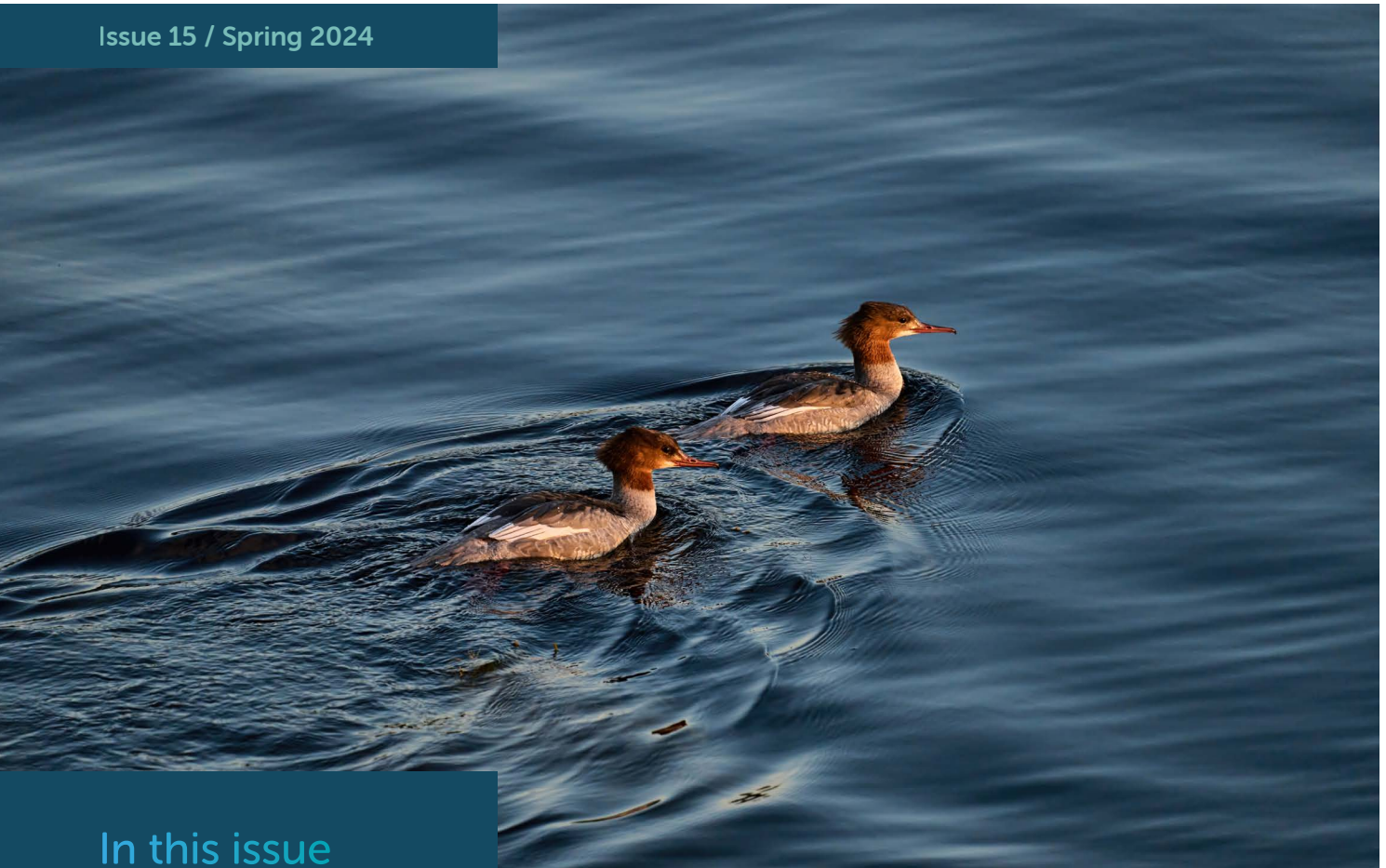


# Newsletter



An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

Issue 15 / Spring 2024



## In this issue

- 1 Water Forum welcomes new members
- 4 Policy Update
- 5 Research Update
- 8 Education and Awareness Update

## The Water Forum welcomes new members and says a big Thank You to departing members.

The Water Forum provides a platform for stakeholder engagement on water policies and the management of Ireland's waters. This February, the Water Forum held its first meeting with 13 new members, who have joined 13 existing members that have been reappointed for a second term. All members of the Forum are nominated by their representative organisations and appointed by Darragh O'Brien TD., the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The members are from a wide range of organisations representing 16 different sectors, thereby bring diverse opinions, perspectives, and interests to water management issues. Current members represent agriculture, angling, business, community and voluntary sector, domestic water consumers, education, environment, fisheries, forestry, recreation, rivers trusts, rural water, social housing, tourism, trade unions and youth.

