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Water Forum calls for a plan of action and timeline to address waste water impacts on waterbodies to be included in the next River Basin Management Plan

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report *Urban Waste Water Treatment in 2022*, released today stated that over half of Ireland's urban waste water is not meeting those standards. Uisce Éireann (UÉ) state that the Ringsend water treatment plant upgrade which processes over 40% of Ireland's urban waste water will be completed in the coming weeks bringing 97% of urban waste water to EU standards. The Water Forum welcomes this progress and the continued investment required to address the infrastructure improvements needed to meet Urban Waste Water Treatment (UWWT) standards.

Complying with the treatment standards set in the EU UWWT Directive is an essential step in protecting our environment and is also necessary for Ireland to avoid European Union fines. The deadline to comply was 2005 yet in 2019 the Court of Justice of the European Union declared that Ireland had failed to fulfil its obligations under the Directive.

Poorly treated sewage can pollute receiving lakes, rivers and coastal water bodies and is preventing many of our rivers and lakes reaching good ecological status required under the Water Framework Directive. Ireland's River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) has identified 208 waterbodies with waste water as a significant pressure and the EPA report has identified 39 of these as priority areas for action.

The Forum has called on Uisce Éireann to address all of the pressures identified in the 208 water bodies, to make these plans publicly available along with a draft timeline for delivery in the next RBMP. All assessments should be carried out so that the issues can be fully addressed in the next UÉ funding cycle to 2029. Dr Matt Crowe Chair of the Water Forum stated *'it is essential that Uisce Éireann speed up progress on providing this fundamental infrastructure to protect water quality in rivers and coastal areas but, to build trust, they need to keep the public informed along the way'*.

The report noted that five areas that met standards in 2021 failed to maintain compliance in 2022 and that there was an 84% increase in plant breakdowns since 2019. This highlights a weakness in management and oversight of treatment plants to make sure that they perform at their best to

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protect the environment. Changing weather patterns resulting from climate change will impact storm water flows and waste water treatment plant operations. The Water Forum calls on UÉ to review its operational and quality control systems to ensure that they can adequately mitigate climate change impacts into the future.

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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 agricultural sector, consumers including customers of Irish Water, the rural water sector, rivers trusts, angling, business sector, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, forestry, education, social housing, recreation 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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