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Strategic
Plan

Looking after Ireland's
water resources

We are the national statutory
body representative of all
stakeholders with an interest
in the quality of Ireland's
water bodies

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Introduction

Who we are

The Water Forum is the national statutory body representative of all stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's water bodies. It consists of 26 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality and also public water consumers. In accordance to the Water Services Act, the Forum has advisory roles in relation to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Irish Water, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and the Water Policy Advisory Committee.

The Forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues with regard to water quality, rural water policy, issues of concern to customers of Irish Water, the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland.



26
members



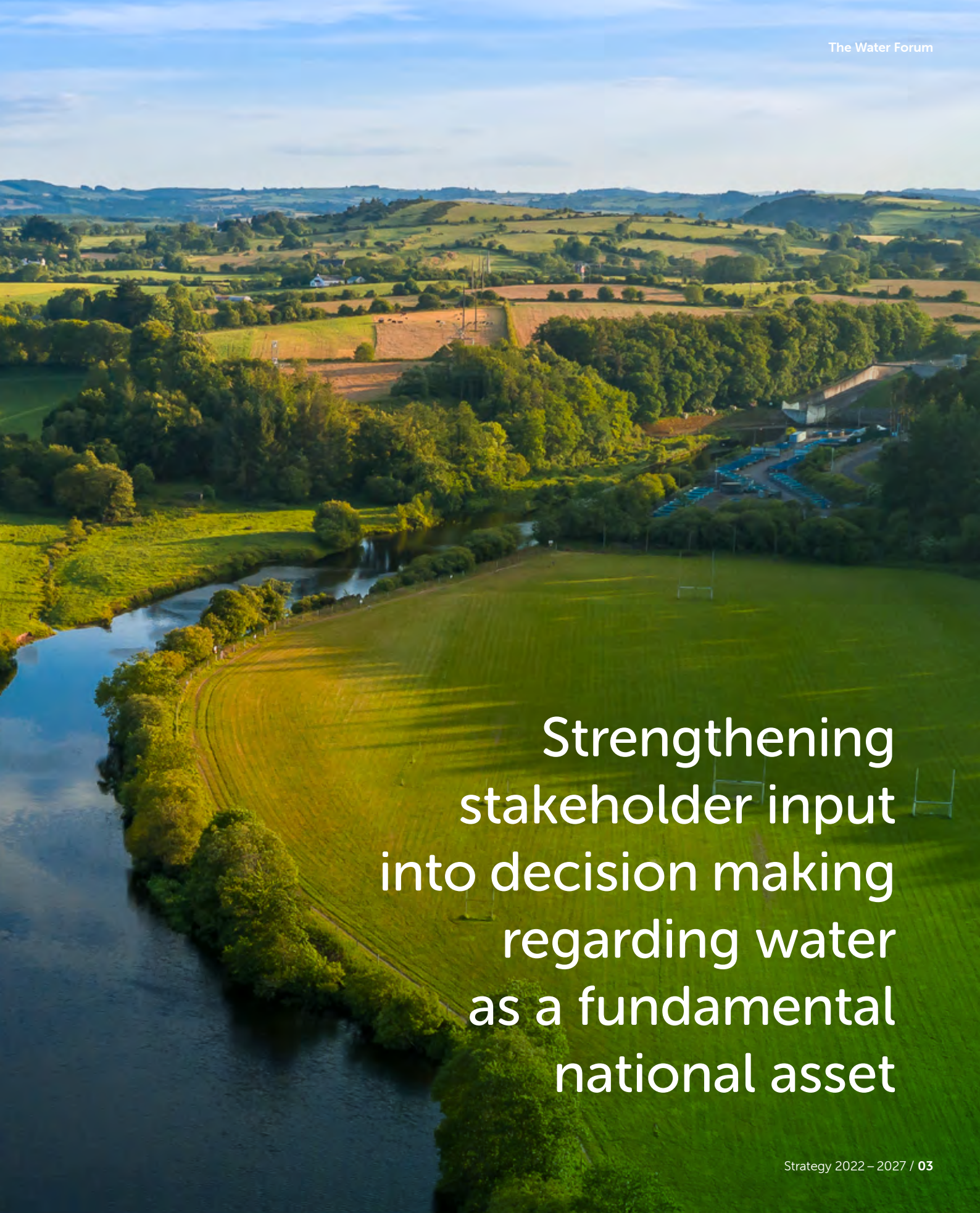
Advising on
water issues



Unifying
platform



Strengthening
stakeholder input

An aerial photograph of a river flowing through a lush green landscape. The river is on the left, curving towards the bottom left. To the right of the river is a large, open green field, possibly a sports field, with a goalpost visible. Behind the field is a dense forest. In the background, there are rolling hills and some buildings under a blue sky with light clouds.

