into his office and said 'we need to talk about Our Lady's Island'.

"You could see from the outset how dear this area is to him. He pretty much ordered me to get the wheels in motion and see how we can orchestrate a response, and without his sense of urgency we wouldn't be here today."

Funded by the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme.