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National Water Forum hosts a workshop on opportunities for education and communication on the need for water conservation.

Despite our predominantly wet climate and abundance of water resources, in recent years there have been regular shortages in water supply to homes and businesses. Population growth and economic development are expected to continue to increase at varying rates across the country, which will result in a greater demand for water. Climate change projections indicate there will be an increase of up to 27% in drought periods in Ireland, particularly in the south and east of the country, which will add further pressure to water supplies. Demand management, or reducing wastage of water, is essential to make supplies sustainable.

There are multiple benefits to increasing efforts to conserve water. It would first reduce the water demand, thereby reducing the volume of water taken from the local waterbodies and reducing the energy consumed in abstracting and treating water. It would support climate adaptation efforts as we will need to adapt to longer and more frequent drought conditions in the future. While we do not pay for our water, 20% of the energy used in the home is for heating water, therefore if we transition to using more water efficiency technologies and alternative water sources, such as rainwater harvesting, we will decrease the carbon emissions and energy costs in the household.

The Water Forum commissioned research to identify what measures are needed to incentivise water savings and discourage wastage in Ireland. This research¹ completed by Dr Sarah Cotterill of UCD and Dr Peter Melville-Shreeve from Exeter University, made a number of recommendations. One of these was the need to: **Rethink Water Education** – to support bottom-up understanding of water, from the processes that underpin treatment and supply, to the energy and resources required to produce drinking water, linked to the national curriculum. To explore this, the Forum hosted a workshop (hybrid) in Dublin to discuss how we might increase education and awareness on the need for water conservation in Ireland.

Representatives from many organisations attended the meeting, including the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, Irish Environmental Network, Tidy Towns, Local Authority Waters Programme, DCU Citizen Science Projects, An Taisce Green Schools and Globe projects, Clean Coasts, EcoEd4All, Uisce Éireann, PPNs, Saolta, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim ETB, Atlantic Technical University, Trinity College Dublin, Dwr Uisce project, Leave no trace, Louth County Council and Water Forum members.

Session 1 of the workshop included a presentation from Waterwise, the leading UK water efficiency non-government organisation, which provided learnings from the UK Water Efficiency Strategy which

¹ [Water-Forum-Domestic-Water-Conservation-Policy-Brief-Final.pdf \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

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could be applied in Ireland. Unique opportunities were identified to deliver joined up action to promote awareness.

In Session 2, Dr Anne Dolan, who is Chair of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Development Committee for the new Leaving Cert subject Climate Action and Sustainable Development highlighted that getting water education into the national curriculum can be challenging due to a myriad of demands on the curriculum. However, opportunities do exist to use the excellent resources currently available, for example through the Education for Sustainable Development Strategy and the Forum will work with agencies and providers to progress Anne's recommendations to advance education on water conservation.

A round table discussion led to further suggestions for action to promote water conservation in Ireland. In the coming months, the Water Forum will publish a position paper on progressing water conservation in Ireland.

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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 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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