

PRESS RELEASE 11th October 2024

Uisce Éireann need to build resilience into Urban Wastewater Treatment infrastructure

Poorly treated sewage when returned to the natural environment can pollute receiving lakes, rivers and coastal water bodies. The EPA Report published today shows that 10 large towns including Dublin are failing to treat wastewater to the required EU standards. The EPA have identified 73 priority areas where improvements in wastewater is urgently needed to protect the environment. Uisce Éireann have not yet started works on half of these.

In the recently published Water Action Plan, wastewater treatment is the significant pressure preventing 197 water bodies from reaching good ecological status as required under the Water Framework Directive. The Water Action Plan states that Uisce Éireann will prepare a Sectoral Action Plan that will detail the measures to address the urban wastewater discharges impacting the 197 at risk water bodies. The Forum has asked that Uisce Éireann will work to remove urban wastewater as a pressure on waterbodies. This will require future proofing wastewater treatment infrastructure to ensure wastewater treatment compliance into the future.

Increasing population and industrial activity increases demand for water resources and increases the volumes of wastewater produced. This will put additional stress on wastewater infrastructure and subsequent impact on water bodies receiving wastewater effluent. These challenges will be exacerbated during extreme weather events such as floods or droughts. The Water Forum have requested that Uisce Éireann prepare for such eventualities by developing catchment-based flood and drought risk plans to address potential future climate scenarios as well as growing economic and population demands.

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 from urban wastewater while also planning to build resilience for future challenges, like increasing population and climate change impacts'*.

An interim action could be to reduce water use as that will reduce the pressure on wastewater infrastructure, the Water Forum requests that the Government expedite the proposed Water

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Conservation working group to develop a framework for water efficiency as well as energy efficiency in all new buildings.

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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 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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