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PRESS RELEASE The Water Forum response to the EPA Drinking Water Quality in Small Private Supplies Report

The Water Forum welcomes the EPA *Drinking Water Quality in Private Group Schemes and Small Private Supplies 2020* report published today. It is unacceptable that in 2020, 2,900 people served by 20 Private Group Water Schemes and 49 small private supplies (e.g. hotels, pubs and restaurants, crèches, nursing homes and national schools), were found to have *E.coli* contamination, thereby putting these consumers health at risk.

In 2020, the Water Forum commissioned research into [how to improve drinking water quality in Small Private Supplies](#) where a key recommendation called for the establishment of a new *national organisation*, similar to the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, to manage issues related specifically to small private supplies, including their registration.

The research also highlighted the need for training for borehole and well contractors, while guidelines on well construction and maintenance should be made widely available to current and future private supply owners. In some areas of the country groundwater is contaminated with pathogens and other naturally occurring contaminants such as arsenic and these need to be identified with 'hotspot' maps produced to show these locations. Drinking water supplies need a setback distance from potential contamination sources (farmyards, septic tanks, industrial activities) and should, ideally, be fenced off to prevent animal access and kept free of debris. Guidelines on well protection measures need to be provided.

Wells need ongoing maintenance and should be tested annually and preferably after periods of heavy rainfall or extreme weather events. The research recommends that the inspection regime of small private supplies is strengthened so that all wells are monitored and inspected on a regular basis as this will highlight the importance of maintaining and protecting well water and supply systems. Furthermore, there needs to be proper regulation and enforcement of good agricultural practice and adequate treatment of domestic wastewater (septic tanks), in order to protect drinking water sources from further contamination. An awareness campaign such as a well stewardship campaign at national, regional and local levels is needed to address the ongoing failures identified in the EPA report and there needs to be much more training in drinking water and well protection measures.

Small Private Supply owners should have access to local one-on-one support, and there should be a register of the relevant qualified service providers (well drillers, water test facilities, treatment providers etc) to make it easier for supply owners to access the necessary expertise.

The Water Forum believes that protecting drinking water resources is of paramount importance to safeguard public health as prolonged exposure to certain contaminants has the potential to seriously damage health. Therefore, the Forum recommends that urgent action is taken to ensure private water supplies are safe and the Water Forum will continue to engage with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the ongoing review of the rural water sector.

End 22/02/2022

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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