

Kilteel Group Water Scheme

**Extracted from:
County Kildare Groundwater Protection Scheme,
Volume II: Source Protection Zones**

County Kildare Groundwater Protection Scheme

Volume II: Source Protection Zones

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APPENDIX VII: KT Cullen & Company. Source Protection Reports for Monasterevin, Rathangan, Johnstown Bridge and Robertstown.

- Overall conclusions are contained within Volume I -

13 Kilteel Group Water Scheme

13.1 Introduction

The objectives of the report are as follows:

- To delineate source protection zones for the groundwater supply at Kilteel.
- To outline the principal hydrogeological characteristics of Kilteel area.
- To assist Kildare County Council in protecting the water supply from contamination.

The protection zones are delineated to help prioritise certain areas around the source in terms of pollution risk to the well. This prioritisation is intended to provide a guide in the planning and regulation of development and human activities. The implications of these protection zones are further outlined in ‘Groundwater Protection Schemes’ (DELG/EPA/GSI, 1999).

The report forms part of the groundwater protection scheme for the county. The maps produced for the scheme are based largely on mapping techniques which use inferences and judgements based on experience at other sites. As such, the maps cannot claim to be definitively accurate across the whole county covered, and should not be used as the sole basis for site-specific decisions, which will usually require the collection of additional site-specific data.

13.2 Location & Site Description

The source is located 2 km east of Kilteel village, Co. Kildare, on the north west facing slopes of Cupidstownhill. The source comprises a spring & sump located in the townland of Cromwellstown. The source was commissioned in 1963. A sump 2.5 m deep and 2 m wide was built over the spring. The sump is covered with a concrete cap. Water flows from the sump via gravity to an 18,000 gallon reservoir situated 400 m directly downslope of the spring. According to the group scheme administrators the scheme provides water for about 220 people. At present there is no chlorination of the water at the source.

13.3 Summary of Source Details

GSI No.	2921NWW157
Grid reference	O ³ 00513 221703
Townland	Cromwellstown
Owner	Kilteel Group Water Scheme
Source Type	Spring
Elevation (ground level)	285 m OD (Malin Head).
Static water level	Ground level
Normal consumption (Co.Co. figures 2000)	13,000 gals/day (60 m ³ d ⁻¹)
Yield (estimates from group scheme administrators)	160 m ³ d ⁻¹
Depth of sump	2.55 m
Depth-to-rock	~5 m

13.4 Methodology

13.4.1 Desk Study

Details about the spring such as depth, date commissioned and abstraction figures were obtained from County Council personnel; geological and hydrogeological information was provided by the GSI.

13.4.2 Site visits and fieldwork

This included the following;

- Interview with the group scheme personnel 9/5/02;
- Water sampling October 2002;
- Field mapping walkovers on 14/3/02 and 9/5/02 to further investigate the subsoil geology, the hydrogeology and vulnerability to contamination.

13.4.3 Assessment

Analysis of the data utilised field studies and previously collected data to delineate protection zones around the source.

13.5 Topography, Surface Hydrology and Land Use

The spring is located on the leading north western slopes of the Wicklow hills. It occurs at a break of slope at about 250 m O.D. To the east of the spring the slopes continue upwards to the highest point in the vicinity of the spring - Cupidstown Hill (379 m O.D.) in the order of 1 in 11. The topography to the west of the spring as far as Kilteel village become less steep, with slopes in the order of 1 in 18. Beyond Kilteel village the topography is relatively flat.

There are frequent springs and streams in the area. Approximately 470 m south of the source spring another spring of similar magnitude occurs at the same topographic contour. Cupidstown Hill and Cromwellstown Hill form the watersheds in the area and the spring lies in the catchment of the Kill, Slane and Liffey rivers.

The land use around the spring is predominately sheep and cattle grazing and some forestry. One large quarry sits just on the watershed at Cromwellstown Hill.

13.6 Geology

13.6.1 Introduction

This section briefly describes the relevant characteristics of the geological materials that underlie the Kilteel source. It provides a framework for the assessment of groundwater flow and source protection zones that will follow in later sections.

Geological information was taken from a desk-based survey of available data, which comprised the following:

- Bedrock Geology (Mc Connell *et al*, 1994).
- Information from geological mapping in the nineteenth century (on record at the GSI).
- Wicklow County Council Groundwater Protection Scheme (Woods, L., Wright, G., 2001).
- Soils of County Kildare (Conry, M. J., Hammond, R. F. and T. O'Shea, 1971).

13.6.2 Bedrock Geology

Greywacke³ sandstones, shales and slates dominate the area. Further details are given in Section 2 Volume I. These rocks are exposed in the large quarry at Cromwellstown Hill where they dip steeply (80°) to the east.

³ Greywacke are sandstones or siltstones that are cemented by a high proportion of mud deposited from currents loaded with sediment on seafloor slopes.

13.6.3 Subsoil (Quaternary) Geology

13.6.4 Till (Boulder Clay)

‘Till’ or ‘Boulder clay’ is an unsorted mixture of coarse and fine materials laid down by ice. Till is mapped around the source, except in the uppermost reaches of the hillsides, where due to elevation and steep slope rock is very close to surface.