Strengthening stakeholder input into decision making regarding water as a fundamental national asset

What we do

We provide a platform for stakeholder engagement and dialogue on all matters relating to water as an environmental, economic and social asset, thereby:

- We provide a strong, independent voice on water quality, conservation and future proofing
- We act as a governance component in the management of Ireland's water resources
- We advocate for innovative engagement between policy makers, stakeholders and the public
- We review, reflect and comment on the development of national policy and the effectiveness of and the impediments to the implementation of policy.



How we do it

1

We provide a **platform for stakeholder engagement and dialogue** on all matters relating to water as an environmental, economic and social asset.

- We build the capacity of our members to engage in the dialogue
- We build and maintain relationships
- We manage/bridge the tensions between primary interests and the common good
- We partner with key agencies to leverage expertise, insight, knowledge and research outputs
- We broker perspectives to explore the costs and benefits of competing interests

2

We provide a **strong, independent voice** on water quality, conservation and future proofing.

- We reflect a diversity of voices to form a composite view on policies, technical, governance and community solutions
- We gather intelligence, science and best practice through external input and commissioned research
- We make sense of and disseminate information through conferences, media and workshops
- We explore futures thinking and aspire to drive transformational change

3

We act as an **integral governance component** in the management of Ireland's water resources.

- We develop effective relationships with Government Departments, Irish Water (IW), Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), rural water services and with other relevant bodies through emergent experimental governance approaches
- We look to international best practice in water governance
- As a component of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) structures, we raise emerging concerns in relation to the implementation process

4

We **develop strategic responses** to water policy issues.

Determined by the priorities within the Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plan:

- We develop policy submissions and positions based on research, external expertise, agency input and dialogue
- We invest in a learning mindset to develop, change and integrate perspectives
- We promote an integrated systems approach to water management and governance

Everyone shares the objective of clean and healthy waters in Ireland. Achieving this, however, will require fundamental changes in many aspects of life in the country.



Foreword

The planetary environmental crisis threatens to engulf the Earth. In the lifespan of the generation born in the mid-20th Century, the phenomenon of climate change has emerged as an overwhelming existential threat.

Each year the urgency and the scale of the challenge become even more pronounced. At a global level, the UN Sixth IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) report states that:

- Climate change is intensifying the water cycle and affecting precipitation patterns with more intense rainfall events resulting in flooding or dry periods causing drought conditions.
- Melting glaciers and ice sheets will cause sea level rise resulting in severe coastal flooding directly impacting on low-lying coastal towns and cities.
- Changes to the ocean, including warming, more frequent marine heatwaves, ocean acidification, and reduced oxygen levels have been clearly linked to human influence.

At a national level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) points to the continuing deterioration of water bodies; biodiversity loss; the impacts of climate change and the deteriorating air quality as the main elements of the environmental crisis in Ireland.

In shaping its strategy and priority action areas for the coming years the Water Forum is acutely conscious of this background.

Ireland's waters are exposed to many hazards; nutrient contamination, pesticide and herbicide residues, the threat of invasive species and siltation being among the most significant of these.

Everyone shares the objective of clean and healthy waters in Ireland. Achieving this, however, will require fundamental changes in many aspects of life in the country. The Water Forum attempts to provide a space where the changes required are agreed among those directly affected by them.

In attempting to arrive at such broadly based agreement, the Forum is guided by the principle that the polluter pays and that of public money for public goods. Economic strategies that reward poor environmental behaviour, or which fail to disincentivise poor behaviours, are unlikely to result in transformational positive outcomes for water.

The Forum membership reflects the complexities of the interplay between economic and environmental objectives and accords a great deal of attention and focus to this decision-making juncture where these two sets of considerations converge.

In this sense the Forum is pioneering an innovative model of environmental brokerage where the costs and responsibilities for water quality protection and enhancement are shared out on an agreed basis between multiple actors.

The Irish Government will shortly publish the third cycle River Basin Management Plan for the period up to 2027. The final Plan will provide the policy context for the work of the Forum and will set the national objectives and measures to achieve the necessary water quality standards as required by the Water Framework Directive. Apart from such National and EU requirements regarding the restoration of water quality, the moral imperative should help mobilise a countrywide resolve to reverse the process of water quality deterioration and ensure we protect this great natural resource for future generations.

