

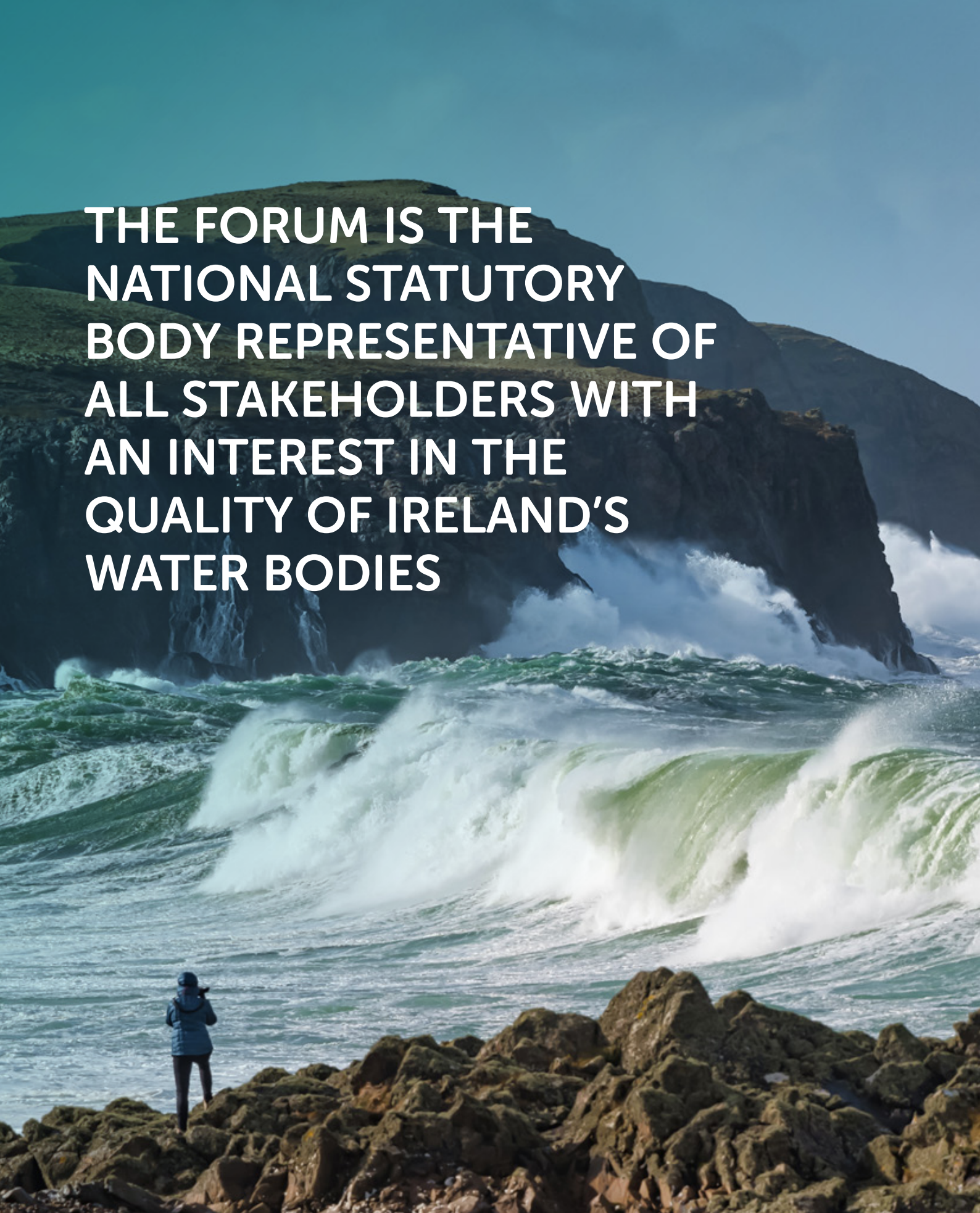
Looking after Ireland's
water resources



2021

Annual
Report

**THE FORUM IS THE
NATIONAL STATUTORY
BODY REPRESENTATIVE OF
ALL STAKEHOLDERS WITH
AN INTEREST IN THE
QUALITY OF IRELAND'S
WATER BODIES**



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Foreword

Despite the limitations caused by Covid-19, this past year has been a busy one for Water Forum members and the many agencies and stakeholders with whom the Forum engages.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF the second River Basin Management Plan gathered momentum to catch up on any delays caused as a result of Covid in 2020. The EPA Water Quality report for 2020 showed promising improvements in areas receiving priority action but disappointingly there were also declines in other areas and the impact of agriculture on waterbodies continues to gather pace. Consequently, the members of the Forum devoted time to deliberations on the content of submissions on Food Wise 2030 Strategy, the Nitrates Action Plan and the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan to ensure these policies could better address Ireland's water quality objectives. Expertise and perspectives from a range of organisations and experts were shared and used in the development of the recommendations outlined in the Forum's submissions. The implementation of these new policies will require cross-component planning where disciplines and organisations from multiple Government departments and agencies should work together in a co-ordinated manner to achieve climate and environmental targets. The Forum welcomes engagement with any of these bodies in such deliberations going forward.

