

EU agencies study Mid-West waterways

- Latvian and Greek agencies adopt good practices after visit

Three Mid-West environmental and tourism projects have been showcased as good practice examples to regional development agencies from 8 countries across Europe.

Regional development agencies from Finland, Slovenia, Latvia, Greece, Romania, Netherlands, UK and Ireland last week visited Lough Derg, and the Olatrim (Tipperary) and Groody (Limerick) Rivers.

The study visit, which also included a conference in Limerick's Strand Hotel, was organised by the Mid-West Regional Authority (MWRA) as part of its ongoing remit as a partner agency in the EU-funded 'Territories of Rivers Action Plans' (TRAP) project. The two-year project is aimed at benefitting partner regions through the transfer of good practices in integrated water and landscape management.

Cllr. Oliver Garry, MWRA Cathaoirleach said: "The TRAP project and interregional meetings such as this enable the MWRA to benefit from exchanges with other partner regions, each of whom has particular expertise in one or more areas such as governance, monitoring, aquatic environment or river tourism. The MWRA can also share its best practises in the area of governance, given its extensive experience of Regional Planning Guidelines and the important role that they can play in the sustainable development of an area."

During last week's visit, the TRAP partners were addressed by a number of public agencies with responsibility for Lough Derg, including Waterways Ireland, Fisheries Ireland and the OPW. The group were also addressed by Dan Minchin of the Lough Derg Science Group who gave a perspective on the ecological and historical aspects of Ireland's third largest lake. The partners took a boat trip of the lake between Ballina and Garrykennedy and enjoyed an Irish music recital with dance by 30 pupils of Gaelscoil Aonach Urmhumhan (Nenagh). Visits were also undertaken to the Olatrim and Groody Rivers which are subject to improvements works by the OPW and Fisheries Ireland under the Environmental River Enhancement Programme (EREP).

Joe MacGrath, North Tipperary County Manager and the MWRA's Designated County Manager said the study visits to Lough Derg and the Olatrim and Groody Rivers have led to three of the EU partners transferring the good practices implemented in the Mid-West into similar domestic projects.

He explained: "We were delighted to be able to facilitate a visit to Lough Derg during which we showcased the work of the Lough Derg Marketing Strategy Group, a collaborative approach of public state agencies and private sector representatives, in relation to marketing Lough Derg and improving its tourism functionality. Our project partners from Greece are taking this good practice and transferring into their own policy and have also identified the Mid West Regional Planning Guidelines as a good practice."

"Furthermore," Mr Conneally added, "policies adopted in the Region on landscape, flood risk assessment and protection of aquifers were lauded by our Latvian partners who will be transferring these policies into their own regional planning strategy. They hope to improve policy guidance at a regional level as this is weak in Latvia, and of particular relevance to a number of rivers that traverse Latvia but originate in neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, our UK partner, The Association of River Trusts is transferring the environmental and ecological work practices being implemented on the Olatrim and Groody Rivers into its own projects."

Liam Conneally, Director of the MWRA said the visit will feed into the progress already made by participating project partners since the TRAP project was initiated in 2012.

“Through its participation in this project, the MWRA is seeking to improve the governance of lake tourism, for Lough Derg in particular,” he added.

Mr. Conneally continued: “The MWRA and the South-West Regional Authority (SWRA) hosted a joint Irish stakeholders’ meeting in October 2012 which attracted 20 representatives from 15 organisations in the Mid-West and South-West regions. Major challenges were seen to be about partnerships, local ownership of problems, engaging of communities, integration of policies, inter-relationships between issues and coordination between organisations. The MWRA are currently working in conjunction with the Lough Derg Marketing Strategy Group to identify how two particular good practices of the TRAP project will be imported from other partner regions and transposed to the situation of Lough Derg to provide a more holistic approach to governance of the region.”

TRAP is co-funded by the ERDF Interreg IVC programme. Project partners include Kainuun Etu Ltd (Finland); Association of River Trusts (United Kingdom); Zemgale Planning Region (Latvia); Regional Development Agency of Western Macedonia SA (Greece), MWRA and SWRA (Ireland); Waterboard Noorderzijlvest (the Netherlands); National Institute of Research Development for Mechatronics (Romania); and Soca Valley Development Centre (Slovenia).

For more on the TRAP project visit www.traproject.eu.

