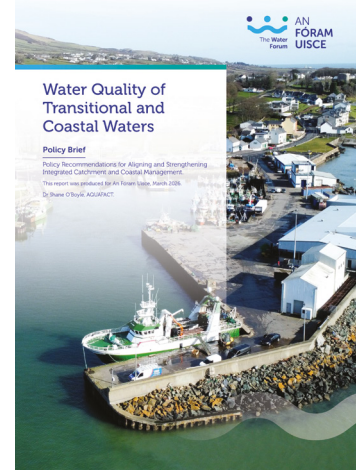


# Newsletter

An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

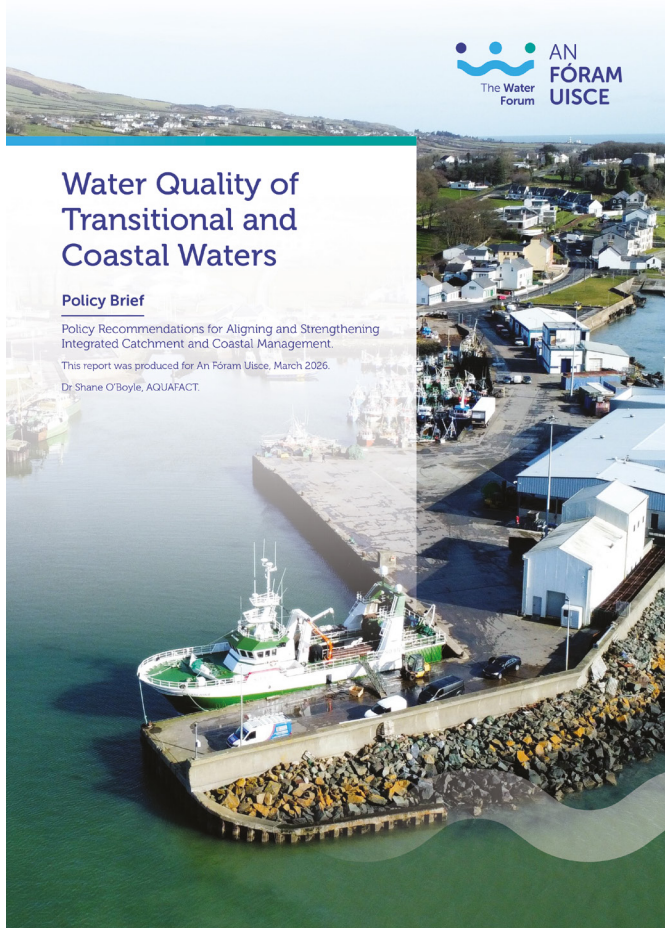
Issue 23 / Spring 2026



## In this issue

- What new research says about transitional & coastal waters
- What public water users said about communications & customer service
- Improving inspections for domestic wastewater systems (septic tanks)
- Engagement with Uisce Éireann on customer communications
- Visit to Uisce Éireann's National Laboratory in Limerick

# Research & Insights



## Water Quality of Transitional and Coastal Waters

### Policy Brief

Policy Recommendations for Aligning and Strengthening Integrated Catchment and Coastal Management.  
 This report was produced for An Fóram Uisce, March 2026.  
 Dr Shane O'Boyle, AQUAFACIT.

### Key Findings and Evidence:

1. Only 30% of transitional waters achieve good ecological status.
2. Progress on estuarine water quality is reversing, driven by rising nutrient pollution and past mitigation measures focused on phosphorus reduction over nitrate reduction.
3. Integration between water and marine policies could be improved to support better management of estuaries and coastal waters.

## Policy Brief on Transitional & Coastal Waters

Ireland's estuaries and coastal waters are under growing pressure – and addressing this requires a more integrated approach to how we manage land, rivers and sea.

Our latest report highlights a clear gap: freshwater and marine systems are still managed too independently.