Reliable and resilient water and wastewater services are fundamental for any society to thrive. Regrettably there is still much to be done to achieve the required standards for water supply resilience and wastewater treatment in Ireland. The National Water Resources Plan is a welcome step forward and the new regional plans are needed, but for a myriad of reasons the implementation of plans and programmes are lethargic. The Forum was gravely concerned that public health was put at risk through failures in operations at Gorey and Ballymore Eustace and would like to reiterate that water provision should be treated as a food supply to ensure the highest environmental standards and procedures. The Forum appreciates the ongoing interactions with Irish Water and the CRU in the provision of water and wastewater services. The Forum maintains close vigilance on Rural Water Services and engagements with the EPA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and

Heritage (DHLGH) resulted in submissions on the National Inspections Plan for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems and liaison on the review of Rural Water Services.

The Forum's research programme supports much of its work and this year the topics included Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-benefits for Climate and Biodiversity and the subsequent webinar discussion is reported later in this report. Commissioned research to identify policy recommendations for the management of Invasive Alien Species, highlighted a need for significant policy changes and biosecurity measures that need to be put in place to block pathways for the introduction and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) on the island. The Forum will continue to work with agencies and stakeholders to encourage public awareness, engagement and mobilisation to monitor and prevent the spread of IAS.

The Forum was delighted with the opportunity to discuss the draft River Basin Management Plan at the launch of the public consultation for the 3rd cycle with Ministers O'Brien & Noonan and DHLGH officials. The Forum have also drafted a new Strategy for our work programme from 2022 to 2027. This gave an opportunity for members and staff to evaluate the Forum's work to date and the new Strategy marks the beginning of a new chapter in the Forum's work. It provides for an exciting future for the members and team as we look to strengthening our input to policy and deepening our impact, so that public and stakeholder engagement, education, and collaborative information sharing are central to ensuring a cultural change in how water is valued and that it is treated as an equal pillar to climate and nature in addressing the environmental crises in Ireland.



Introduction to The Water Forum

26 
members

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce) was established on a statutory basis in June 2018, in accordance with the Water Services Act 2017. The Forum has advisory roles in relation to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Irish Water, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Water Policy Advisory Committee.

THE FORUM IS the national statutory body representative of all stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's water bodies. Consisting of 26 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connection to issues relating to water quality and also public water consumers. Approximately 50 different organisations were involved in the nomination of members.

The Water Services Act 2017 provided the statutory basis for the Water Forum. The Act also provided for the dissolution of the Public Water Forum (whose remit was primarily concerned with issues pertinent to Irish Water and the Regulator) and the National Rural Water Services Committee (the committee for addressing issues regarding rural water), with their functions being incorporated into the Water Forum.

The Forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues pertaining to water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers

of Irish Water and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland. As an independent entity, the Water Forum has discretion to determine its own work programme and means of communicating its views and analysis.

Dr Tom Collins was Chair of the Water Forum from 2017 until retiring in September 2021.

The Forum's work is supported by an executive team including: Donal Purcell, Senior Executive Officer; Dr Triona McGrath, Research Lead; and Dr Gretta McCarron, Communications and Education Lead. Dr Angelos Alamanos joined the team as a post-Doctoral researcher based at Dundalk Institute of Technology and Martina Ryan, provides administration support.

Further information on the work of the Water Forum is available at www.thewaterforum.ie

Vision and Mission Statement



Vision

An Fóram Uisce has defined its vision where Ireland will have clean and healthy waters, capable of supporting biodiversity and providing the basis for a positive and healthy economic and cultural life.



Mission

We will ensure that all stakeholders are regularly reminded of our vision and their role in achieving and supporting same.

We will provide a unifying platform for multiple and sometimes competing interests to work together in a collaborative manner, and drawing on each other's expertise and experience, addressing the many challenges to the vision.

We will endeavour to inspire, inform, educate and challenge all stakeholders in matters relevant to the vision.