13.6.5 Sand/gravel

Isolated sand/gravel pockets are mapped in the area and there are numerous small sand/gravel pits. Note no sand/gravel is mapped in the vicinity of the source. However, group scheme administrators indicate that sand/gravel was found during excavation of the spring supply and it is likely that small sand/gravel pockets do occur in the area of the source.

13.6.6 Depth to Bedrock

The area around the hill tops is mostly outcrop and shallow rock. Moving down slope toward Kilteel the depth to bedrock deepens to >5 m.

13.7 Groundwater Vulnerability

Groundwater vulnerability is dictated by the nature and thickness of the material overlying the uppermost groundwater ‘target’. No sand/gravel aquifers are mapped at the source and considerations of groundwater vulnerability concern the permeability of the whole subsoil profile and the depth to bedrock. A detailed description of the vulnerability categories can be found in the Groundwater Protection Schemes document (DELG/EPA/GSI, 1999).

Mapped depth to bedrock varies from 3-5 m near the source to less than 3 m closer to the watershed. Consequently, vulnerability ranges from high at the source to extreme at the watershed (refer to Maps 6 and 8).

The vulnerability mapping provided will not be able to anticipate all the natural variation that occurs in an area. The mapping is intended only as a guide to land use planning and hazard surveys, and is not a substitute for site investigation for specific developments. Classifications may change as a result of investigations such as trial hole assessments for on-site domestic wastewater treatment systems. The potential for discrepancies between large scale vulnerability mapping and site-specific data has been anticipated and addressed in the development of groundwater protection responses (site suitability guidelines) for specific hazards. More detail can be found in ‘Groundwater Protection Schemes’ (DELG/EPA/GSI, 1999).

13.8 Hydrogeology

13.8.1 Introduction

This section presents our current understanding of groundwater flow in the area of the source.

Hydrogeological and hydrochemical information for this study was obtained from the following sources:

- GSI files and archival Kildare County Council data.
- Kildare County Council drinking water returns.
- Group Water Scheme personnel.
- Hydrogeological mapping carried out by GSI.

13.8.2 Rainfall, Evaporation and Recharge

The term ‘recharge’ refers to the amount of water replenishing the groundwater flow system. The recharge rate is generally estimated on an annual basis, and generally assumed to consist of an input

(i.e. annual rainfall) less water losses prior to entry into the groundwater system (i.e. annual evapotranspiration and runoff). The estimation of a realistic recharge rate is critical in source protection delineation, as it will dictate the size of the zone of contribution to the source.

In areas where point recharge from sinking streams, etc., is discounted, the main parameters involved in recharge rate estimation are annual rainfall, annual evapotranspiration, and annual runoff and are listed as follows:

- *Annual rainfall:* 1000 mm.

Rainfall data for gauging stations around Kilteel (from Fitzgerald, D., Forrester, F., 1996).

Gauging Stations	Grid reference	Elevation OD (m)	Approximate distance & direction from source	Annual ppt 1961-1990
Brittas G.S (Dublin)	O034235	244	2.5 km east	1048
Blessington G.S.	N980142	206	8.0 km south	948
Rathcoole-Saggart G.S.	O032273	107	5.0 km north east	810
Kill G.S.	N970226	101	7.0 km west	794

Brittas (Glenaraneen) G.S. is the closest in terms of distance and elevation to the Kilteel source. Contour maps produced by Fitzgerald, D., Forrester, F., 1996 suggest that annual rainfall near Kilteel is in the range of 1000-1200 mm rainfall. It would therefore appear to be reasonable to assume an annual average precipitation of 1000 mm for the Kilteel area.

- *Annual evapotranspiration losses:* 430 mm. Potential evapotranspiration (P.E.) is estimated to be 450 mm yr.⁻¹ (based on data from Met Éireann). Actual evapotranspiration (A.E.) is then estimated as 95 % of P.E., to allow for seasonal soil moisture deficits. This figure ('actual evapotranspiration') was calculated using an adaptation of the country-wide potential evapotranspiration data presented in the "Agroclimatic Atlas of Ireland" (Collins and Cummins, 1996). More local measurements of evapotranspiration are not available.
- *Potential recharge:* 570 mm yr.⁻¹. This figure is based on subtracting estimated evapotranspiration losses from average annual rainfall. It represents an estimation of the excess soil moisture available for either vertical downward flow to groundwater or runoff and is commonly referred to as "Effective Rainfall".
- *Annual runoff losses:* 460 mm. Given the nature of the slopes, till cover and iron pans in the soil it is considered that most potential recharge will runoff to surface water and only a small proportion will infiltrate to bedrock or to the pockets of sand/gravel subsoil. The lowest infiltration factor used by (Wright *et al*, 1982). Thus a representative value for the runoff is estimated to be in the order to 80%.

These estimations are summarised as follows:

Average annual rainfall (R)	1000 mm
Estimated P.E.	450 mm
Estimated A.E. (95% of P.E.)	430 mm
Potential Recharge (R – A.E.)	570 mm
Runoff losses (80% of recharge)	460 mm
Estimated Actual Recharge	110 mm

13.8.3 Groundwater levels, Flow Directions and Gradients

No water level data are available in the vicinity of the spring, but at the sump water levels are at ground level.