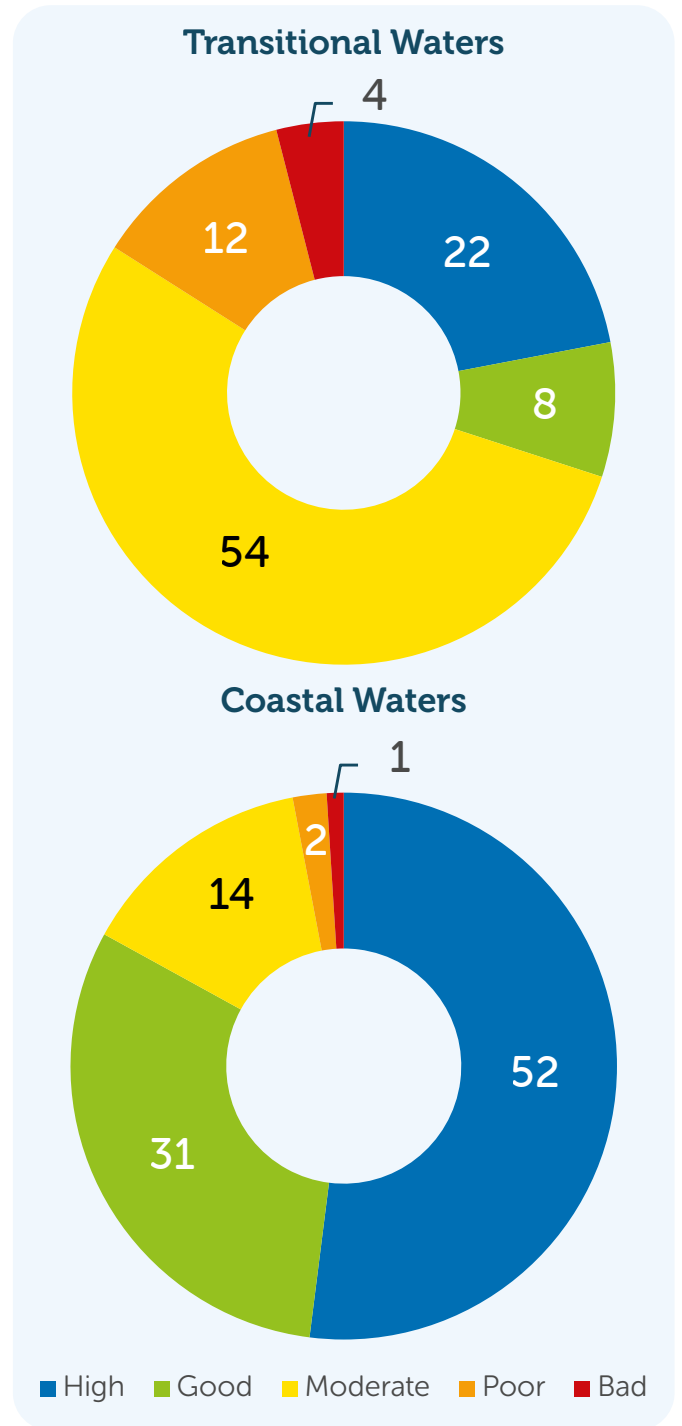


Figure 1: Percentage (%) of transitional and coastal waters in each of the WFD classes for the period 2019-2024