Based on our understanding of the vision and having regard to our interactions with stakeholders, the Forum is responsible for drafting recommendations regarding the on-going development of national policies and strategies in relation to all water issues.

The Water Forum Membership

The 26 members of the Forum reflects the complexities of the interplay between economic, social and environmental objectives in water management. Our work affords a great deal of attention and focus to decision making where these different sets of considerations converge.

Membership

Chairperson

Tom Collins (to September 2021)

Agriculture

Denis Drennan, ICMSA

Dominic Cronin, ICOS

Paul O'Brien, IFA

Derrie Dillon, Macra na Feirme

Angling & Water Sports

Martin McEnroe (Angling)

Tim Butter (Water sports)

Business

Neil Walker, Ibec

Community & Voluntary

Izzy Petrie, St. Vincent de Paul

Gerald Quain, Irish Rural Link

Consumers

Keith Hyland

Connie Rochford

Laurie Kearon

Social Housing

David Wright, ICSH

Education

Suzanne Linnane, Dundalk
Institute of Technology

Environment

Bernadette Connolly, Cork Env. Forum

Charles Stanley Smith, Environment
Pillar

Elaine McGoff, An Taisce

Ollan Herr, Zero Waste Alliance

Sinead O'Brien, SWAN

Forestry

Brendan Fitzsimons, Tree Council
of Ireland

Tourism

Tim Fenn, Irish Hotels Federation

Trade Unions

Liam Berney, ICTU

Rivers Trusts

Siobhan Ward, Moy Rivers Trust

Rural Water

Barry Deane, NFGWS

Jean Rosney, NFGWS

In 2021, the Water Forum finalised its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and currently 37% of Plenary Committee members were women; 50% of the Water Services Standing Committee and 38% of the Catchment Management Standing Committee members were women.

After 6 years as Chair, Dr Tom Collins retired from the Forum in September 2021 and Laurie Kearon, the representative for public water consumers retired in December 2021. We would like to thank them both for their dedication to their roles and commitment to the Water Forum.



The Water Forum Plenary

The Water Forum Plenary meets approximately nine times per year. In 2021, all nine of the meetings were held online because of COVID 19 guidelines. It is chaired by the Forum Chairperson.

Meetings of The Water Forum

19th January 2021	13th July 2021
23rd February 2021	14th September 2021
23rd March 2021	19th October 2021
27th April 2021	14th December 2021
1st June 2021	



Pictured left to right: Chair of the Water Forum, Professor Tom Collins; Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee; Darragh O'Brien T.D., Minister for Housing Local Government & Heritage; Donal Purcell, the Water Forum; Malcolm Noonan T.D., Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform; Gretta McCarron & Triona McGrath, the Water Forum and Cllr. Daniel Whooley, Deputy Mayor of Fingal. Maxwell photos.

Presentations made to the Forum Plenary

19th January
Water Policy Section, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Presentation on the Department priorities for 2021.

23rd February
Dr Florence Renou-Wilson, Dr David Wilson, Katherine Flood
Research Report & discussion on the Peatlands Research Project

23rd March
Hilary Curley Consultant
Presentation and final adaption of the Water Forum's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement

14th September
Karen Brosnan & Geoff Dooley, Consultant Facilitators
Workshop on the development of the Forum's Strategic Plan for 2022-2027.

The Forum members were also invited by Minister for Housing Local Government & Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, TD and Minister of State, Malcolm Noonan, TD to the opening of the public consultation on the draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 in Donabate, Dublin on 27th September 2021.



Committees of the Forum

Catchment Management Standing Committee

ESTABLISHED IN 2018, the Catchment Management Standing Committee (CMSC) facilitates stakeholder engagement on all catchment management issues at a national, strategic policy level with the common goal of restoring our waters and improving the supply and quality of drinking water.

The role of the Committee is to debate and analyse issues relating but not limited to:

- Leading the debate on water in Ireland
- Review and advise on the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) and the Water Framework

Directive (WFD)

- Lead public awareness and education on the value of water
- Support and promote public consultation and engagement on all matters relevant to water

The Committee has responsibility to report to the Forum plenary meetings in relation to these strategic objectives.

The Standing Committee was chaired by Dr Tom Collins and comprises of members including: Brendan Fitzsimons, Charles Stanley Smith, Connie Rochford, Denis Drennan, Dominic Cronin, Dr Elaine McGoff, Gerald Quain, Jean Rosney, Martin

McEnroe, Paul O'Brien, Sinead O'Brien, Siobhan Ward and Dr Suzanne Linnane.

In 2021, the Standing Committee met on 13 occasions.