The water table in the area is generally assumed to be a subdued reflection of the topography, with groundwater flowing from the watersheds at Cupidstown Hill and discharging into the Slane River. Groundwater is assumed to flow in a westerly direction following the topographic downslope direction. The water is caused to focus at the spring mainly due to topography. Several other springs are noted at the same topographic contour where there is a break in slope.

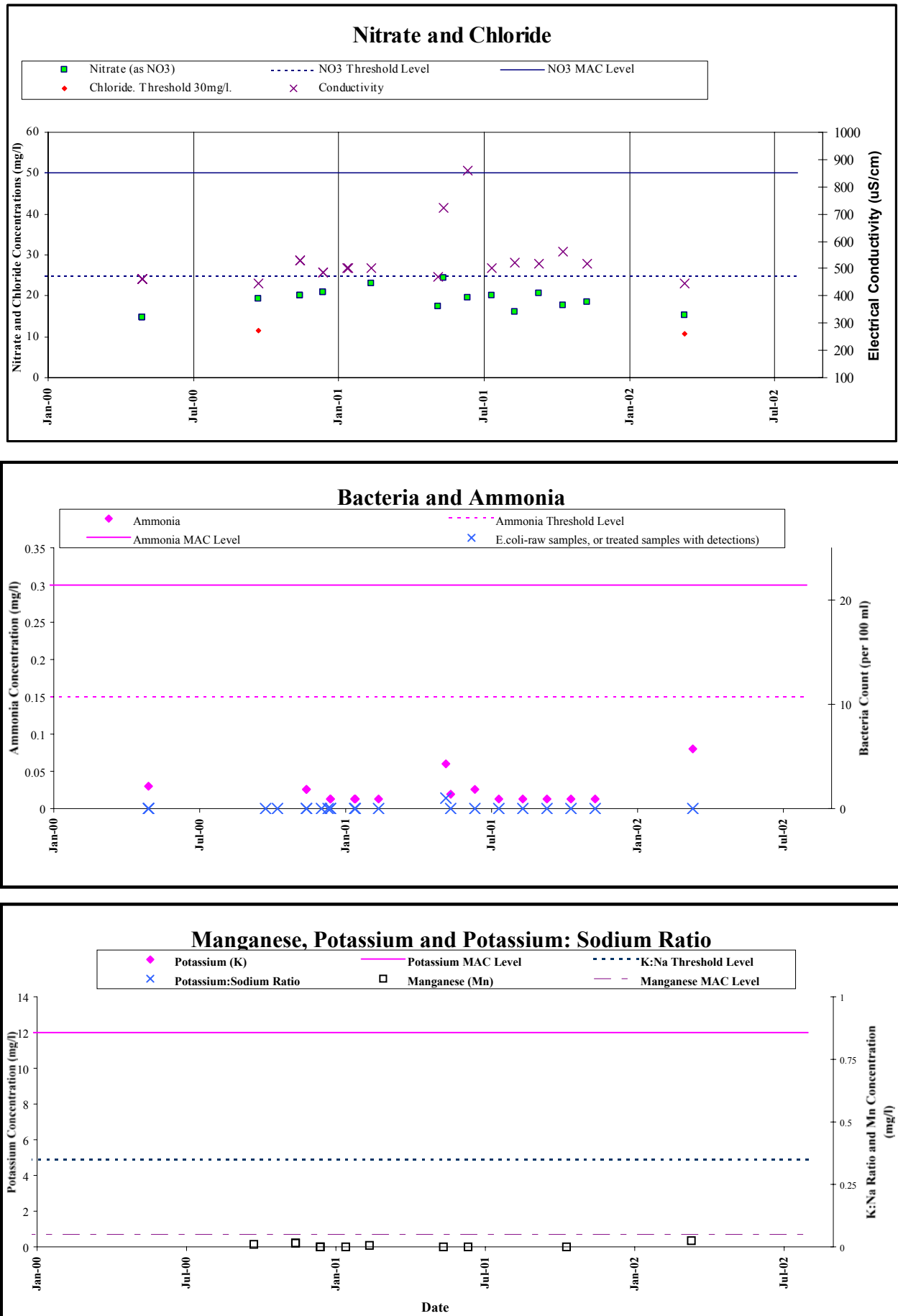
The topographic gradient is estimated to be about 0.09. Groundwater gradients in the bedrock are assumed to be similar to the topographic gradient due to the low permeability and steep slopes. For the purposes of calculations it is assumed to be 0.05.

13.8.4 Hydrochemistry and Water Quality

The data is summarised graphically in Figure 13-1 and the following key points are identified:

- The hydrochemical analyses show that the water is slightly hard, with total hardness values of 108-150 mg l⁻¹ (equivalent CaCO₃) and electrical conductivity values of 305-490 µS cm⁻¹. These values are not typical of those from limestone rock units or sand/gravel deposits. This suggests that, though groundwater may be reaching the surface through a small sand/gravel pocket, the spring is mainly fed by the bedrock aquifer.
- Nitrate concentrations from fifteen available samples over the last two years are only slightly above background levels.
- Only one slight exceedance of faecal coliforms is recorded from the eight available raw water samples taken over the last two years.