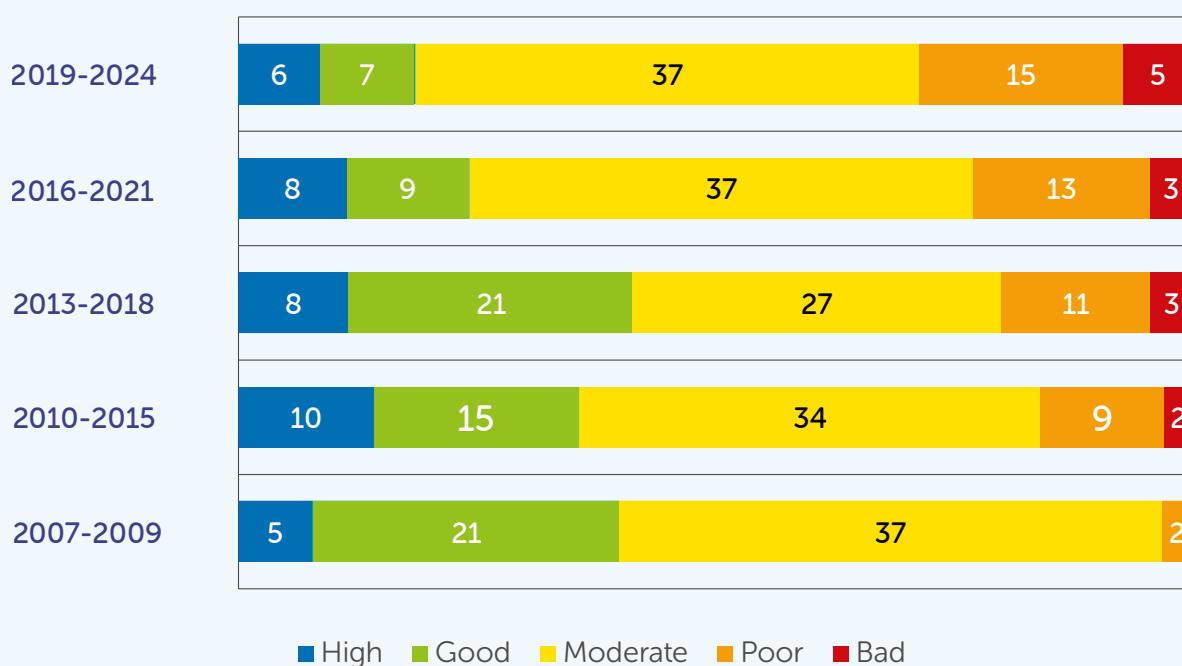


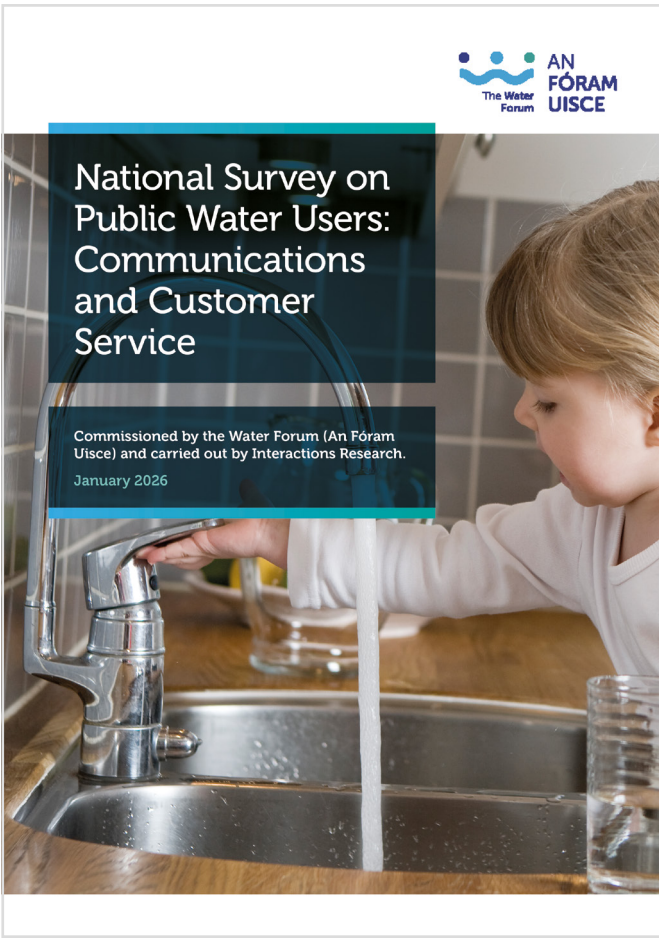
Figure 2: Change in ecological status of transitional waters since the first WFD assessment period in 2007-2009

#### Selected recommendations include:

- Managing nitrogen and phosphorus together across the freshwater-marine continuum.
- Strengthen understanding of the scale and extent of eutrophication in estuarine and coastal waters by developing a national vulnerability index for nutrient enrichment and eutrophication.
- Targeting action where it will have the greatest ecological impact (“right measure, right place”).
- Establish a Joint Steering Group and implementation plan for the Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- Introducing a statutory Integrated Coastal Zone Management strategy to bridge the gap between land-sea governance.