Presentations to the Catchment Management Standing Committee

12th January

Representatives from the Office of Public Works (OPW)

Update on the River Shannon Management Agency Bill 2020 and current Flood risk programmes.

26th February

Representation from the EPA

Presentation on the Review of the National Inspection Plan for Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Septic Tanks)

6th September

Early-Stage Career Bursary Awardee

Irene O'Callaghan, University College Cork

Research Report & Discussion: Legacy Sediment Contamination

12th October

Dr Frances Lucy, Sligo Institute of Technology, Joe Caffrey, Dr Jaimie Dick, Queen's University, Belfast.

Research Report & Discussion: Invasive Alien Species; Policy Recommendations for their Management in Ireland

11th November

Representative from Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP)

Programme update and Q&A

Representative from Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP)

Programme update and Q&A

11th November

Representatives from Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Local Authority Waters Programme and the EPA

Update on the impacts of Agriculture on water quality and measures proposed in the draft River Basin Management Plan. Use of Pollution Impact Potential maps.

7th December

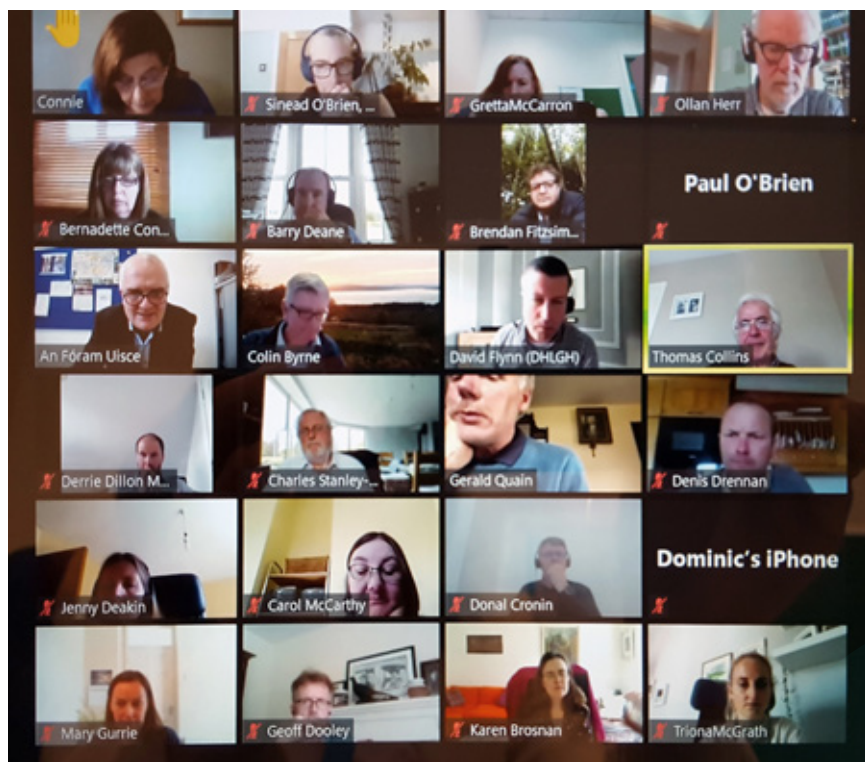
Representatives from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Water Policy Section, Local Authority Waters Programme and the EPA.

Discussion on Governance structures proposed in the draft RBMP and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) Research Outcomes

The Catchment Management Standing Committee led on the development of a number of significant policy submissions in 2021. Most significant of these were those policy areas relating to agricultural practice in Ireland including: Food Wise 2030 (DAFM, June); Common Agricultural Policy – Proposed Interventions (DAFM, August); Nitrates Action Plan (DHLGH, January & September) and Common Agricultural Policy – Strategic Plan (DAFM, December). Many of these submissions required a number of meetings to discuss the content of the Forum's policy recommendations. The members worked diligently and with mutual respect to achieve common ground.

After the launch of the draft River Basin Management Plan the Committee has engaged on an ongoing basis with the Department officials, Local Authority Waters Programme and the EPA to contribute to the development of the draft RBMP 2022-2027 to ensure that all the significant issues identified by the Forum will be addressed in the final plan.

Between September and December 2021, Dr Connie Rochford has acted as Chair of the Catchment Management Standing Committee, we would like to thank Connie for her astute leadership of the committee.



Catchment Management Standing Committee meeting with Department Officials, LAWPRO and EPA.