Professor Tom Collins

Chair of An Fóram Uisce – The Water Forum
2018-2021



Vision

Ireland's waters are clean, healthy and life enhancing, supporting biodiversity and providing the basis for community wellbeing and economic sustainability.



Mission

The Water Forum provides a platform for the stakeholders of water quality, where the members draw on their various perspectives and expertise to address the challenges and agree governance, societal and technical policies and solutions to achieve clean and healthy waters.



Intention

"We recognise the current environmental crisis, and we are committed to act cohesively and urgently in Ireland's efforts to address this crisis. We appreciate that this will require transformational change, on the part of all."

Values and principles

We inform and **add value to policy** through dialogue and the sensemaking of science



We synthesise existing knowledge to **deliver innovative, sustainable solutions**



We are committed to providing a space where competing interests **find common purpose**



We are committed to **social and environmental justice** so that both people and nature have access to a clean environment



Each stakeholder is afforded **equal opportunity** to contribute



We listen to each stakeholder, **respect the diversity of views** and learn from and value the work of others



We **share our learnings** and outcomes without reserve



Strategic goals

1

Provide a unique and robust platform for stakeholder engagement and agreement on key issues concerning Ireland's waters

2

Be a proactive and authoritative national statutory body, leading on water policy, management and governance

3

Bring scientific recommendations to policy through analysis, dialogue and sense making

4

Lead on innovation in experimental Governance and futures thinking

5

Advocate for the need for and benefits of meaningful public engagement and education in water resource management



Goal 1

Provide a unique and robust platform for stakeholder engagement and agreement on key issues concerning Ireland's waters

Objectives

- Lead stakeholder engagement and participation on all matters relevant to water
- Build and maintain a strong informed Forum

Outcomes

- Water resource management issues and opportunities identified
- Key issues analysed, discussed and positions developed
- Members are empowered to contribute to policy



Goal 2

Be a proactive and authoritative national statutory body, leading on water policy, management and governance

Objectives

- Advise the Minister on the formulation of national policy relating to water
- Review and advise on the RBMP
- Identify and advocate for optimum level of engagement with the implementation structures of the RBMP
- Engage with IW, CRU, EPA, DHLGH in the delivery of water and wastewater service
- Develop relationships with Government Departments to optimise the potential contributions of the Forum
- Engage with the DHLGH on rural water issues

Outcomes

- Informed policy submission and policy recommendations for water protection made to Ministers across Government
- RBMP progress monitored, with regular updates from the DHLGH and leading agencies
- Effective working relationships with the structures within the RBMP
- Up to date information on water and wastewater service delivery is shared. Reports and submissions to plans are made by the Forum
- Government Departments engage with the Forum as an authoritative national voice on water quality
- Direct input into rural water policy and the development of rural water services



Goal 3

Bring scientific recommendations to policy through analysis, dialogue and sense making

Objectives

- Gather intelligence from existing research, new commissioned research and external expertise to inform policy
- Contribute to the debate on water quality, water conservation and future proofing in collaboration with agencies
- Act as a conduit between the scientific community and the public

Outcomes

- Research reports and policy recommendations
- Research output and learnings are disseminated through conferences, webinars and workshops
- Enhanced public consciousness and awareness of the value of water



Goal 4

Lead on innovation in experimental governance and futures thinking

Objectives

- Advocate for a whole of Government approach in water and overall environmental management, which takes on board the outputs of stakeholder engagement
- Complement and critique the work of implementing bodies and agencies to improve water quality outcomes
- Reflect on and evaluate our contribution to mitigating the current environmental crises and how this could be improved
- Identify and advocate for optimum public engagement in integrated catchment management and RBMP implementation
- Evaluate the Forum's processes and effectiveness through reflection and annual planning

Outcomes

- The concept of systems approach (FILLM) is shared with agencies and Government Departments and is implemented across catchment plans
- More effective water quality outcomes are achieved
- Water is established as an integral part of the environmental crises along with climate and biodiversity
- International best practice and expertise is explored to inform action and knowledge. The Forum is seen as a model for experimental governance
- Internal evaluations, action planning and monitoring is carried out



Goal 5

Advocate for the need for and benefits of meaningful public engagement and education on water resource management

Objectives

- Advocate for effective public participation in integrated catchment management
- Promote awareness and education on the value of and threats to water
- Promote best practice on public participation, based on national and international best practice

Outcomes

- Greater understanding of the role and value of participative democracy and public engagement in policy formation
- Education resources on the value of water are shared
- A pathway for effective public engagement is in place for water management at local/catchment level





Structures and resources to support the work of the Forum

Forum committees

The Forum Plenary meets every six weeks and has adopted its own Standing Orders and Terms of Reference based on the provision of the Water Services Act 2017. The terms of office and membership of the Forum is governed by relevant legislation.