#### [Water Quality of Transitional and Coastal Water](#)



## Insights on Communications and Customer Service from the National Survey on Public Water Users

The Water Forum commissioned a survey to gauge public attitudes towards public water supply, customer services and communications. The survey was conducted online and in hotspot areas that had experienced recent supply issues.

The findings show a clear contrast between nationally representative respondents and customers living in areas experiencing supply disruptions.

Here is a summary of the key findings from the survey.

[National Survey on Public Water Users: Communications and Customer Service](#)

1) Overall satisfaction with drinking water quality is high, but experience of supply and quality issues remains significant—particularly in hotspot areas.

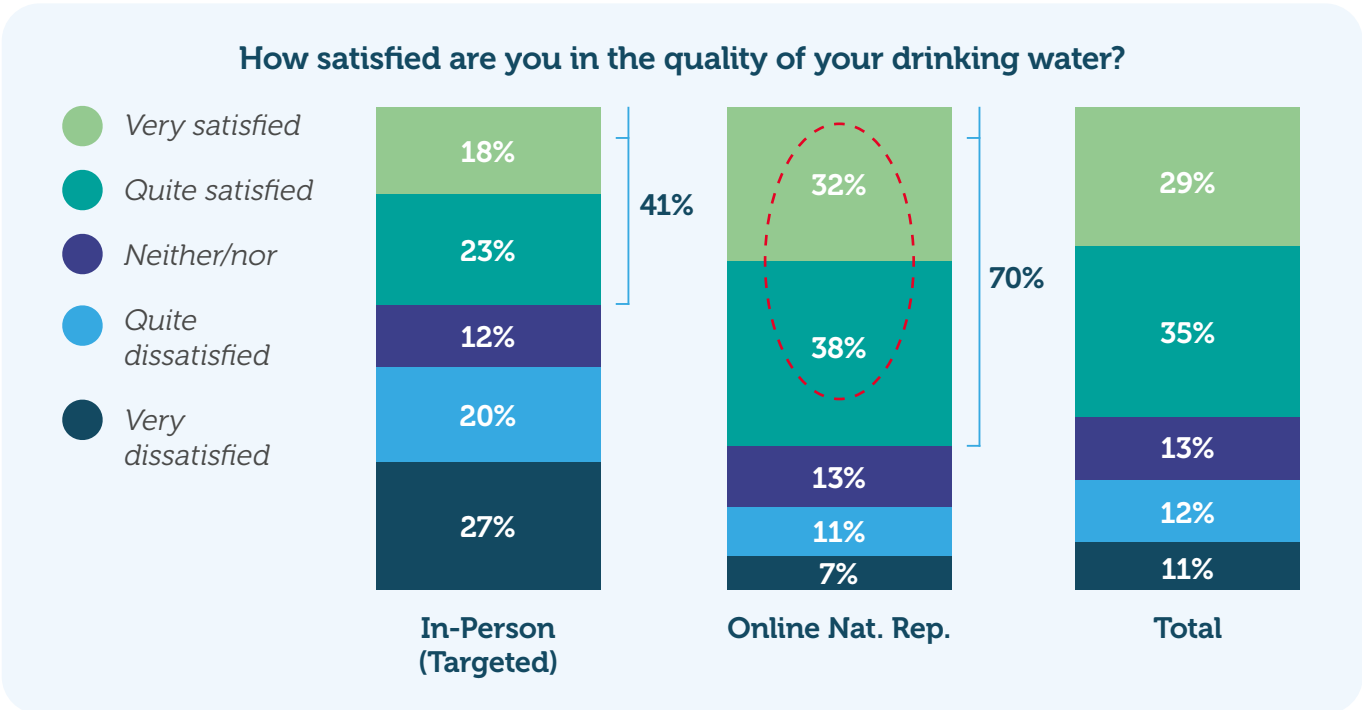
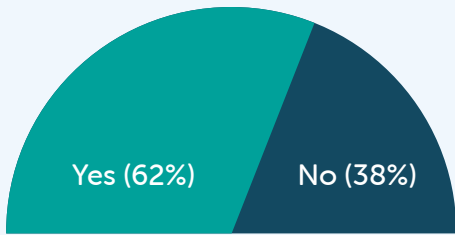


Figure 3: Survey Question - Overall, how satisfied are you in the quality of your drinking water?

