

# Newsletter



An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

Issue 22 / Winter 2025



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## At a Glance

This edition highlights recent policy and regulatory developments in Irish water management, the Water Forum's advice on Significant Water Management Issues, the new Small Wastewater Discharge Regulations, the Draft 6th Nitrates Action Programme, and Uisce Éireann's Revenue Control 4 to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, alongside updates on the Forum's education and engagement activities, including the 2026 Young Scientist Exhibition.

## Team Update

The Water Forum bids farewell to Martina Ryan, who has been a valued member of the team since September 2019. During her time with the Forum, Martina played a central role in establishing administrative and financial procedures, managing invoicing and budgets, preparing returns for the Department, and supporting engagement with Forum members through meetings and conferences.

We are also pleased to welcome Beverley McGrath, who joined the team in January 2026 taking up the administrative role with the Forum. Beverley looks forward to supporting the Forum's work and engaging with members and stakeholders in the period ahead.

## Policy & Advice

### Water Forum Submission on Significant Water Management Issues


The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage hosted a workshop on the 23rd October 2025 on the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI) to be addressed in the 4th Water Action Plan. Following this workshop, the Forum developed a set of recommendations for the Department to consider when developing the SWMI consultation material. The recommendations refer to key issues that should inform the development of the 4th Water Action Plan (2028–2033).

The Water Forum's submission highlights both progress made under current Water Action Plan cycles and the areas where further action is needed to achieve water quality objectives.

### Water Forum Key Recommendations

- *Emphasises the importance of effective delivery calling for a relentless focus on implementation in the next Water Action Plan*
- *Highlights the need for stronger water quality protection and more targeted measures*
- *Calls for improved policy coherence and cross-government coordination*

See here:

 [AFU-Submission-Pre-SWMI-Consultation-4th-Water-Action-Plan\\_.pdf](#)

### Progress to Date

The Forum acknowledges that advancements have been made in governance structures and targeted actions since the 1st and 2nd Water Action Plan cycles. It also notes that the 3rd cycle has focused on developing, testing and piloting new approaches, including Sectoral Action Work Plans, Catchment Management Work Plans and Catchment Community Fora, many of which are still in their early stages.

### Where Further Focus Is Needed

Despite these developments, the Forum remains concerned that overall progress towards achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive is slow. While targeted measures have delivered improvements in some water bodies, deterioration persists in others. The Forum emphasises the need for stronger protection measures and increased, targeted actions in the 4th Water Action Plan to achieve more consistent and sustained improvements in water quality.

The Forum identifies the following priority areas for action under the 4th Water Action Plan:

Priority Area	Water Forum Position
<b>Implementation</b>	A continued and relentless focus on implementation is required, including timely publication of the 4th Water Action Plan and a twin-track approach that maintains delivery under the current cycle while advancing preparation of the next. Transparent tracking of actions is essential to identify and address barriers early.
<b>Resourcing</b>	Implementing bodies and sectoral leads should review and secure the staffing and resource requirements needed to deliver the remainder of the third cycle and to support effective implementation of the fourth plan.
<b>Catchment Management</b>	The roll-out of Catchment Management Work Plans and Catchment Community Fora should extend across all 46 catchments, supported by clear roles, responsibilities and adequate resourcing.
<b>Public Participation</b>	Effective public participation should be supported through accessible information, clear engagement structures and continued support for mechanisms that enable community involvement in water-related actions.
<b>Policy Coherence</b>	Improved policy coherence is required, supported by policy mapping, enhanced cross-government coordination and a renewed financing strategy linking water, climate and biodiversity objectives.

### Next Steps

The DHLGH have since launched the public consultation on Significant Water Management Issues, which is open until 19th June 2026.

The Water Forum plans to engage with the DHLGH, LAWPRO and other key agencies to support the development of its submission over the coming months.



## Water Forum Submission to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities on Uisce Éireann’s Revenue Control 4 (2025–2029)

### Revenue Control 4 (2025–2029) in Brief

The role of the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is to provide a robust economic regulatory framework that enables Uisce Éireann to deliver the infrastructure the country requires, while driving improvements in efficiency, governance and services to customers. Revenue Control 4 (or RC4) is the framework through which the CRU evaluates and approves the next phase of investment in maintaining and upgrading Ireland’s water and wastewater infrastructure.

RC4 sets the funding available to Uisce Éireann to provide water and wastewater services. This includes:










- Maintain and upgrade drinking water and wastewater infrastructure
- Reduce leakage and improve security of supply
- Improve wastewater treatment and environmental compliance
- Support housing delivery and population growth

RC4 represents a significant increase in investment compared with RC3, proposing a scale of investment that is 63% higher.

Under the Water Services Act 2017, the Water Forum has a statutory advisory role to both the CRU and Uisce Éireann in relation to Uisce Éireann’s performance. The Water Forum made a submission to the CRU’s Draft Determination of RC4, focusing on how this investment can deliver clear benefits for customers, the environment and public health, while ensuring transparency and value for money.

