



## **PRESS RELEASE Water Forum response to the EPA Drinking water quality in public supplies report**

An F6ram Uisce - The Water Forum welcomes the EPA report on Drinking Water Quality in Public Supplies 2020 released today which shows that compliance with microbiological and chemical standards is high at 99.5%. Irish Water supply 1.3 million households on the public drinking water supply and a secure supply of safe drinking water is essential for public health and for sustaining Ireland's economy.

The report includes a note of caution however that water treatment in many supplies is not robust and supplies need to be made resilient and safe into the future. The security of a supply is dependent on 1) *the risks to the supply*, 2) *the adequacy of the water treatment infrastructure*, and 3) *the management and operational controls* in place.

*Risks to a drinking water supply* occur at the source of the raw water supply such as in rivers, lakes, springs and groundwater. Most of these risks are within the catchment of the waterbody such as storm water adding silt and bacteria and pathogens or pesticides and herbicides off the land into the water source. Another such risk is a low water supply that has concentrated pollutants. To combat this, Irish Water are in the process of developing Drinking Water Safety plans which identify the risk and the hazard. However, to date, Irish Water have only completed plans for 44% of customers, the Water Forum therefore recommends that Irish Water complete this work as soon as possible and to put measures in place to mitigate the risks identified.

When the EPA considers the *adequacy of the water treatment infrastructure* is not good enough, that plant is placed on a Remedial Action List (RAL). Irish water has made progress removing plants off this list down to 46 from 77 in 2019, however the Water Forum agrees with the EPA that progress is too slow as nearly 1 million people remain on RAL water supplies. The report also states that Irish Water assessed 866 site disinfection systems but only half of these are deemed satisfactory as Irish Water experiences delays in commissioning systems owing to Covid-19 restrictions. This matter should be addressed urgently to safeguard public health.

The *management and operational controls* in place to ensure a safe water supply and the proper implementation of Irish Water's Water Disinfection Programme to prevent failures or incidents occurring at water treatment plants. In 2020, there were a total of 43 boil water notices at 37 supplies in 19 counties affecting nearly 75,000 customers. Such processes were highlighted recently by the failures in water treatment at Ballymore Eustace and Gorey and in many other treatment plants across the country whose customers have been issued with boil water notices. The Forum supports the EPA recommendation that Irish Water must ensure that sufficient control measures are in place to ensure satisfactory operation of plants and the provision of safe drinking water for now and into the future.

The Forum recognises that Irish Water has a significant task to build new infrastructure to address the current needs and future demands for safe drinking water but there are no excuses for failures in management or operations procedures which places the public health at risk.

End.

### **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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