This wide range of representation provides an opportunity to input different outlooks and values to policy development for water management and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The Forum provides advice to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Uisce Éireann; the Commission for Regulation of Utilities; and the Water Policy Advisory Committee.

After initial introductory meetings, the work has already begun with the establishment of sub-committees, presentations of research findings, updates on water policy initiatives and plans to develop further policy advice which incorporates the views of the range of sectors represented on the Forum.

The Water Forum Chair, Dr Matt Crowe welcomed members: 'I am delighted to welcome our new members and would

also like to thank departing members for their time and commitment during their tenure at the Forum.

**Achieving good water quality, delivery of excellent water services and planning for the future protection of water resources will remain the key focus of the Forum's work.'**

### Water Forum members and staff

Members and staff of the National Water Forum, from left: Constanze O'Toole, Maria Snell, Matt Crowe, Triona McGrath, Elaine McGoff, Steve Conlon, Suzanne Linnane, Ciaran Maguire, David Wright, Aisling Corkery, Barry Deane, Karan O'Loughlin, Keith Hyland, Sinead O'Brien, Fintan Kelly, Karin Dubsy, Michael Kenny, Connie Rochford, Neil Walker, Gretta McCarron, Tadgh Buckley, Donal Purcell, Eimear Manning and Eamonn Carroll. Members missing from the photograph include, Charles Stanley Smith, David Downes (appointed in April), Marie Doyle, Martin McEnroe and Maria O'Gorman.



Sector	Name	Organisation
Agriculture	Tadgh Buckley	Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
Agriculture	Eamonn Carroll	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)
Agriculture	Dominic Cronin	Irish Co-Operative Organisations Society (ICOS)
Agriculture	Dr Maria Snell	Macra na Feirme (MACRA)
Angling	Martin McEnroe	Angling Council of Ireland
Business	Neil Walker	Irish Business & Employers Confederation (IBEC)
Community & Voluntary	Micheal Kenny	Irish Rural Link
Community & Voluntary	Maria O'Gorman	Community & Voluntary Pillar
Domestic Consumer	Keith Hyland	Uisce Éireann Customer
Domestic Consumer	Connie Rochford	Uisce Éireann Customer
Education	Dr Suzanne Linnane	Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
Environment	Karin Dubsy	Sustainable Water Network (SWAN)
Environment	Fintan Kelly	Irish Environmental Network (The Environmental Pillar)
Environment	Elaine McGoff	Irish Environmental Network (The Environmental Pillar)
Environment	Sinead O'Brien	Sustainable Water Network (SWAN)
Environment	Charles Stanley Smith	Sustainable Water Network (SWAN)
Fisheries	David Downes	Fishery Sectoral Organisations
Forestry	Marie Doyle	Forestry Sectoral Organisations
Recreation	Ciarán Maguire	Water Recreational Sector
Rivers Trusts	Constanze O'Toole	The Rivers Trusts in Ireland
Rural Water	Barry Deane	National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS)
Rural Water	Jean Rosney	National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS)
Social Housing	David Wright	Irish Council for Social Housing
Tourism	Steve Conlon	Tourism Sectoral Organisations
Trade Unions	Karan McLoughlin	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Youth	Eimear Manning	National Youth Council of Ireland
Chairperson	Dr Matt Crowe	Independent



We would really like to acknowledge the work and contributions of departing friends.



