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Climate Action Regional Offices

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A Chara,

The global climate change crisis is inextricably linked to water. Latest research indicates Ireland will see increased incidence of extended periods of abnormally low precipitation, more and greater precipitation extremes and flooding, heatwaves and storms (Nolan and Flanagan, 2020). The impacts of climate change in Ireland will occur in conjunction to an existing adaptation deficit for the sustainable management of Irish water resources. For instance, there is currently a lack of resilience in our water supplies with significant insufficiencies in supply and wastewater treatment infrastructure. Uisce Éireann has stated that 58% of public water supplies have a supply demand deficit in normal conditions, which increases to 66% during drought. Increased frequency and magnitude of drought conditions will add additional pressure to water availability for sustainable abstraction during summer months. Moreover, increased demand from both population growth and economic development, will add additional challenges to the management of our water resources. In relation to water quality, only 54% of Ireland's waterbodies are achieving at least good ecological status as required by the EU Water Framework Directive (EPA, 2022), where climate change will exacerbate existing pressures on water quality, altering the mobility and pathways of pollutants from land into our waterways, with resulting impacts on human health and aquatic biodiversity.

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce), established on a statutory basis in June 2018 in accordance with the Water Services Act 2017, facilitates national stakeholder input to water policy development in Ireland. The Forum has advisory functions to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Water Policy Advisory Committee, Uisce Éireann and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities. The Forum consists of 25 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connection to water. The Forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues, including the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and Ireland's River Basin Management Plan. The Water Forum's vision is for clean and healthy waters, supporting biodiversity, community wellbeing and economic sustainability. One of the roles of the Forum is to analyse water issues related to climate change and to develop appropriate policy advice.

The Water Forum has recently made a submission to the Climate Change Advisory Council, with recommendations related to Ireland's Climate Action Plan and Sectoral Adaptation Plans. The Forum would also like to make a submission to the Climate Action Regional Offices and to each Local Authority, with recommendations for inclusion in the Local Authority Climate Action Plans. Water is central to public health, a functioning environment, and a productive economy, and it should therefore be central in climate change adaptation planning.

Water Forum Recommendations to the Climate Action Regional Offices and Local Authorities in relation to Local Authority Climate Action Plans.

1. Water Conservation

Strategic Goal: Increase water conservation for both climate change mitigation (to use and waste less treated water) and climate change adaptation (to adapt to increased frequency and magnitude of summer drought)

- By the first week of June 2023, there were 7 counties requiring local water conservation measures (e.g. night-time restrictions and water tankering to reservoirs) due to increased water demand and extended periods of warm, dry weather. Climate change is expected to increase the magnitude and frequency of droughts in Ireland, which will add additional pressure on water supply infrastructure.
- Water Conservation (i.e. using and wasting less potable water) should be used as both a tool for climate change mitigation, by using and wasting treated water, and climate change adaptation to support sustainable water management with increased magnitude and frequency of summer drought. Research commissioned by the Water Forum (Cotterill, 2021)¹ reports that the use of multiple simple water saving technologies in a domestic setting can reduce water demand by up to 25% per person per day, with significant water savings with the use of rainwater harvesting and greywater re-use. Furthermore, 19% of energy used in homes is to heat water, and cumulative impacts of water efficiency measures will help to reduce carbon emissions both directly in the home and indirectly through reduced volumes of treated water required.
- Local Authority Climate Action Plans should include actions to increase water efficiency and water conservation in public housing and public buildings, to ensure buildings are not only energy efficient, but also water efficient. This will require training of plumbers and building contractors in water saving technologies, such as low flow showerheads, shower timers, water saving tap inserters, cistern displacement devices.
- There is a need for education of the bottom up understanding of water, from the processes that underpin treatment and supply, to the energy and resources required to produce drinking water. Local Authority Climate Action Plans should include an action to increase education and awareness of the need to conserve water and support community water conservation initiatives.

