

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

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CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Fish Kill at the ESB Power Station on the River Erne at Ballyshannon

Published at 12:00 noon on Wednesday 21 May 2014

I wish to advise members of this Assembly of my concerns in relation to a recent fish kill involving the loss of a substantial number of juvenile eels (elvers) at the Ballyshannon power station operated by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB).

The ESB hydro-electric plant at Ballyshannon on the River Erne represents a significant barrier to the passage of migratory fish including wild Atlantic salmon and the European eel. In order to mitigate against the risk ESB is required by European law to manage methods to ensure safe fish passage and to comply with the EU Eel Management Plan (EMP's) for the catchment.

As part of its commitment ESB, manages a "trap and truck" eel conservation fishery on the Erne to by-pass the dams. While the arrangements agreed with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and my Department have worked well in the past, I am aware that there was an incident last year which resulted in elver mortalities at Ballyshannon, as a result of a failure by ESB to maintain the fish trap.

I have been advised of a further incident at Ballyshannon, which occurred over Easter, with the reported loss of approximately 100kgs of elvers from the Erne system. This has happened at a time when eels stocks are under considerable pressure throughout Europe and the loss is significant bearing in mind that the total elver run in the Erne system for 2013 was only was 215kgs.

When informed of this incident, my officials immediately raised their concerns with the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources (DECNR) and IFI and requested an urgent report from ESB. The responsibility

for this fish kill lies solely with ESB and I am far from satisfied that the company is carrying out its responsibilities in relation to compliance with the EU Eel Management Plan.

My Chief Fisheries Officer met with ESB and IFI officials in Ballyshannon on Wednesday 7 May and the IFI is currently undertaking a formal investigation and is assessing what sanctions are appropriate in the circumstances.

I have also written to Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD, Minister of State at the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources to express my concerns and calling on ESB to be held to account. I have also sought his support in formalising protocols with ESB to ensure that the arrangements on all fish passage issues on the Erne are in place.

I will keep members of this Assembly updated on developments.