*Water Forum members and staff at the last plenary meeting held with departing members in January 2024. From back left standing: Neil Walker, Connie Rochford, Keith Hyland, Aisling Corkery, Matthew Crowe, Charles Stanley Smith, Martin McEnroe, Barry Deane, Dominic Cronin, David Wright, Donal Purcell, Gretta McCarron, Triona McGrath. Sitting from left: Suzanne Linnane, Liam Berney, Gerald Quain, Derrie Dillon, Ollan Herr, Tim Butter, Bernadette Connolly, Brendan Fitzsimmons and Denis Drennan. Missing from the picture is Issy Petrie, Jean Rosney, Sinead O'Brien, Siobhan Ward and Tim Fenn.*

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our departing members who have all made a very valuable contribution to water policy development in the past number of years. Denis Drennan, Derry Dillon and Paul O'Brien represented agricultural interests and Bernie Connolly and Ollan Herr both championed environmental protections particularly marine interests and nutrient recycling and the circular economy. Issy Petrie was a strong

advocate for social justice. Brendan Fitzsimmons, Gerald Quain, Liam Berney, Siobhan Ward, Tim Butter, Tim Fenn ably represented their sectors by being strong contributors to debates and policy development throughout their tenure. While they all reported enjoying their experiences with the Forum and particularly shaping policy, many also highlighted the value of the friendships they made.

**Go n-éirí an bóthar leat agus go raibh maith agat**

# Policy Update

## The new Water Services Policy Statement 2024-2030 has been published

The Government prepares a Water Services Policy Statement approximately every 6 years to clarify, for Uisce Éireann and for others, the Government's expectation for the delivery and development of water and wastewater services in the years ahead. The purpose of the Water Services Policy Statement 2024-2030 is to build on the work of the previous Policy Statement and to reflect the changes in water services provision and requirements in the last number of years.

The Policy Statement aims to address the current and future challenges in terms of delivering safe, reliable and sustainable water services. It sets out objectives and priorities that provide a framework for Uisce Éireann to develop public water services

through its Strategic Funding Plan. The Statement states that the Exchequer will continue to provide funding to deliver improvements in private domestic water services in rural areas. The Multi-annual Rural Water Programme will provide capital funding to address key challenges faced by the Rural Water Sector and the Group Water Schemes to maintain, renew and develop their systems and networks.

The three main objectives as set out in this Statement for water services delivery in the period to 2030 are:

- Availability and reliability
- Safety and quality
- Sustainability

Water services play an essential role in enabling economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

The Government highlight that the key underlying principles they use to develop and provide water services includes:

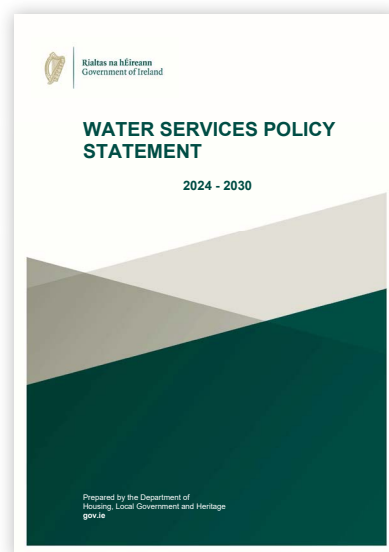
- Compliance with water-related European Union legislation
- Delivery of UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation
- Implementation of the OECD Council Recommendation on Water

### [Water Services Policy Statement 2024-2030](#)

The Water Forum welcomes the commitment in the WSPS to set up a National Water Conservation Working Group and look forward to working with the Department to develop a strategy for water conservation.

The Forum's submission on the draft Water Services Policy Statement is available below:

### [Water Forum submission on the Water Services Policy Statement](#)



# Research Update

A goal of the National Water Forum’s 2022-2027 Strategic Plan is to advocate for the need for and benefits of meaningful public engagement in water resource management.

So, to develop Water Forum recommendations that are based on the latest scientific knowledge and international best practice, the Forum commissioned research to: **Review of best practices (National and International) in public participation in environmental management, with policy recommendations for the protection and restoration of water bodies.**

The tender was awarded to a research team consisting of: Hammond Sarpong, Research Lead, Caroline

Gilleran Stevens, David Getty, Suzanne Linnane, Dundalk Institute of Technology; Jill Slinger, TU Delft; and Alec Rolston, Goyder Institution Adelaide.

The researchers carried out a case study review that focused on two themes of the Aarhus Convention: access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision making. They considered the requirements of International Regulations and Directives such as the 2022 Environmental Performance Index, the Water Framework

Directive and the EU Environmental Implementation Reports. They carried out qualitative research through interviews with 20 national and 10 international stakeholders (people involved directly in public participation in water management) and considered public participation using the International Association of Public Participation spectrum (Figure 1) ([IAPP 2018](#)).