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

- There should be an increase in engagement and collaboration between Local Authorities, Uisce Éireann, Group Water Schemes and Small Private Supplies to support county wide water conservation initiatives and adaptation measures during drought conditions. Uisce Éireann should provide updates to Local Authorities on drought tracking and water stressed areas to ensure a secure and resilient supply of water across each county.
- The Water Forum has developed a policy position paper on water conservation and is calling on the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to develop a National Water Conservation Strategy, to include a revision of the building regulations to ensure future housing and developments are both water and energy efficient.

2. Future planning and sustainable water resources

Strategic Goal: Sustainable management of water resources should be included in the Local Authority planning application process and should include future impacts of climate change on water availability.

- There should be transparency and accountability in the planning application process to ensure the sustainable management of our water resources, with clear roles and responsibilities for decision making between Local Authorities and Uisce Éireann.
- Future planning applications should assess water availability of water resources which are required to meet water demand, in conjunction with the future risk to supply from climate change. This will require training for planning staff on water availability and impacts of abstraction on aquatic ecosystems.

3. Integrated Catchment Management

Strategic Goal: Climate Change Adaptation Planning should be developed with the river catchment as the management unit, to take account of spatial variability in projections of storms, flooding and drought across the country.

- Many of the impacts from climate change (flooding, drought, sea level rise) is directly related to the movement of water within a catchment (i.e. the area of land around a river, from the source to the sea).
- The catchment should be used as the management unit for climate adaptation planning to take account of spatial variability in projections in storms, flooding and drought across the country. Integrated catchment management should be central to decision making around climate adaptation in Ireland.
- The 3rd River Basin Management Plan (currently being finalised by the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage) proposes to develop 46 catchment management plans to address water quality and quantity in Ireland: these would provide an ideal base to incorporate climate adaptation planning into water resource management. The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) are

leading the development of these catchment management plans, where Local Authorities should engage with LAWPRO to determine how they could support Local Authority climate change adaptation planning. Where a catchment covers two or more Local Authority Regions, there will need to be engagement between the relevant Local Authorities on integrated catchment management and climate change adaptation planning.

- Flood and drought management plans should be developed and assessed at catchment level to support the Local Authority Climate Adaptation Planning.

3. Governance and Aligning Climate, Water and Biodiversity

Strategic Goal: Align objectives and actions for climate, water and biodiversity within Local Authority work programmes to maximise impact and efficiency from existing resources.

- Efforts to meet climate, water and biodiversity objectives are fragmented and misaligned, despite the fact there are often multiple benefits for actions across all three spheres.
- There should be a commitment within the Local Authority Climate Action Plans for greater policy coherence and alignment of climate, water and biodiversity objectives, which would support greater integration of resources with optimum environmental benefits. This will require improved collaboration between different sections within Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders at county and catchment scale.
- In order to better integrate water management with biodiversity and climate change action, the Water Forum adopted the Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management (FILLM)² as a framework for environmental management to address the interconnectedness of natural systems. This integrated approach facilitates the identification of co-benefits of various measures to ensure optimum benefits for water, climate and biodiversity for efforts and resources used, while also supporting decision-making around trade-offs, where required.
- FILLM recommends that measures required for sustainable management of water resources, biodiversity management and climate change adaptation and mitigation should be developed and implemented in an integrated manner. The Forum believes that the Local Authority Climate Action Plans should consider this approach for climate mitigation and adaptation actions.
- Aligning action for climate, water and biodiversity would also benefit communities, making environmental management more understandable, less fragmented and thus more achievable. Communities should be informed of the different co-benefits that may exist from the measures or actions they are being asked to implement and should be supported to develop a landscape vision and action plan for climate, water and biodiversity.

² [Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management - An Fóram Uisce \(thewaterforum.ie\)](#)

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The Forum would welcome engagement with the Climate Action Regional Offices to discuss its recommendations in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Matt Crowe
Chair