Water Services Standing Committee

THE WATER FORUM established a Water Services Standing Committee in 2018 and in so doing, re-iterated its commitment to facilitating stakeholder engagement on all water services issues (including drinking water and wastewater) at a national, strategic policy level with the common goal of improving the supply and quality of drinking water and protecting and restoring our waters.

The committee is required to debate and analyse issues related to drinking water and waste water, including, but not limited to:

- Water conservation
- Rural water issues
- The interests of the customers of Irish Water.

It is chaired by Barry Deane and comprises the following members: Connie Rochford, David Wright, Denis Drennan, Keith Hyland, Laurie Kearon, Neil Walker, Sinead O'Brien, Dr Suzanne Linnane and Dr Tim Butter.

The Standing Committee met on 9 occasions in 2021.

Presentations to the Water Services Standing Committee

20th April

Representatives from Irish Water

Presentation on the current status of the Eastern Midlands Water Supply Project

Early-Stage Career Bursary Awardee

Dr Luisa Andrade, University College Cork

Research Report & Discussion: Protection of Small Private Supplies in Ireland

6th July

Representatives from DHLGH

Rural Water Division

Presentation and discussion on the Review of the Rural Water Programme

Early-Stage Career Bursary Awardee

Hammond Sarpong, Dundalk Institute of Technology

Research report & Discussion: Communicating water availability to improve awareness and the implementation of water conservation measures in the Republic of Ireland

5th October

Representatives from Irish Water

Update on the recent issues at Ballymore Eustace & Gorey Water

Treatment Plants & the current position in this regard.

15th November

Representatives from the EPA Drinking Water Team

Updates regarding audits of Gorey & Ballymore Eustace WTPs & the current position on these

Representatives from Irish Water

Update on the National Water Resources Plan (NWRP) Phase 2- Regional Water Resources Plan – Eastern Midlands

10th December

Presentation from Dr Sarah Cotterill University College Dublin

Research Report & Discussion: A Framework for Improving Domestic Water Conservation in Ireland

The Water Forum established a Liaison Sub-Group of its membership to interact with Irish Water on an ongoing basis to improve engagement and build a partnership approach towards dealing with matters of concern to the Forum. The liaison Group met with Irish Water on three occasions throughout 2021 to get updates on the progress of their work.



Policy Submissions

THE FORUM HAS A RESPONSIBILITY to comment and make submissions in relation to national policies pertinent to water quality. During the course of the year, the Forum submitted responses to a number of consultation processes which are summarised as follows:

January

Climate Action Plan
DHLGH

**National Development Plan
Review to Renew**
DPER

**Irish Water Revenue Control 3
Financial Incentives**
CRU

February

National Water Resources Plan
IW

Irish Water First Fix
CRU

March

Review of National Inspection Plan
EPA

June

Food Wise 2030
DAFM

July

**Expansion of Ireland’s Marine
Protected Areas**
DHLGH

August

**Common Agricultural Policy –
Proposed Interventions**
DAFM

January & September

Nitrates Action Plan
DHLGH

October

**National Inspection Plan for
DWWTs** EPA + letter to Dept.

December

**Common Agricultural Policy –
Strategic Plan**
DAFM



Submission Spotlight

To the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the draft CAP Strategy 2023-2027

THE MEMBERS OF the Forum held a number of meetings to discuss the content and how the CAP Strategic Plan could better address Ireland's water quality; expertise and perspectives from a range of organisations and experts were shared and used in the development of the recommendations outlined in the Forum's submission.

The Water Forum welcomed the 'Green Architecture' outlined in the new CAP, that proposes to address the climate, biodiversity and environmental crises through enhanced conditionality, the Eco Scheme Intervention of Pillar 1 and the range of climate/environment interventions of Pillar 2.

The Forum welcomed the proposal that "the underpinning principle for the (Pillar 2 AECM) scheme will be 'right action in the right place' in order to ensure effective targeting of measures to deliver biodiversity, water and climate action in an integrated manner on farms".

The view of the Water Forum is that the national CAP Strategy would similarly benefit from the conceptual framework provided by the Forum's Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management (FILLM), as a means of optimising efficiency and effectiveness in achieving environmental outcomes for climate, biodiversity, water quality and soil enhancement. The Forum believes that while designing actions/ measures to be included in the new CAP Strategy that priority for the AECM scheme should be for water bodies identified as being at risk from agriculture, with additional emphasis on those with a range of co-benefits for water, climate, soil and biodiversity to maximise capacity and resource efficiencies (see Table 1, FILLM). The implementation of the new CAP will require cross-component planning where disciplines and organisations from multiple Government departments and agencies should work together in a co-ordinated manner to achieve climate and environmental targets.