## Increasing impact on the decision

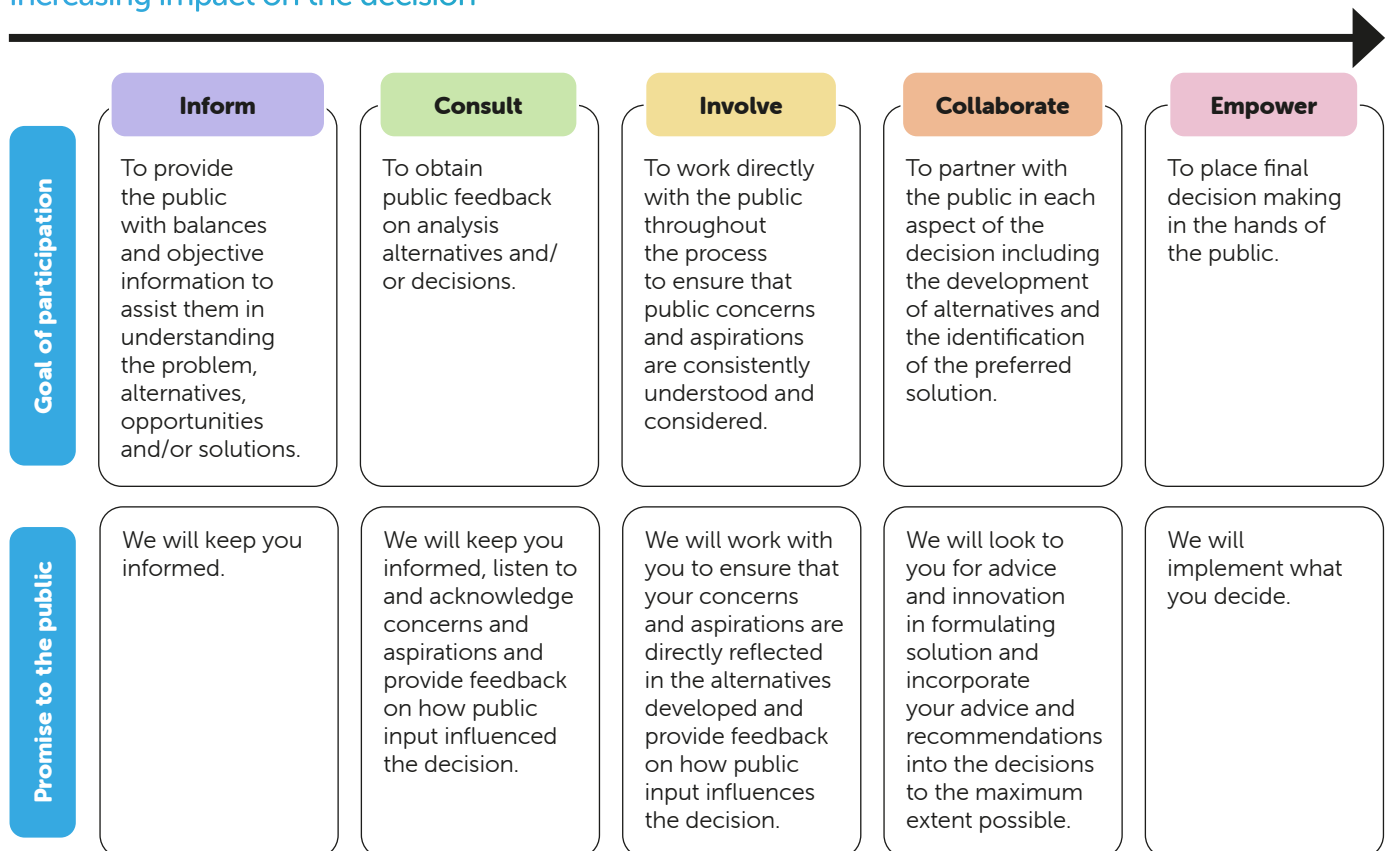


Figure 1: The Public Participation Spectrum (from the International Association of Public Participation, 2018)



The spectrum describes five general modes of public participation that fall on a progressive continuum of increasing influence over decision-making in a given engagement process. Importantly, the model not only describes the goals of a given mode of public participation, but also the "promise" that each mode communicates, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the public.