Figure 13-1 Kiltel - Key indicators of agricultural and domestic groundwater contamination



13.8.5 Aquifer Characteristics

The bedrock formations at the source are classed as **Poor Aquifers which are generally unproductive (Pu)**. Further details can be found in Section 4 of Volume I. Groundwater is assumed to flow through the upper few metres of weathered bedrock.

Sand/gravel was reported to be present during excavation of the spring sump, and small sand/gravel pockets are present on the hillsides of north east Kildare (refer to Map 2). It is likely that the sand/gravel at the source comprises a small pocket perhaps only a few tens of square metres in size. This sand/gravel deposit would be too small to be mapped as an aquifer, but sand/gravel of even this small size could provide significant extra storage for groundwater in a poor bedrock aquifer, and the pocket may be significant in allowing this spring to supply demand throughout the summer.

Given the expected small size of the sand/gravel pocket at the source and given the inferences derived from the water quality data (Section 13.8.4), the sand/gravel is not thought to be significant in terms of overall recharge to the source. As such, the aquifer parameters of the bedrock are taken as the main influence on the source protection zones around the source. Permeabilities are considered to be low in the bedrock, estimated to be in the order of $1-2 \text{ m d}^{-1}$. Porosities are assumed to be 0.01. These are conservative estimates based on values used for the slightly more productive bedrock aquifer at the Kilkea source (refer to Section 12.8.5).

13.9 Conceptual Model

- The Kilteel scheme abstracts $60 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$ from a mountainside spring. The aquifer is mapped as 'generally unproductive'. Note that it is not unusual for springs of this size to occur in mountainside settings in even the most unproductive aquifers.
- Most of the flow to the spring occurs through the top few metres of weathered bedrock, with some additional flow and storage provided by a small sand/gravel pocket located at the spring.
- Groundwater discharges at the spring as a result of topography and the presence of a sand/gravel pocket.

13.10 Delineation of Source Protection Areas

13.10.1 Introduction

This section delineates the areas around the source that are believed to contribute groundwater to it, and that therefore require protection. The areas are delineated based on the conceptualisation of the groundwater flow pattern, and are presented in Map 8.

Two source protection areas are delineated:

- ◆ Inner Protection Area (SI), designed to give protection from microbial pollution;
- ◆ Outer Protection Area (SO), encompassing the zone of contribution (ZOC) to the spring.

13.10.2 Outer Protection Area

The Outer Protection Area (SO) is bounded by the complete catchment area to the source, i.e. **the zone of contribution (ZOC)**, which is defined as the area required to support an abstraction from long-term recharge. The ZOC is controlled primarily by (a) the total discharge, (b) the groundwater flow direction and gradient, (c) the subsoil and rock permeability and (d) the recharge in the area. The ZOC is delineated using both analytical modelling and the results of hydrogeological mapping and conceptualisation. Given the limited amount of calibration data available, a full groundwater numerical model was not undertaken. The resulting boundaries are presented in Map 8 and are described as follows:

The **Eastern Boundary** is defined using topography. A ridge runs from Cupidstown Hill through Cromwellstown Hill and then onto Saggart Hill/Slievethoul, creating a watershed between water flowing east to the Brittas river and water flowing toward the springs and the Slane river.

The **Western boundary** is constrained by the location of the springs itself. Groundwater to the west of the spring cannot flow to the spring as the groundwater is downgradient on the western side of the spring. An arbitrary buffer of 50 m is placed on the downgradient side of the spring.

The **Northern** and **Southern** boundaries were delineated to link the spring to the watershed at Cupidstown Hill, using topographic ridges, ensuring that;

- The final width of the ZOC at the watershed was no less than the width predicted by the uniform flow equation (100 m).
- The total area of the ZOC was no less than that predicted by the water balance. Assuming an average annual recharge of 110 mm/year, the recharge area required to balance the spring flow is estimated to be 0.3 km². The spring flow used in this calculation was derived by increasing measured flows by 50% to allow for an expansion of the ZOC during dry weather.
- The limits of the ZOC equated to or exceeded a distance of 50 m in all directions from the spring.

13.10.3 Inner Protection Area

According to “Groundwater Protection Schemes” (DELG/EPA/GSI, 1999), delineation of an Inner Protection Area is required to protect the source from microbial and viral contamination and it is based on the 100-day time of travel (ToT) to the supply. Estimations of the extent of this area are made by hydrogeological mapping and analytical modelling. A permeability (K) value of 1 m d⁻¹, porosity (n) of 0.015 and a gradient (i) of 0.05 were used to estimate the velocity (V) as follows;

$$V = (K.i) / n$$

$$V = 3 \text{ m d}^{-1}$$

Thus the 100-day time of travel is estimated to be 300 m.