A total of 27 recommendations were made in the submission across Pillar I and Pillar II interventions. Recommendations for Prioritisation within Pillar II AECM schemes included:

1. PAAs, where agriculture has been identified as a significant pressure, should be ranked highest within Tier 1 for priority access to Pillar 2 AECM scheme.
2. The definition of 'vulnerable water area' currently proposed for Tier 2, should be "any water body where agriculture has been identified as a significant pressure".
3. The proposed 'vulnerable water area' eligibility criterion currently proposed for Tier 2, should be included within Tier 1 to allow farmers in these areas to get priority access to the AECM scheme, with additional priority given to those identified as having a critical source area (defined by EPA PIP maps).
4. In addition to PAAs and vulnerable water areas, applications for AECM payments which propose measures with multiple co-benefits for water, soil, climate and biodiversity, should be prioritised for eligibility for the scheme.

Recommendation for Conditionality: the Forum recommends there is greater emphasis on targeted measures within Pillar 1, such as consideration of spatially targeted buffer zones in poorly draining soils under GAEC 4.

The full submission is available at: www.thewaterforum.ie/app/uploads/2021/12/Water-Forum-Submission-on-CAP-Public-Consultation.pdf (thewaterforum.ie)

Research Outputs and Reports

The Forum's overarching research objective is to: To ensure all guidance concerning the management of inland aquatic environments and water resources provided by the Forum is supported by the best available science; and where knowledge gaps exist, to carry out or commission research to support the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

Research Outputs in 2021 included:

A research project titled '**Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while Delivering Co-benefits for Climate and Biodiversity**', was carried out by Dr Florence Renou-Wilson of University College Dublin along with colleagues Catharine Pschenycky, Emily Riondato, David Wilson, Kate Flood and Connie O'Driscoll.

The report highlighted the importance of Ireland's peatlands for the provision of clean water, biological diversity and for greenhouse gas sequestration and climate mitigation. Natural peatlands exert a net cooling effect on global climate but drained peatlands can release significant amounts of stored carbon accelerating climate change. Rewetting and restoring these peatlands can reverse this and restore natural carbon sink function. Traditionally in Ireland, economic and utilitarian values relating to the extraction of peat was paramount but in recent years there has been a shift in societal norms towards the cultural, heritage and recreational value of peatlands. This provides an opportunity to transform peatlands from sites of labour and employment to sites of restoration, recreation and conservation thereby having a more positive impact on the ecosystem services provided by peatlands. The report provided a number of recommendations for management practice to optimise the value of peatlands for climate mitigation, biodiversity and water quality.

A second research project carried out by Prof. Frances Lucy, Institute of Technology, Sligo; Prof. Joe Caffrey, INVAS Biosecurity Ltd.; and Prof. Jaimie Dick, Queen's University, Belfast explored '**Invasive Alien Species in the Republic of Ireland: Policy Recommendations for their Management**'.

This research looked at the impact of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) currently in Ireland, an assessment of pathways for introduction of IAS to Ireland was undertaken, current policy gaps were identified and mechanisms for restricting IAS introduction and spread were identified. The report highlights the economic and environmental cost of inaction on IAS particularly with increasing globalisation and as an island our native species are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of IAS. Enhanced legislation and surveillance programmes to monitor the presence and status of IAS in waterbodies are needed. The authors recommendations included: the establishment of one single, suitably resourced, authority with responsibility for IAS management; the development of a National Biosecurity Strategy for Ireland; establishment of an all-island IAS Forum; resources for training and enhanced customs controls; the development of a national IAS education and awareness programme as a minimum to protect Ireland into the future.

"Natural peatlands exert a net cooling effect on global climate but drained peatlands can release significant amounts of stored carbon accelerating climate change. Rewetting and restoring these peatlands can reverse this and restore natural carbon sink function."

Irene O'Callaghan of University College Cork was awarded the **Sediment Legacy Contamination** research bursary.

The report highlights the immense knowledge gap on legacy sediment contamination in Ireland's freshwater and recommends that guidelines need to be set for acceptable concentrations of contaminants in freshwater sediments. Compounds that are known to be hazardous to the aquatic environment need to be clearly labelled. Monitoring of sediment contamination should be included in catchment management programmes.

Ms Luisa Albuquerque de Andrade, was awarded the **Protection of Small Private Supplies in Ireland** research bursary.

This work identified the key persistent contaminants impacting on small private supplies and identified practice to minimise the impacts of these, such as well location selection and set back distances; well protection features; good drilling practice and well maintenance and inspection regimes. One of the key recommendations is that a specific governance organisation is established to provide overarching guidance and support to Small Private Supplies nationally and the development of communications and awareness strategies to promote desirable well stewardship practices.

