



## Enhancing water quality – changing mindsets

### Farmers leading implementation of sustainable water management solutions

**“In the past 5 years, agricultural production in Ireland has been increasing significantly, so there is a growing need for sustainable farming practices to alleviate pressure on Ireland’s natural water bodies” – Carol Quish, Project Manager of the Irish Mulkear Operational Group project that supports farmers to take the lead in mitigating agricultural impacts and enhancing water quality within the Mulkear catchment.**



The Mulkear catchment in the Limerick and Tipperary counties of Ireland is considered ‘at risk’ because of a worrying decline in the water quality across the catchment. The Operational Group (OG) Mulkear-EIP has designed a programme to support farming activities, whilst bringing about catchment-scale improvements in water quality. “We wanted to implement a local, farmer-led collaborative partnership, to co-design an innovative suite of mitigation measures” Carol Quish explains.

The Mulkear-EIP OG launched an open call for farmers to join their programme. All of the farmers involved attend regular Discussion Group meetings. Together with the project team and other local stakeholders, they identify problems and co-create practical and sustainable water management solutions. All farming activities are represented, including dairy, suckler and beef cattle, to bring a balanced perspectives to the discussion groups. “The discussion groups are about changing mindsets, raising awareness and capacity building, empowering farmers to address farming related impacts on water quality, and it is also about co-design and co-development of applicable solutions” explains Carol.



The project team also works with each farmer to draw up an individual farm plan with specific measures to improve water quality. These include, for instance, *nutrient management* such as inclusion of clover and application of lime, *grazing infrastructure* like protecting water courses and *farmland enhancement* such as in-field mounds. One of the participant farmers explains “One of the measures that we are applying is low emission slurry spreading, [...] we have to be more conscious of the time of year and the weather when we spread. It gives a more efficient use of nitrogen while protecting the environment” The farmers in the Mulkear catchment have traditionally spread manure in Autumn, even though at this time of year the ground is water logged and increases the risk of nutrients reaching local water bodies. Changing

this mindset leads to results which are both beneficial for the farmers and provide co-benefits for surrounding ecosystems.

In 2022, the project team will assess how successful the different mitigation measures are for improving water quality, and will provide results-based payments to the farmers. In this way, participating farmers are rewarded to reflect the success of their actions.

The project will disseminate the outcomes of this collaborative work, “We aim to share best practice via Digital Story Telling and an award system to recognise farmers and local river champions” – says Carol.

“As well as ensuring sustainable farming practices at local scale, we hope that the results of this project will also help to inform wider water quality and environmental practices and policies.” – says Carol, It’s important to highlight that Irish farmers are willing to do these measures and help improve water quality.”

### Project information

- **Contact:** Mulkear EIP Project Manager: Carol Quish [carol@mulkeareip.com](mailto:carol@mulkeareip.com) +353 (0)83 1044609
- The project is led by Mulcair Catchment Limited, others involved are the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as well as stakeholders from the wider community.
- Over 60 farmers will participate in the programme which will run for 5 years.
- More information on Mulkear EIP-Innovation in the [EIP-AGRI database](#), on the [project website](#)
- [Project brochure](#)
- [Project video](#) – interviews with farmers