13.11 Groundwater Protection Zones

The groundwater protection zones are obtained by integrating the two elements of land surface zoning (source protection areas and vulnerability categories) – a possible total of 8 source protection zones. In practice, the source protection zones are obtained by superimposing the vulnerability map on the source protection area map. Each zone is represented by a code e.g. **SI/H**, which represents an Inner Protection area where the groundwater is highly vulnerable to contamination. Four groundwater protection zones are present around the source. The final groundwater protection zones are shown in Map 8.

Table 14 Matrix of Source Protection Zones around the Kilteel source.

VULNERABILITY RATING	SOURCE PROTECTION	
	<i>Inner</i>	<i>Outer</i>
<i>Extreme (E)</i>	Not present	SO/E
<i>High (H)</i>	SI/H	SO/H
<i>Moderate (M)</i>	Not present	Not present
<i>Low (L)</i>	Not present	Not present

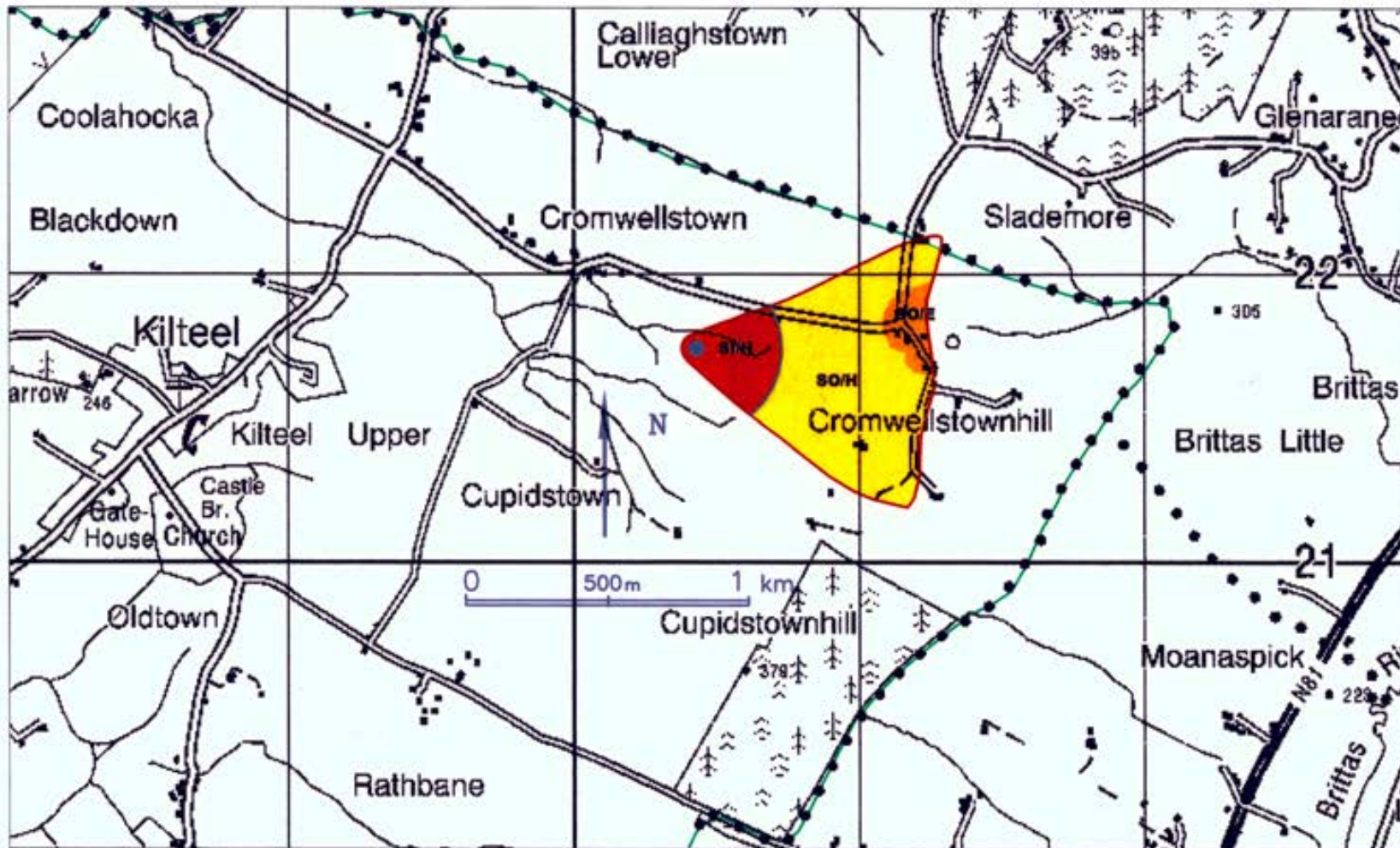
13.12 Potential Pollution Sources

Land use in the area is described in Section 13.5. The land around the source is grassland dominated, used for cattle and sheep. Agricultural activities, septic tanks, road spillages and waste petroleum products from the quarry are the principal potential hazards to the water quality in the area. As

discussed in Section 13.8.4, available water quality data provide no evidence of significant domestic and agricultural impacts on water quality at the source at present. However, nitrate levels are slightly elevated. Given the small discharge at the spring, the potential for dilution is low and these nitrate levels would rise rapidly to significant levels with only a slight increase in, for example, landspreading loading rates or the number of domestic wastewater treatment systems in the source protection areas.