Specific learnings from the national and international case studies review that could be applied in Ireland included:

**For access to environmental information:**

- The Water Quality App developed by "Les Agences de l'Eau" in France to enable access to information on water quality across catchments could be a useful tool in Ireland. Real-time data accessibility and user-friendly interfaces will help enhance public participation and awareness, aiding in the protection of water quality, while fostering a sense of shared responsibility among citizens.
- Consideration should be given to developing a centralised online platform similar to South Australia's "yoursay.sa.gov.au" "WaterConnect" and "Environ Data SA" and the "Scottish Environment web" which serve as single entry points for citizens to engage with the Government on environmental matters and as centralised repositories for environmental information and data, facilitating easy search, discovery, analysis and interpretation.
- The Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) curriculum should be expanded and structured to prioritise environmental and sustainability education programmes similar to practice under the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care education in Australia.
- Professional training and courses for interested individuals on public participation and governance could be offered such as at the Hague Academy for Local Governance.



**For public participation in environmental decision-making:**

- Lessons from the Environmental Water Advisory Group in New South Wales and the Water Board of the Netherlands on how to utilise local expertise to drive actions towards resolving environmental challenges at catchment level, while contributing to broader water policy at national level could be used in the establishment of the proposed Catchment Community Fora for the third River Basin Management Plan.
- Research shows youth-led activism and innovation must be encouraged and fostered in order to build future capacity. The case studies illustrate this can be achieved through grants, awards and support mechanisms for young individuals and student-led projects that address environmental challenges. This encourages

young people to have an interest in environmental issues and to participate actively from an early age.

- Funding mechanisms that enable non-professional scientists and volunteers to participate in environmental data collection, research and monitoring must be valued and continuously supported. These initiatives can provide valuable insights and localised data, contributing to informed decision-making and building a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens.

By adopting these learnings, an environment can be created that encourages meaningful public engagement, strengthens collaboration among stakeholders, and promotes informed decision-making in environmental matters. The research

findings indicate that these measures will contribute to more sustainable environmental policies and practices in the country.

To establish how effective current participatory action is with a view to

strengthening provision, the researchers carried out a Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) analysis of insights gathered from the interviews with stakeholders (Figure 2).



Figure 2: SCOT analysis of the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats for current public participation actions.

Institutional fragmentation, legal and operation ambiguities and general data protection regulation were identified as factors hindering public participation. This finding indicates opportunities for various stakeholders and institutions to align their strategies to complement rather than compete for public engagement. Effective co-ordinated structures for optimal public engagement could also address the reported challenges of low public engagement, limited awareness or concern and public fatigue, mistrust and role ambiguity. The researchers propose the Integrated Participatory Model to streamline participation and to address the need for:

- 1) institutional coherence in delivering effective public participation in environmental management,
- 2) effective monitoring and evaluation to ensure consistent and effective public participation, and
- 3) a bridge between bottom-up and top-down approaches to public participation ensuring that all institutions collaborate towards achieving common environmental objectives.

The Water Forum will consider the research findings in the coming months with a view of developing a position on public participation for water management outcomes.

**This finding indicates opportunities for various stakeholders and institutions to align their strategies to complement rather than compete for public engagement.**



# Education and Awareness Update

Our previous Newsletter reported on a water services customer survey we completed in 2023 that showed 54% of people did not know where their drinking water comes from. In an attempt to address this knowledge gap, the Water Forum has developed education modules for schools. On World Water Day, we launched our first education module [Using Digital Maps to explore local water resources](#) and shared it with schools across the country.

The module is suitable for secondary school Junior Cycle classroom-based assessments or for Transition Year students. It comprises a resource book for teachers that includes 4 lesson plans with supporting Power Point presentations and links to additional information. It includes an introduction to digital maps on [www.catchments.ie](http://www.catchments.ie) and provides lessons on topics including, where water is sourced, local water quality, how drinking water is treated, along with where and how wastewater is treated.

To support learning, encourage critical thinking and provide an opportunity for student assessment there is also a student workbook. All of the resources have been shared through the Water Forum's education networks and are available on [Scoilnet.ie](http://Scoilnet.ie) a platform for school resources.

The resources were prepared by Maigne Rivers Trust and academics from Mary Immaculate College. All education and awareness resources are available on the Water Forum [website](#)