A *Water Services Standing Committee* has been established to address the Forum's work in relation to water and wastewater services.

A *Catchment Management Standing Committee* was established to review the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan and liaise with the implementation structures in monitoring progress. Both committees can propose topics for further research to inform members knowledge and policy submissions. The Forum also establishes working groups to focus and report on particular issues as and when required.

Funding requirements and Office arrangements

The Forum is funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the budget is reviewed on an annual basis to reflect the work commitments and outputs of the Forum. The Forum has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with Tipperary County Council for the purposes of facilitating the Forum's secretariat arrangements, financial systems, recruitment and payroll requirements, ICT backup and leasing arrangements. The Forum's administrative office is located in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

Secretariat

The Forum is supported by a Senior Executive Officer, a Research Lead, a Communications and Education Lead and Clerical Officer. The Forum has an agreement with Dundalk Institute of Technology for the support of a Post-Doctoral Researcher.

Membership of the Forum

Agriculture

- Dominic Cronin, ICOS
- Derrie Dillon, Macra
- Denis Drennan, ICMSA
- Paul O'Brien, IFA

Angling and Recreation

- Tim Butter, Water Sports
- Martin McEnroe, Angling

Business

- Neil Walker, IBEC

Community and Voluntary

- Izzy Petrie, St. Vincent de Paul
- Gerald Quain, Irish Rural Link

Irish Water Consumers

- Keith Hyland
- Laurie Kearon
- Connie Rochford

Education

- Suzanne Linnane, DKIT

Environment

- Bernadette Connolly, Cork Env. Forum
- Ollan Herr, Zero Waste Alliance
- Elaine McGoff, An Taisce
- Sinead O'Brien, SWAN
- Charles Stanley Smith, Env. Pillar

Forestry

- Brendan Fitzsimons, Tree Council of Ireland

Rivers Trusts

- Siobhan Ward, Moy Rivers Trust

Rural Water

- Barry Deane, NFGWS
- Jean Rosney, NFGWS

Social Housing

- David Wright, ICSH

Tourism

- Tim Fenn, IHF

Trade Unions

- Liam Berney, ICTU

Glossary and Abbreviations

Glossary

Sensemaking	Techniques can be used to explore how people come to make sense of complex and unfamiliar issues such as water resource management. It is a means to grasp group reasoning around a particular topic, formed in support of new, future-oriented and less familiar issues. In this context the identification of anchors whereby meaning is attached to more concrete and tangible objects or experiences is useful to consider in more detail, suggesting prevailing ideas, and established associations on a given issue.
Experimental governance	Learning-by-monitoring using an ongoing process of provisional goal setting, based on the comparison of alternative approaches advanced in different contexts. Experimental governance ¹ was developed as a response to the perceived failure of “command and control” regulation in a rapidly changing world where fixed rules written by a hierarchical authority are quickly rendered obsolete on the ground, where front line actors need to find joint solutions to common problems through experimental trial and error processes.
Participative democracy	Participative democracy is a model of democracy in which citizens are provided power to make political decisions, normally at local level. The multiple benefits of wide participation, through inclusion, direct engagement and empowerment are emphasised. Citizens and communities are given a more central role in developing responses to real world problems.
Deliberative democracy	Deliberative democracy ² is a form of democratic decision-making where stakeholders engage in a process of learning, reflection and reasoned discussion before forming a collective judgement. Deliberative democracy claims that when the stakeholders affected by an issue come together to share their perspective and listen to others it leads to credible and legitimate decisions.
Futures thinking	Futures thinking ³ is a creative and exploratory process for surfacing the drivers of change that are shaping the future and that have policy implications today. It invites divergent perspectives to seek many possible answers and acknowledges uncertainty. It's a different mind-set to analytical thinking (essentially traditional problem-solving) which uses convergent thinking to seek the right answer and reduce uncertainty

Abbreviations


CRU	Commission for Regulation of Utilities
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
IW	Irish Water
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan

1 Reference: Sabel, C. and Zeitlin, J. (2012) Experimentalist Governance, in D. Levi-Faur (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.169-183.

2 www.ccukdemocracy.org/deliberative-democracy-faqs



3 www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/futures-thinking

The Water Forum
is guided by the
principle that the
polluter pays and that
of public money for
public goods





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