Irish Rural Link

25th May 2017

**Community Wetlands Forum Launch Strategic Plan 2017-2020 as part of Biodiversity Week 2017**

President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins will be guest of honour at an event in Abbeyleix Manor Hotel, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois today, Thursday 25th May, hosted by the Community Wetlands Forum. The event is organised in the context of National Biodiversity Week 2017 and will highlight our society's dependence on the natural environment for our food, our water, our health and our wealth. The Community Wetlands Forum will also launch their new Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020, a copy of which will be presented to President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins.

The Community Wetlands Forum (CWF) was established under the umbrella of Irish Rural Link in September 2013. The initiative came from community groups involved in wetland conservation who were developing the idea of wetlands as assets for their communities, as well as work undertaken by Irish Rural Link on behalf of communities affected by the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

There are currently 8 local community groups who are members of the CWF, with more interested in joining. Members include Abbeyleix Bog (Laois), Wetlands Heritage Ireland (Longford), Cabragh Wetlands (Tipperary), Schohaboy Bog (Cloughjordan, Tipperary), Clara Bog (Offaly), Ounamoun Nature Reserve, Drummin Bog (Carlow), and Girley Bog (Meath). The forum is also attended by representatives from Environmental NGO’s, Third Level Education Institutes and State Agencies.

The launch of the Strategic Plan today will showcase some of the work the CWF has done to date and the work of each of the members as well as some local school projects and young scientist projects. President Michael D. Higgins, who remains an avid supporter of conservation and wise use of wetlands and peatlands, will speak at the event.

Seamus Boland, CEO of Irish Rural Link, says “The CWF has put in a great deal of work and effort to get the forum off the ground and this will be evident at today’s event. Each group have shown what community engagement and working together is really about as a network and in their respective Peatland and wetland”.

With this event and the launch of their Strategic Plan, the CWF hope to raise awareness of the value of wetlands for local communities and the value of community engagement for the protection and wise use of wetlands.

The event takes place from 3-5pm.

Ends

**For further information, please contact (anytime):**

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**About Irish Rural Link:**

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of over 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level.