

PRESS RELEASE 22nd March 2023

National Water Forum highlights the need for action to protect water on World Water Day

Today, is World Water Day, designated so by the United Nations with the stated aim of accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crises. The UN asks that we *'be the change you wish to see'*, every individual action matters. This day also marks the beginning of the 2023 United Nations Water Conference being held in New York where global leaders will come together to address the water and sanitation crises. Globally water is scarce. Only 0.5% of water on Earth is useable and available as freshwater. Every living thing needs water to survive, yet like air, we tend to take it for granted.

Water is not static, it is constantly moving. It wears down mountains, creates soils, moves through and nourishes every living thing, including people. It supports economic development and helps maintain personal hygiene, health and well-being. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report published yesterday noted that human activity has increased global temperatures by 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. This warming is most often manifested by its impact on the movement of water, with either too much or too little water in any one place at a time. Warmer air increases evaporation rates resulting in heavier and more intense rainfall events, such as the one that flooded one third of Pakistan last year. Ireland is not immune.

Research commissioned by the [National Water Forum](#) reviewed the latest scientific data and climate projections, which indicate that climate change will have impacts for both water quality and quantity in Ireland. There will be episodes of intense storms resulting in flooding particularly in the west and south and erosion in coastal areas. There will also be periods of reduced rainfall resulting in drought conditions and low flow levels in rivers and lakes. Ireland was the only country in Europe with a mapped soil moisture deficit in late February this year, if such conditions were to continue it would have impacts for agricultural production.

In addition to climate change impacts, population increase and increasing economic activity will put additional pressures on water supply systems and wastewater services owing to increasing water demand. Uisce Eireann's National Water Resources Plan noted that 58% of water supply zones were in supply demand deficit in normal conditions with up to 66% in deficit during summer drought. In 2017, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Future Funding for Domestic Water Services recommended that conservation of water resources should be embedded as a principle of water policy in Ireland. This will require investment in water services infrastructure and the provision of incentives to save water and discourage wastage.

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The means are available to provide solutions.

We need to consider how we can adapt and prepare for the additional demands on water supply and the potential impacts on water quality. Ireland has flood management and early flood warning systems in place but more needs to be done to improve drought management planning and warning systems. Research commissioned by the Water Forum has recommended the development of a [National Framework for Domestic water conservation](#) which could provide a pathway for water conservation that will reduce water demand to mitigate negative environmental impacts and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ease the pressure on water and wastewater infrastructure.

Meeting climate targets, protecting water and nature will require a change in the way we live. Such transformational change will only be achieved when there is trust in the system. Everyone needs to work together to prioritise risk reduction and to share the benefits and burdens equitably. For this to happen, we need leaders to facilitate conversations that will enable the necessary change to take place. The Water Forum has recommended that a national approach for public participation is developed to achieve better outcomes in the protection of water resources. Changing behaviour is essential to keep warming to levels which we can survive and to protect water resources and nature. As the UN states, we need to accelerate action by being the change we want to see, every individual action matters. In fact, this will be essential to deliver the transformational changes that are needed in the timeframes required.

Solutions are available but supports and policies are still needed to realise the transformations required to achieve Ireland's objectives for climate, nature and water. As a stakeholder body informing national policy, the Water Forum is working to achieve that change. The 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan will be published in the coming months and the Forum is hopeful some of these easy wins for water, nature and climate mitigation will be reflected in this important national plan.

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

Note to the Editor

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce) was established in 2018 to provide a platform for public engagement on all matters relating to water management in Ireland and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It consists of 25 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations and sectors with an interest in water issues that includes the environmental sector, the rural and agricultural sector, consumers including customers of Irish Water, the rural water sector, rivers trusts, angling, business sector, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, fisheries, forestry, education, social housing and tourism. In accordance with the Water Services Act, 2017, the Forum has advisory

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roles in relation to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), Irish Water (IW), the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC). The Forum is chaired by Dr Matt Crowe.

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