



Briefing Note with regard to the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project and advices required by An Fóram Uisce.

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to set out the background to the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project (WSP), the nature of the Review of same which is being undertaken by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and to outline the areas of advice which is required by An Fóram.

Background to the Water Supply Project

Irish Water (IW), the national water utility, is progressing with their most significant water supply project, the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project. Details with regard to same are set out in a presentation given by IW to An Fóram last October, a copy of which is attached for information. It should be noted that the project has been on-going for many years, long before the establishment of Irish Water and has followed a pathway in terms of considering alternative solutions to reaching a final recommendation. It is understood that IW looked at 10 possible options for meeting this requirement and, having undergone an assessment process they, for a variety of reasons, have arrived at this solution.

The stated purpose of the project is to provide a long term and reliable solution to the ever increasing water supply shortage in the greater Dublin area. The scheme is designed to abstract water from the River Shannon and pipe it across the country to supply water to communities along its pathway and ultimately to Dublin City and region.

Concerns and considerations

We think it could be stated that there is agreement, in general, that Dublin and its region are becoming increasingly water stressed and that failure to address same will have a catastrophic impact in terms of economic development in that region which will impact the country as a whole. There are serious concerns with regard to current usage and leakage levels and further, in relation to current leakage resolution levels – it is understood that Dublin's headroom space will have peaked by mid 2020s and so we are approaching intense urgency with regard to creating headroom in Dublin's water supply.

However, it could also be stated that there is not an agreed acceptance of IW's proposed solution. There is a multiplicity of concerns with regard to the issue, some of which are listed below:

1. There is a very significant water leakage rate from Dublin's aged and poor condition water infrastructure. It would appear that this issue is of primary concern and that the proposals by Irish Water to address same are considered by many to be insufficient and of low ambition. A view is held that if this issue was adequately addressed, there would not be a need for a project the scale and size of the WSP. Alternative views would strongly disagree with same, pointing to the technical difficulties with repairing/replacing mains in a complex and dated infrastructure running through a busy city.
2. Further concerns centre on the impact of the abstraction on the River Shannon and possible environmental concerns with regard to same, both in terms of the abstraction and also the disruption to local communities along the route of the pipe.
3. The costs of the project are also of serious concern, having regard to the condition of infrastructure throughout the country and the demands on investment in order to repair and modernise same.
4. A further view is that the solution to Dublin's water requirements should be met within the Dublin region through a mixture of groundwater and surface water solutions together with the development of greater capacity in terms of reservoirs.
5. There is also a view that desalination might be a viable alternative which could produce sufficient quantities of water close to where it is required and that with modern technology, the costings of such a project might not be as prohibitive as heretofore.
6. Further views refer to the need to introduce more environmentally acceptable solutions including recycling of grey water and wastewater, rainwater harvesting etc.

Advice required by An Fóram.

An Fóram was notified, in October 2018, that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government had appointed the CRU to carry out a review of the project, a copy of the terms of reference are attached. It should be noted that the CRU is required to consult with An Fóram Uisce in this regard. Having received presentations from IW and Ms. Emma Kennedy last October (copies attached), An Fóram has raised a number of concerns which it would need clarification on. These include:

1. In the context of data on current and projected leakage, consideration of the capability of IW to respond to the leakage crisis in terms of timescale, costs and likely water conservation. An Fóram requires an assessment of what is realistic in the context of on the ground conditions in a busy city with a multiplicity of aged and poor condition pipe work.
2. In terms of alternative solutions, An Fóram needs further information with regard to desalination in the context of advancing technologies, including the provision of costings and also examples of significant desalination projects in large cities internationally and how do they work?
3. Of further consideration are alternative/complimentary sources rather than sole reliance on surface abstractions from rivers, thus spreading the risk amongst other sources. In particular, the use of groundwater e.g. aquifers which we understand supply other large cities including Paris. We also require examples of international best practice where there is a mix of supplies from groundwater sources, surface sources and/or desalination. In addition, examples from international best practice regarding rainwater capture at municipal and domestic levels would be helpful.

4. An Fóram requires advice on the viability and potential contribution to water supply from recycling wastewater and grey water for drinking water purposes based on international best practice.

It is understood that the CRU has put in place arrangements to commence its review. However, details are not yet available as to when it will be engaging with An Fóram, nor indeed the nature of that engagement.

In order to progress with this matter, An Fóram is seeking proposals from suitably qualified and independent persons or companies to provide a brief outline of the timelines and costings involved in providing it with the required advices.

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