A summary of The Water Forum’s recommendations is presented in the pages below.

### Water Forum’s Recommendations - Key Themes

Outcomes-Based Approach	
Capacity to Deliver	
Delivery of Leakage Reduction	
Domestic Metering Investment	
Wastewater Performance	
Major Projects	
Climate Resilience	
Customers, Communities and Trust	
Security of Supply	



## A. Delivering Investment and Outcomes

	Water Forum Observations	Water Forum Recommendation
<b>Wastewater Performance</b>	RC4 places greater emphasis on outputs (e.g. infrastructure delivery) without clearly specifying the outcomes, such as service, environmental and public health outcomes the investment is intended to achieve	<i>A stronger outcomes-based approach during the implementation and monitoring of RC4, clearly linking infrastructure delivery to service improvements, environmental protection and public health benefits</i>
<b>Capacity to Deliver</b>	It is unclear whether Uisce Éireann's operational capacity has been benchmarked against the significantly increased scale of investment proposed under RC4	<i>Broader benchmarking of delivery capacity, drawing on international best practice. Flexibility to meet additional responsibilities outside of RC4 will be required, such as additional housing and small-scale effluent</i>
<b>Delivery of Leakage Reduction</b>	Leakage performance targets were not achieved during RC3. The CRU propose that Uisce Éireann reduce leakage targets, which it considers is too ambitious, without clear delivery plans, data and resourcing	<i>Leakage targets should not be reduced; instead, obstacles to meet leakage targets should be assessed and overcome. Reduced leakage is essential for sustainable water management and building public trust in the supplier</i>
<b>Domestic Metering Investment</b>	The CRU propose that Uisce Éireann deprioritise investment in domestic metering due to lack of domestic water charges	<i>Water meters are essential to support sustainable water management, to identify leaks, assess demand and support water conservation. A cost benefit analysis should be carried out to indicate the wider benefits of the proposed investment in domestic meters, which should be prioritised in areas facing supply-demand pressures</i>

## B. Resilience, Environment and Public Trust

	Water Forum Observations	Water Forum Recommendation
<b>Wastewater Performance</b>	Wastewater underperformance persists, and it is unclear what RC4 will deliver for water bodies affected by urban wastewater pressures	<i>Greater ambition to reduce urban wastewater as a pressure on water bodies, supported by clearer assessment of wastewater capacity and performance under RC4</i>
<b>Major Projects</b>	Major projects account for a significant share of RC4 investment but are not included in the list of RC4 delivery obligations and associated targets	<i>Targeted reporting should be complemented by stronger project planning, delivery and monitoring guidance, with annual reviews to ensure major projects remain fit for purpose in the context of growth and climate change</i>
<b>Climate Resilience</b>	While climate change is recognised as a driver for sustained investment, the consultation material does not clearly demonstrate how Uisce Éireann's investment plans account for climate risks and impacts	<i>Climate change modelling and metrics should be embedded in investment prioritisation and project planning, with regular reassessment of major projects against updated climate projections</i>
<b>Customers, Resilience and Trust</b>	Customer service improvements are not clearly linked to outcomes such as public trust, awareness and security of supply	<i>Customer service metrics should be expanded to include outcomes such as public trust, awareness and proactive communication, including uptake of text alerts and access to clear water information</i>
<b>Security of Supply</b>	Key security of supply performance targets were not achieved or clearly reported during RC3, and proposals to defer reporting until RC5 risk limiting understanding of supply-demand challenges	<i>Security of supply risks should be clearly quantified and reported during RC4 at both national and water resource zone level, supported by system improvements and capacity building</i>

The Water Forum's submission highlights the importance of ensuring that the significant investment proposed under RC4 delivers improvements in water services, environmental protection and public trust. The Forum emphasises that outcomes, capacity, transparency and long-term resilience must be central to the final determination.

The full Water Forum submission to the CRU on Revenue Control 4 (2025–2029) is available on the Water Forum website.

See here:



<https://thewaterforum.ie/app/uploads/2026/02/FINAL-AFU-Submission-to-CRU-on-RC4-260126.pdf>

## Water Forum Submission on Small Waste Water Discharge Regulations

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage invited the Water Forum to comment on the new Small Waste Water Discharge (Registration) Regulations to govern wastewater discharges from small housing developments not connected to public sewer networks, intended to support rural housing delivery while addressing concerns raised by the Environmental Protection Agency and Uisce Éireann about the existing regulatory regime.

Under these regulations, Uisce Éireann will facilitate development of wastewater infrastructure by the private sector by:

- Assuming responsibility for securing compliance with wastewater discharge regulations and entering into agreements to take ownership of the infrastructure for future operation and maintenance;
- Introducing regulatory reforms for wastewater discharges to reduce the compliance burden for small volume discharges; and
- Issuing a Circular to planning authorities clarifying the basis of assessment of wastewater treatment options for smaller-scale multi-unit housing developments for both planners and developers.

