

Civic Offices, Limerick Road
Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

e: info@nationalwaterforum.ie

w: www.thewaterforum.ie



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The Water Forum welcomes the inclusion of its recommendations in the third River Basin Management Plan, but urgent implementation of this *Water Action Plan* is essential to achieve outcomes.

The Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage published Ireland's 3rd River Basin Management Plan today. The Water Action Plan sets out the actions planned for implementation between now and the end of 2027. With only 52% of rivers; 48% of lakes and 63% of coastal waterbodies currently reaching the required water quality standard set by EU and national law, immediate and comprehensive action is essential to deliver this Plan and achieve improvements.

At the Plan launch, Dr Matt Crowe, Chair of the National Water Forum stated '*a Plan is only as good as its implementation. The hard work begins now to reverse declining trends in water quality so that rivers, lakes, estuaries and groundwaters achieve the highest possible quality and are protected from the many human induced pressures that damage our precious waters*'. He added that '*well protected good quality water is a fundamental economic, social, environmental and cultural foundation for an Ireland that wants to be seen by the wider world as a clean and green country*'.

An outcomes-based approach

The National Water Forum engaged intensively with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and received expert input from agencies responsible for water management to inform its recommendations. Most of these recommendations are included in the Water Action Plan 2024-2027. A key Forum recommendation was the need for an outcomes-based approach to water management, with specific measures to protect or restore water quality delivered in all waterbodies and clear accountability for who is responsible for implementing these measures. The Forum also advised that implementing the right measure in the right place at waterbody level will achieve outcomes for water but can also deliver benefits for climate and nature.

The Forum welcomes the commitment in the Plan to develop Catchment Management Plans for each of the 46 catchment areas as this is how the right actions in the right places to both protect and improve water quality at a local level will be monitored. To this end, the Forum urges all agencies and pressure owners to work together to deliver these Catchment Management Plans in a timely manner.

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Stakeholder input

As a stakeholder body inputting to policy, the Water Forum is acutely aware of the importance of stakeholder engagement in the process of developing plans for managing catchments. Responsible agencies need to engage with local stakeholders to identify and deliver outcomes in waterbodies and the proposed Community Catchment Fora will assist in this task. The €60m Farming for Water European Innovation Programme and the increase in support for the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) are also welcome and will help farmers reduce pollution from agriculture, the biggest sectoral pressure on water quality in Ireland.

In conclusion, Dr Matt Crowe noted, *'The Water Forum is now looking forward to a strong focus on implementation and will engage with the lead agencies for sectors such as agriculture, wastewater, forestry and hydromorphology to hear about their individual sectors plans to protect and improve water quality'*.

To find out more about water quality the www.catchments.ie website provides a wealth of information or to get involved with protecting your own local water body contact the Local Authority Waters Programme at www.lawaters.ie.

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Note to the Editor

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce) was established in 2018 to provide a platform for stakeholder engagement on all matters relating to water management in Ireland and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It consists of 26 members from a wide range of organisations and sectors with an interest in water issues, including 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.

In accordance with the Water Services Act 2017, the Forum's statutory function is to advise the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), Uisce Éireann, (UÉ), the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC) in relation to water management and the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan and the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum is chaired by Dr Matt Crowe.

Contact: gretta@nationalwaterforum.ie

www.thewaterforum.ie

Twitter: @anforamuisce

