



Water Forum Webinar aims to discuss the need for meaningful public participation to protect biodiversity, water quality and climate mitigation

It is now proven that human activities are driving climate change, biodiversity loss and deteriorating water quality. The Water Forum, a stakeholder body comprising individuals, environmental organisations, community groups and businesses who advise the Minister on water policy, is an advocate for the need for public participation and engagement in catchment management. Meaningful public engagement provides groups, businesses and individuals with an opportunity to input to the development and implementation of environmental actions at local catchment level for water, biodiversity and climate outcomes.

The concept of co-benefits is becoming more prevalent, where actions to improve water quality for example, will have benefits for other environmental spheres such as biodiversity and climate. Integrated catchment management that takes a *whole of landscape approach* (soil, water, biodiversity and air quality) could account for these co-benefits and enable the prioritisation of actions for positive environmental outcomes in all realms. Involving a wide spectrum of stakeholders within local communities allows for the consideration of cultural and social ecosystem services, such as heritage sites and areas of local recreational value to be included in local action plans. Experts, local policy makers and agencies will essentially need to find ways to walk alongside the people who live and work in catchments to provide meaningful ways for them to impact on decision making and co-create local actions.

In 2021, the Irish Government has reviewed a raft of policies and action plans with a view to protecting Ireland's natural environment, including, the Climate Action Plan, the Nitrates Action Programme and the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan, while the Biodiversity Action Plan has been reviewed with a view to preparing a 4th plan for Ireland. Furthermore, the draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 is currently out for public consultation. The challenge is that many of these plans have time limited objectives, such as, Ireland's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030; halting biodiversity loss by 2030; the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan aims to bring all of Ireland's water bodies to good ecological status by 2027. All of these plans and policies have been in place for a decade or more, yet recent EPA environmental monitoring reports show that the majority of these environmental metrics continue to show declines.

To make meaningful progress towards achieving ambitious environmental targets, these fragmented national policies, with minimal input from local communities, need to change. A recent EPA report shows that 85% of the Irish people surveyed are worried about the impact of climate change, 78% felt more should be done to mitigate climate change and 79% feel the protecting water resources is Ireland's greatest priority.

The Water Forum will host a webinar on **3rd February at 10am** to discuss how the gap can be bridged between the national policies and plans and the desire among citizens to deliver outcomes for the natural environment. Academics will present research on best practice in public participation and tools for delivering such participative and deliberative democracy programmes. Organisations and community groups already involved in developing and delivering water and biodiversity plans and actions at local level will discuss their learnings and what further supports and frameworks will be

required to achieve real progress towards meeting the objectives of national policies which impact water, biodiversity and climate.

Connie Rochford, Water Forum member and acting Chair, stated that *'The Forum would like to encourage anyone with a role in public participation, or who would like to learn more about approaches to public engagement for environmental outcomes, to attend the webinar'*.

[Webinar details](#)

[Registration](#)

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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.

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