Sarpong Hammond Antwi of Dundalk Institute of Technology was awarded the **Communicating water availability to improve awareness and the**

implementation of water conservation measures research bursary.

This study reviewed social media posts and broadcast media, carried out interviews to ascertain the Irish public's understanding of drought and the effectiveness of water availability communications in the aftermath of the National Water Conservation Orders in 2018 and 2020. The findings identified the need for a consolidated national drought information system to coordinate, monitor, forecast, and help plan and inform the general public, stakeholders, and policymakers and the media on drought events and their impact on water resources. It is recommended that the Forum takes a proactive lead on national stakeholder engagement on drought and its impact on water resources. There is limited public appreciation for the work that ensures water supply, the Water Forum could lead a national awareness campaign to help build knowledge and resilience.

The Forum supports its work with internal research also. Some of the topics reviewed in 2021 includes: Nature based solutions, Water Usage of Data centres in Ireland and Bathing water quality.

The Research Lead also contributes to National Research Networks including the Water Research Steering Committee (Chaired by DHLGH); the EPA National Environmental Research Steering Committee and Third Level / Research Institutions.



Education and Awareness

The overarching objective of the Education Strategy 2020-2021 is:

To collaborate with agencies and education providers to enhance the scale and diversity of water education programmes; facilitate networking and support resource sharing; initiate awareness campaigns that illuminate the value of water for personal, societal, and economic well-being.

Water Matters Schools Competition

On World Earth Day 22nd April the winners of the Water Matters Schools Competition were announced. Pupils were asked to watch the Water Forum's Water Matters video and interview grandparents or older adults about how water matters at home had changed from 1971 to 2021. Significant numbers of schools and pupils submitted posters, artwork, stories and videos. The senior winners were Scoil Naomh ERC, Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry; the junior winners were Oaklands Primary School, Stillorgan, Dublin.

National Science Week

For National Science Week a video was launched to introduce the draft River Basin Management plan with contributions from Minister Malcolm Noonan, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Caroline Wynne from the EPA, Monitoring Unit and Thomas Carolan of the Local Authority Waters Programme. The video was shared with schools across Ireland and is available on the Water Forum's You Tube Channel.

Water Forum Factsheets

Factsheets covering issues relating to water management in Ireland have been produced and made available on the Water Forum website under Education and Awareness resources:

- An introduction to the Water Framework Directive
- An Introduction to the River Basin Management Plan

Further topics are in preparation include: Water Management in Ireland; Water Services In Ireland; An Introduction to the National Water Resources Plan.

Water Education resources are shared with catchments.ie and the water education network.



Minister Malcolm Noonan, introducing the draft River Basin Management Plan.

Communications: Press Releases and Newsletters

The Forum's communications hub is the website www.thewaterforum.ie where all of the Forum's communications are available.

Research reports, policy submissions, meeting minutes, press releases, newsletters, weekly news updates and social media feeds are accessible.

Key communications in 2021 include:

- Annual Report for 2020
- 3 Quarterly Newsletters, 4th was published in January 2022
- Webinar and weekly news updates

Networks

- Education Working Group
- Water Education Network

The Forum's quarterly newsletter is circulated to all members, their organisations and the Forum's stakeholder network, news media and it is made publicly available on the website.

Press Releases are available on the Water Forum website: www.thewaterforum.ie

Twitter feeds are available on the Forum's website.

Representation and Presentations

The Senior Executive Officer, Donal Purcell represents the Forum on the Water Advisory Body.

Dr Triona McGrath presented to the National University of Ireland Galway's Marine and Freshwater Management Masters Programme.

Dr Gretta McCarron presented on the Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management at International Association Hydrogeologists Irish Group webinar and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management webinar.



Webinar Discussion on 'Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management'

PEATLANDS ARE UNIQUE

environments that provide a wide range of beneficial services and functions to humans and the environment. In their natural state, they provide filtration processes to clean water and slow-the-flow by reducing the quantity of water entering rivers and lakes; they help regulate the global climate and mitigate climate change; they support unique flora and fauna; and provide multiple cultural services to society.

Ireland's land area is comprised of 20% peatland, but only 18% of all peatlands are in a 'near natural' or 'healthy' state. Consequently, 82% of peatlands are considered 'degraded'. Peatlands consist of 95% water, and degraded peatlands are drained to varying degrees for peat extraction, domestic peat cutting, agriculture or forestry. Drainage of peatlands and removal of surface vegetation releases nutrients (phosphorus, nitrogen, ammonia), dissolved carbon and sediment, which gives rivers and lakes a dark colour, and reduces water quality.