Small-scale wastewater discharges can pose risks to water bodies and drinking water sources if not properly monitored and managed. The proposed regulations mark a change in how responsibility, oversight and long-term operation of this infrastructure will be managed.

### **Water Forum Recommendations**

*In its submission, the Water Forum:*

- *Recognises the role of the regulations in supporting housing delivery*
- *Emphasises that protection of water quality must remain central*
- *Highlights the need for robust assessment, effective oversight and clear accountability*

## What happens next

Next steps include the development of technical standards by Uisce Éireann and the preparation of Registration Guidelines and General Binding Rules by the Environmental Protection Agency. The full Water Forum submission on the proposed Small Waste Water Discharge Regulations is available on the Water Forum website.

## See here:



[AFU-Submission-DHLGH-Small-Scale-Effluent-FINAL.pdf](#)

## Water Forum Submission on the Public Consultation of the draft 6th Nitrates Action Programme

Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) is the national framework that puts into effect the EU Nitrates Directive, which aims to prevent nutrient (especially nitrate) pollution from agricultural sources and to protect water quality in rivers, lakes, estuaries and groundwater. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) is the lead authority for the Nitrates Regulations and work in close collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The NAP applies to all types of farming & includes measures related to storage of manure & organic fertilisers, nutrient management, distances from waterbodies and application of fertilisers (incl. prohibited/closed periods).

The DHLGH launched a public consultation on the draft 6th NAP on the 28th October 2025. The DHLGH and DAFM delivered a briefing to the Water Forum in November 2025. The draft NAP included new regulatory and non-regulatory measures to be included in the 6th NAP.

The Water Forum's submission emphasises that clearer outcomes, better targeting, strong advisory support and practical delivery are essential to protect water quality while supporting a sustainable agricultural sector.

## Key Themes from the Water Forum's Submission

1

NAP Measures must clearly indicate what specific issue it is intended to address.

2

Nutrient measures need to be targeted where losses are greatest, using a stronger catchment-based approach.

3

Farmers need the right tools and training, including nutrient balances that reflect soil type and all nitrogen sources.

4

Current slurry and soiled water storage capacity is insufficient and requires grant support, planning reform and practical delivery solutions.

5

Restrictions on nutrient application need to be implemented earlier and applied more consistently where risks to water quality exist.

6

Clear communication and well-resourced education are essential to support farmers in improving water quality.

7

Advisory capacity must be strengthened so all farm advisors can provide consistent water quality guidance.

The full Water Forum submission on the 6th Nitrates Action Programme is available on the Water Forum website.

See here:



[AFU-Submission-6th-NAP-FINAL.pdf](#)

# Education and Engagement

## The Water Forum Sponsors Fourth Water Award at Stripe Young Scientist

The Water Forum was delighted to engage with students at this year's Stripe's Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition, where young people from across the country demonstrated a strong interest in sustainability and water protection.

At the Water Forum stand, students were invited to answer one simple question:

*"What's one thing you'll do to save water?"*

The response was overwhelmingly positive, with hundreds of handwritten pledges reflecting thoughtful and practical approaches to water conservation, including:

- Taking shorter showers
- Turning off the taps while brushing teeth
- Being more mindful of everyday water use

Many students also suggested actions such as collecting rainwater for gardens, fixing leaks, using washing machines more efficiently and choosing showers over baths. What stood out was how students linked water use to wider behaviours, including food choices, energy use and technology, showing an understanding of water stewardship within broader sustainability challenges.



### Water Award Winner

Student-led innovation was recognised at the exhibition, with **Oisín Jackson** from **Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna**, winning the Water Forum–sponsored Water Award at the 2026 Stripe Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition for his project, "TURCAST: Forecasting Turlough Depths Through Machine Learning and Data Analysis."

Oisín's project focuses on forecasting short-term turlough depths using machine learning informed by hydrological and meteorological data. Turloughs are seasonal lake systems that respond to groundwater levels and rainfall, and the project highlights the potential of predictive modelling to support understanding of these unique water systems.



Held annually at the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) in Dublin, the Stripe Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition provides a national platform for students to present original research across STEM disciplines. Over 2,000 projects were submitted to the 2026 competition, with 550 selected to participate across five categories: Technology; Biological and Ecological Sciences; Social and Behavioural Sciences; Chemical, Physical and Mathematical Sciences; and Health and Wellbeing. Since the Water Forum introduced its Water Award in 2023, there has been a steady increase in water-related projects.

The Water Forum thanks its members who participated in the exhibition and engaged with teachers, parents and students over the three days. The enthusiasm and insight shown by students underline the importance of education and engagement in supporting long-term water stewardship and protecting Ireland's water resources.





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