

## Response to EPA report Focus on Private Water Supplies 2019

An Fóram Uisce welcomes the EPA Focus on Private Supplies 2019 Report<sup>1</sup> published today. Over one-million people in Ireland receive drinking water from private supplies including 417 Private Group Schemes (Group Water Schemes), 1778 small private supplies registered with Authorities and over 180,000 private wells that are not regulated under the Drinking Water Regulations.

In 2019, 417 private group schemes and 1418 small private supplies were monitored for the pathogen *E. coli* and of these, 108 (20 Group Water Schemes & 88 Small Private Supplies), did not comply with the required standards. 340 small private supplies were not monitored so it is impossible to know if these unmonitored supplies were safe to drink. As the 180,000 private wells are not regulated it is impossible to know how many of these are not reaching the required health standards. *E. coli* bacteria and other pathogens pose a significant health risk and Ireland has one of the highest rates of illness caused by such pathogens in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Local Authorities have responsibility to ensure all registered supplies are monitored, so An Fóram Uisce reiterates the report recommendation that all suppliers check that their supplies are safe and that they register their supply with their Local Authority to ensure their supplies are monitored.

Other issues impacting on private water supplies include contamination from nitrates arising from human or animal organic waste or chemical fertiliser, an issue in 24 of the supplies monitored and high levels of Trihalomethanes formed by reactions between organic matter in the supply and the chemicals used in the treatment process<sup>3</sup>. These issues are particular to surface water supplies so how land is managed is key to address these issues. The National Federation of Group Water Schemes are working with, Local Authorities and the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage to address the issues highlighted with a particular emphasis on Protecting Drinking Water Sources<sup>4</sup>.

An Fóram Uisce has proposed a Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape management (FILLM)<sup>5</sup> to address all of the ecosystem services provided within a catchment whereby communities, stakeholders and agencies work together to protect our natural waters and ecosystems.

At the end of the day, water supplies come from local water bodies and it is our behaviour and how we use the landscape that pollutes rivers, lakes and coastal waters. The onus is on everyone, not just those who supply drinking water, to take collective action to protect this, most precious, resource and consequently our health and that of our neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup> [Drinking water :: Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/drinkingwater/trihalomethanesjointpositionstatement.html)

<sup>2</sup> [An-Fóram-Uisce Concern-for-Irelands-Waters-1.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/drinkingwater/trihalomethanesjointpositionstatement.html>

<sup>4</sup> [Source Protection Archives - National Federation of Group Water Schemes \(nfgws.ie\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [An-Fóram-Uisce Framework-for-Integrated-Land-and-Landscape-Management.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

### **Note to editors**

An Fóram Uisce|The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

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