This is a particular issue in drinking water source areas. Drained peatlands have reduced capacity to store carbon as they are not growing, they release CO₂ contributing to climate change and can no longer support plant and

animal biodiversity. They are also at greater risk of fire. Better management through rewetting and restoration of peatlands can reverse these trends and restore the natural peatland functions. Rewetting is not flooding. But blocking drains can restore the water balance within the peatland so that plants can grow and re-establish to provide and improve animal habitats in the bog and downstream rivers. Industrial cutaway bogs will need longer term measures and more intensive restoration programmes to recover.

'A new way of being in the bog' – the shift from an economic resource to cultural asset

Changing the function of the bogs and peatlands from their economic use associated with peat harvesting, afforestation and agriculture to use for recreation, tourism and heritage values is best achieved through local community engagement. Communities need to be given the opportunity to lead the change in peatland transformation from being

sites of labour and employment to sites of restoration, recreation and conservation.

These shifts in values need to occur, in order, to support the development of sustainable peatlands that support ecosystem services for water, biodiversity and climate, and for local communities. Dr Tom Collins added; "Generations of Irish children have written loving essays entitled A Day in The Bog. Now we are trying to ensure that future generations of our children can write the same essay with the same innocent trust that some things never change."

Report: Optimising Water Quality Returns from Peatland Management while delivering co-benefits for climate and biodiversity.

The Forum would like to thank the Panellists who contributed to the Webinar on Peatlands. Dr Tom Collins, Dr Flo Renou-Wilson, Dr David Wilson, Dr Derek McLoughlin, Kate Flood, Chris Uys and Tina Claffey.

"Ireland's land area is comprised of 20% peatland, but only 18% of all peatlands are in a 'near natural' or 'healthy' state. Consequently, 82% of peatlands are considered 'degraded'."

Finance and Administration

THE EXPENSES INCURRED by An Fóram are provided for by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Housing. During 2021, was expended, broken down into the following categories.

Item	Expenditure to 31st December 2021 €
Meeting expenses	1,393.27
Members travel/expenses	1,659.36
Training and facilitation	3,469.13
Implementation of strategy	109,796.02
Chairs allowance	9,022.38
Secretariat Salary and Travel	381,240.96
Strategic Plan	23,244.78
Office & IT Expenses	23,744.43
Total	553,570.33

Tipperary County Council provides administrative support in the context of human resources, payroll, payments and office space.

Retirement of Professor Tom Collins

The Forum would like to take this opportunity to wish our Chair, Professor Tom Collins, best wishes on his retirement from the Forum.



TOM'S EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE has been an invaluable resource to the Forum as it has developed as a stakeholder body to contribute meaningfully to water management in Ireland. In addition to chairing meetings and contributing to discussions, Tom was also an ambassador for the Forum and our spokesperson on water issues in the national media. As a moderator at webinars, he excelled at posing thought provoking questions and leading innovative thinking.

Tom spent 10 years as Chair of the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee that oversaw an investment of €2 billion in Group Water Scheme infrastructure. Tom was heavily involved in the establishment of the National Centre for Freshwater Studies (now the Centre for Freshwater and Environmental Studies) at Dundalk Institute of Technology. As a member of the Wild Irish Salmon working group, he contributed to the banning of drift net fishing for salmon in Irish coastal waters. In 2015 Tom was appointed Chair of the Public Water Forum, and then remained as Chair of An Fóram Uisce – the Water Forum in 2018.

While the members and staff of the Forum will miss Tom's presence, they are honoured to have worked with him over the years and hope to continue to build and improve the Forum's role and impact in water management in Ireland.

"Tom's expertise and knowledge has been an invaluable resource to the Forum as it has developed as a stakeholder body to contribute meaningfully to water management in Ireland."



Acknowledgements



The Chair & Senior Executive Officer would like to thank the members of the Water Forum for their support, enthusiasm, hard work and commitment during the year, particularly considering the limitations imposed by COVID-19.

The Water Forum would also like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their support of the work of the Forum and/or attendance at meetings of the Forum during 2021.

- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Donal Daly
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Irish Water
- Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
- Office of Public Works
- The Commission for Regulation of Utilities
- The Agricultural Catchments Programme and ASSAP
- Tipperary County Council



Civic Offices, Limerick Road
Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

 www.thewaterforum.ie
 info@nationalwaterforum.ie