Customers in hotspot areas reported lower satisfaction levels and a higher incidence of supply issues. Taste and colour were the most commonly reported issues across both samples, while odour, boil water and do-not-drink notices were more prevalent in hotspot areas.

### In-Person Targeted Sample

Effective responses: 213



### Online Nationally Representative Sample

Effective responses: 852

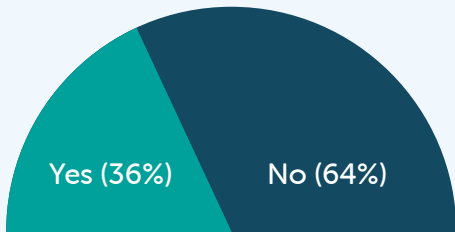


Figure 4: Survey Question - Have you experienced any issues with water supply or water quality in the past 12 months?



2) Customer service satisfaction is lower than in 2021, when 51% rated their experience as good.

Satisfaction levels were notably lower among customers in hotspot areas affected by recent supply disruptions. Results indicate low levels of customer satisfaction across both surveys.

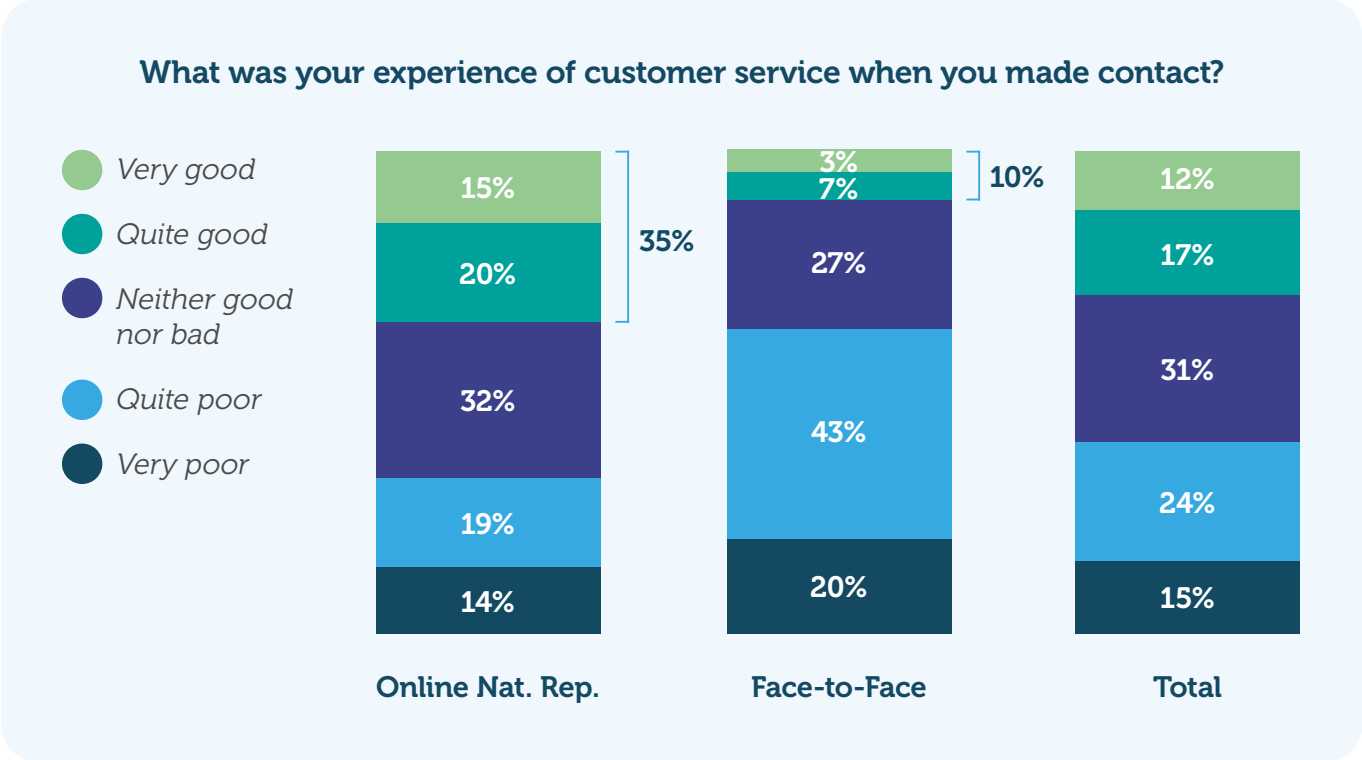


Figure 5: Survey Question - What was your experience of customer service when you made contact?