13.13 Conclusions and Recommendations

- ◆ The source is a small supply and is extremely to highly vulnerable to contamination.
- ◆ The protection zones delineated in the report are based on our current understanding of groundwater conditions and on the available data. Additional data obtained in the future may indicate that amendments to the boundaries are necessary.
- ◆ It is recommended that:
 1. A full chemical and bacteriological analysis of the **raw** water is carried out on a regular basis. The range of analytes should be expanded to include possible contaminants from quarrying and associated activities.
 2. particular care should be taken when assessing the location of any activities or developments which might cause contamination at the well, particularly with relation to nitrates and microbial pathogens.
 3. Well head protection is improved with fencing and proper capping.
 4. The supply is chlorinated.



Kilteel PWS

COUNTY KILDARE GROUNDWATER PROTECTION SCHEME

SOURCE PROTECTION ZONES

VULNERABILITY RATING	SOURCE PROTECTION ZONES	
	Inner (SI)	Outer (SO)
Extreme (E)	S/E	SO/E
High (H)	SI/H	SO/H
Moderate (M)	SI/M	SO/M
Low (L)	SI/L	SO/L

- Public Supply Well
- Zone of Contribution of Wells (SO)
- Inner protection area (SI)
- K.T. Cullen & Co. Ltd.
- GSI Sources

This Source Protection Zone map is designed for general information and strategic planning usage. The boundaries are based on the available evidence and total details have been generalised to fit the map scale. Evaluation of specific sites and circumstances will normally require further and more detailed assessments and will frequently require site investigations to determine the risk to groundwater.

The map is intended for use in conjunction with groundwater protection responses for potentially polluting activities, which take the degree of acceptability of these activities in each zone and describe the control measures necessary to prevent pollution.

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Project Manager: Vincent Fitzmaurice
Digital Map Production: Sinead Smyth & Denise Taylor

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KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Water Services Unit

2008

Scale: 1:50,000

Map No: 11

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Map 8 Kilteel Source Protection Zones

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Appendix IV: Discussion Of the Key Indicators of Domestic and Agricultural Contamination of Groundwater

A.1 Introduction

This appendix is adapted from Daly, 1996.

There has been a tendency in analysing groundwater samples to test for a limited number of constituents. A "full" or "complete" analysis, which includes all the major anions and cations, is generally recommended for routine monitoring and for assessing pollution incidents. This enables (i) a check on the reliability of the analysis (by doing an ionic balance), (ii) a proper assessment of the water chemistry and quality and (iii) a possible indication of the source of contamination. A listing of recommended and optional parameters are given in Table A1. It is also important that the water samples taken for analysis have not been chlorinated - this is a difficulty in some local authority areas where water take-off points prior to chlorination have not been installed.

The following parameters are good contamination indicators: E.coli, nitrate, ammonia, potassium, chloride, iron, manganese and trace organics.

TABLE A1

Recommended Parameters		
Appearance	Calcium (Ca)	Nitrate (NO ₃)*
Sediment	Magnesium (Mg)	Ammonia (NH ₄ and NH ₃)*
pH (lab)	Sodium (Na)	Iron (Fe)*
Electrical Conductivity (EC)*	Potassium (K)*	Manganese (Mn)*
Total Hardness	Chloride (Cl)*	
General coliform	Sulphate (SO ₄)*	
E. coli *	Alkalinity	
Optional Parameters (depending on local circumstances or reasons for sampling)		
Fluoride (F)	Fatty acids *	Zinc (Zn)
Orthophosphate	Trace organics *	Copper (Cu)
Nitrite (NO ₂)*	TOC *	Lead (Pb)
B.O.D.*	Boron (B) *	Other metals
Dissolved Oxygen *	Cadmium (Cd)	
* good indicators of contamination		

A.2 Faecal Bacteria and Viruses

E. coli is the parameter tested as an indicator of the presence of faecal bacteria and perhaps viruses; constituents which pose a significant risk to human health. The most common health problem arising from the presence of faecal bacteria in groundwater is diarrhoea, but typhoid fever, infectious hepatitis and gastrointestinal infections can also occur. Although *E. coli* bacteria are an excellent indicator of pollution, they can come from different sources - septic tank effluent, farmyard waste, landfill sites, birds. The faecal coliform : faecal streptococci ratio has been suggested as a tentative

indicator to distinguish between animal and human waste sources (Henry *et al.*, 1987). However, researchers in Virginia Tech (Reneau, 1996) cautioned against the use of this technique.

Viruses are a particular cause for concern as they survive longer in groundwater than indicator bacteria (Gerba and Bitton, 1984).

The published data on elimination of bacteria and viruses in groundwater has been compiled by Pekdeger and Matthess (1983), who show that in different investigations 99.9% elimination of *E. coli* occurred after 10-15 days. The mean of the evaluated investigations was 25 days. They show that 99.9% elimination of various viruses occurred after 16-120 days, with a mean of 35 days for Polio-, Hepatitis, and Enteroviruses. According to Armon and Kott (1994), pathogenic bacteria can survive for more than ten days under adverse conditions and up to 100 days under favourable conditions; enteroviruses can survive from about 25 days up to 170 days in soils.

Bacteria can move considerable distances in the subsurface, given the right conditions. In a sand and gravel aquifer, coliform bacteria were isolated 100 ft from the source 35 hours after the sewage was introduced (as reported in Hagedorn *et al.*, 1981). They can travel several kilometres in karstic aquifers. In Ireland, research at Sligo RTC involved examining in detail the impact of septic tank systems at three locations with different site conditions (Henry, 1990; summarised in Daly, Thorn and Henry, 1993). Piezometers were installed down-gradient; the distances of the furthest piezometers were 8 m, 10 m and 9.5 m, respectively. Unsurprisingly, high faecal bacteria counts were obtained in the piezometers at the two sites with soakage pits, one with limestone bedrock at a shallow depth where the highest count (max. 14 000 cfu's per 1000 ml) and the second where sand/gravel over limestone was present (max 3 000 cfu's per 100 ml). At the third site, a percolation area was installed at 1.0 m b.g.l; the subsoils between the percolation pipes and the fractured bedrock consisted of 1.5 m sandy loam over 3.5 m of poorly sorted gravel; the water table was 3.5 b.g.l. (So this site would satisfy the water table and depth to rock requirements of S.R.6:1991, and most likely the percolation test requirement.) Yet, the maximum faecal coliform bacteria count was 300 cfus per 100 ml. Faecal streptococci were present in all three piezometers. It is highly likely that wells located 30 m down gradient of the drainage fields would be polluted by faecal bacteria.

As viruses are smaller than bacteria, they are not readily filtered out as effluent moves through the ground. The main means of attenuation is by adsorption on clay particles. Viruses can travel considerable distances underground, depths as great as 67 m and horizontal migrations as far as 400 m have been reported (as reported in US EPA, 1987). The possible presence of viruses in groundwater as a result of pollution by septic tank systems is a matter of concern because of their mobility and the fact that indicator bacteria such as faecal coliforms have been found not to correlate with the presence of viruses in groundwater samples (US EPA, 1987).

The natural environment, in particular the soils and subsoils, can be effective in removing bacteria and viruses by predation, filtration and absorption. There are two high risk situations: (i) where permeable sands and gravels with a shallow water table are present; and (ii) where fractured rock, particularly limestone, is present close to the ground surface. The presence of clayey gravels, tills, and peat will, in many instances, hinder the vertical migration of microbes, although preferential flow paths, such as cracks in clayey materials, can allow rapid movement and bypassing of the subsoil.

A.3 Nitrate

Nitrate is one of the most common contaminants identified in groundwater and increasing concentrations have been recorded in many developed countries. The consumption of nitrate rich water by young children may give rise to a condition known as methaemoglobinaemia (blue baby syndrome). The formation of carcinogenic nitrosamines is also a possible health hazard and epidemiological studies have indicated a positive correlation between nitrate consumption in drinking

water and the incidence of gastric cancer. However, the correlation is not proven according to some experts (Wild and Cameron, 1980). The EC MAC for drinking water is 50mg/l.

The nitrate ion is not adsorbed on clay or organic matter. It is highly mobile and under wet conditions is easily leached out of the rooting zone and through soil and permeable subsoil. As the normal concentrations in uncontaminated groundwater is low (less than 5 mg/l), nitrate can be a good indicator of contamination by fertilisers and waste organic matter.

In the past there has been a tendency in Ireland to assume that the presence of high nitrates in well water indicated an impact by inorganic fertilisers. This assumption has frequently been wrong, as examination of other constituents in the water showed that organic wastes - usually farmyard waste, probably soiled water - were the source. The nitrate concentrations in wells with a low abstraction rate - domestic and farm wells - can readily be influenced by soiled water seeping underground in the vicinity of the farmyard or from the spraying of soiled water on adjoining land. Even septic tank effluent can raise the nitrate levels; if a septic tank system is in the zone of contribution of a well, a four-fold dilution of the nitrogen in the effluent is needed to bring the concentration of nitrate below the EU MAC (as the EU limit is 50 mg/l as NO₃ or 11.3 mg/l as N and assuming that the N concentration in septic tank effluent is 45 mg/l).

The recently produced draft county reports by the EPA on nitrate in groundwater show high levels of nitrate in a significant number of public and group scheme supplies, particularly in south and southern counties and in counties with intensive agriculture, such as Carlow and Louth. This suggests that diffuse sources – landspreading of fertilisers – is having an impact on groundwater.

In assessing regional groundwater quality and, in particular the nitrate levels in groundwater, it is important that:

- (i) conclusions should not be drawn using data only from private wells, which are frequently located near potential point pollution sources and from which only a small quantity of groundwater is abstracted;
- (ii) account should be taken of the complete chemistry of the sample and not just nitrate, as well as the presence of *E. coli*;
- (iii) account should be taken of not only the land-use in the area but also the location of point pollution sources;
- (iv) account should be taken of the regional hydrogeology and the relationship of this to the well itself. For instance, shallow wells generally show higher nitrate concentrations than deeper wells, low permeability sediments can cause denitrification, knowledge on the groundwater flow direction is needed to assess the influence of land-use.

A.4 Ammonia

Ammonia has a low mobility in soil and subsoil and its presence at concentrations greater than 0.1 mg/l in groundwater indicates a nearby waste source and/or vulnerable conditions. The EU MAC is 0.3 mg/l.

A.5 Potassium

Potassium (K) is relatively immobile in soil and subsoil. Consequently the spreading of manure, slurry and inorganic fertilisers is unlikely to significantly increase the potassium concentrations in groundwater. In most areas in Ireland, the background potassium levels in groundwater are less than 3.0 mg/l. Higher concentrations are found occasionally where the rock contains potassium e.g. certain granites and sandstones. The background potassium:sodium ratio in most Irish groundwaters is less than 0.4 and often 0.3. The K:Na ratio of soiled water and other wastes derived from plant organic

matter is considerably greater than 0.4, whereas the ratio in septic tank effluent is less than 0.2. Consequently a K:Na ratio greater than 0.4 can be used to indicate contamination by plant organic matter - usually in farmyards, occasionally landfill sites (from the breakdown of paper). However, a K:Na ratio lower than 0.4 does not indicate that farmyard wastes are **not** the source of contamination (or that a septic tank is the cause), as K is less mobile than Na. (Phosphorus is increasingly a significant pollutant and cause of eutrophication in surface water. It is not a problem in groundwater as it usually is not mobile in soil and subsoil).

A.6 Chloride

The principle source of chloride in uncontaminated groundwater is rainfall and so in any region, depending on the distance from the sea and evapotranspiration, chloride levels in groundwater will be fairly constant. Chloride, like nitrate, is a mobile anion. Also, it is a constituent of organic wastes. Consequently, levels appreciably above background levels (12-15 mg/l in Co. Offaly, for instance) have been taken to indicate contamination by organic wastes such as septic tank systems. While this is probably broadly correct, Sherwood (1991) has pointed out that chloride can also be derived from potassium fertilisers.

A.7 Iron and manganese

Although they are present under natural conditions in groundwater in some areas, they can also be good indicators of contamination by organic wastes. Effluent from the wastes cause deoxygenation in the ground which results in dissolution of iron (Fe) and manganese (Mn) from the soil, subsoil and bedrock into groundwater. With reoxygenation in the well or water supply system the Fe and Mn precipitate. High Mn concentrations can be a good indicator of pollution by silage effluent. However, it can also be caused by other high BOD wastes such as milk, landfill leachate and perhaps soiled water and septic tank effluent.

Box A1 Warning/trigger Levels for Certain Contaminants

As human activities have had some impact on a high proportion of the groundwater in Ireland, there are few areas where the groundwater is in a pristine, completely natural condition. Consequently, most groundwater is contaminated to some degree although it is usually not polluted. In the view of the GSI, assessments of the degree of contamination of groundwater can be beneficial as an addition to examining whether the water is polluted or not. This type of assessment can indicate where appreciable impacts are occurring. It can act as a warning that either the situation could worsen and so needs regular monitoring and careful land-use planning, or that there may be periods when the source is polluted and poses a risk to human health and as a consequence needs regular monitoring. Consequently, thresholds for certain parameters can be used to help indicate situations where additional monitoring and/or source protection studies and/or hazard surveys may be appropriate to identify or prevent more significant water quality problems.

Parameter	Threshold mg/l	EU MAC mg/l
Nitrate	25	50
Potassium	4	12
Chloride	30 (except near sea)	250
Ammonia	0.15	0.3
K/Na ratio	0.3-0.4	
Faecal bacteria	0	0

Box A2 Summary : Assessing a Problem Area

Let us assume that you are examining an area with potential groundwater contamination problems and that you have taken samples in nearby wells. How can the analyses be assessed?

E. coli present ⇒ organic waste source nearby (except in karst areas), usually either a septic tank system or farmyard.

E. coli absent ⇒ either not polluted by organic waste or bacteria have not survived due to attenuation or time of travel to well greater than 100 days.

Nitrate > 25 mg/l ⇒ either inorganic fertiliser or organic waste source; check other parameters.

Ammonia > 0.15 mg/l ⇒ source is nearby organic waste; fertiliser is not an issue.

Potassium (K) > 5.0 mg/l ⇒ source is probably organic waste.

K/Na ratio > 0.4 (0.3, in many areas) ⇒ Farmyard waste rather than septic tank effluent is the source. If < 0.3, no conclusion is possible.

Chloride > 30 mg/l ⇒ organic waste source. However this does not apply in the vicinity of the coast (within 20 km at least).

In conclusion, faecal bacteria, nitrate, ammonia, high K/Na ratio and chloride indicate contamination by organic waste. However, only the high K/Na helps distinguish between septic tank effluent and farmyard wastes. So in many instances, while the analyses can show potential problems, other information is needed to complete the assessment.

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APPENDIX V: Laboratory analytical results