### 3) Customers show strong interest in receiving information, but many do not actively seek it out or know it is available.

52% said they would like more information on their water supply, while only 16% had looked for information on the Uisce Éireann website or social media platforms. Most customers either had never looked for information or did not know it was available.

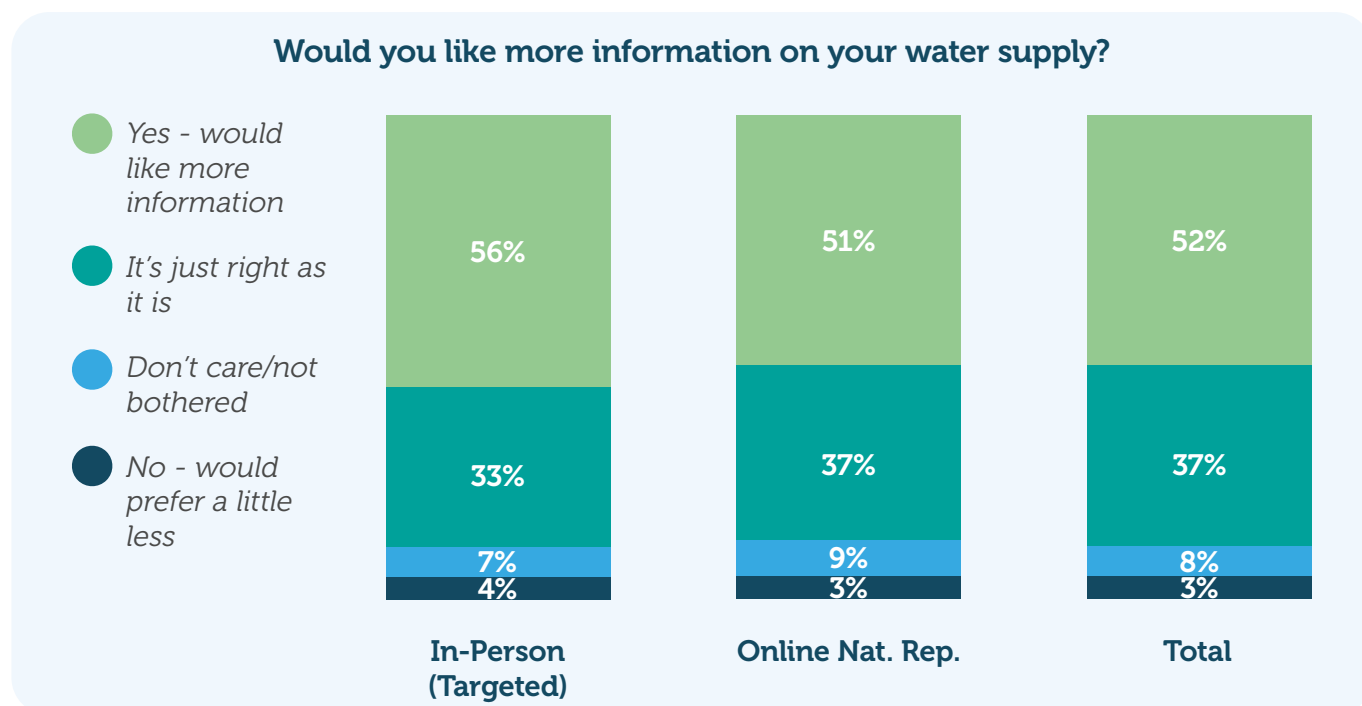


Figure 6: Survey Question - Would you like more information on your water supply?

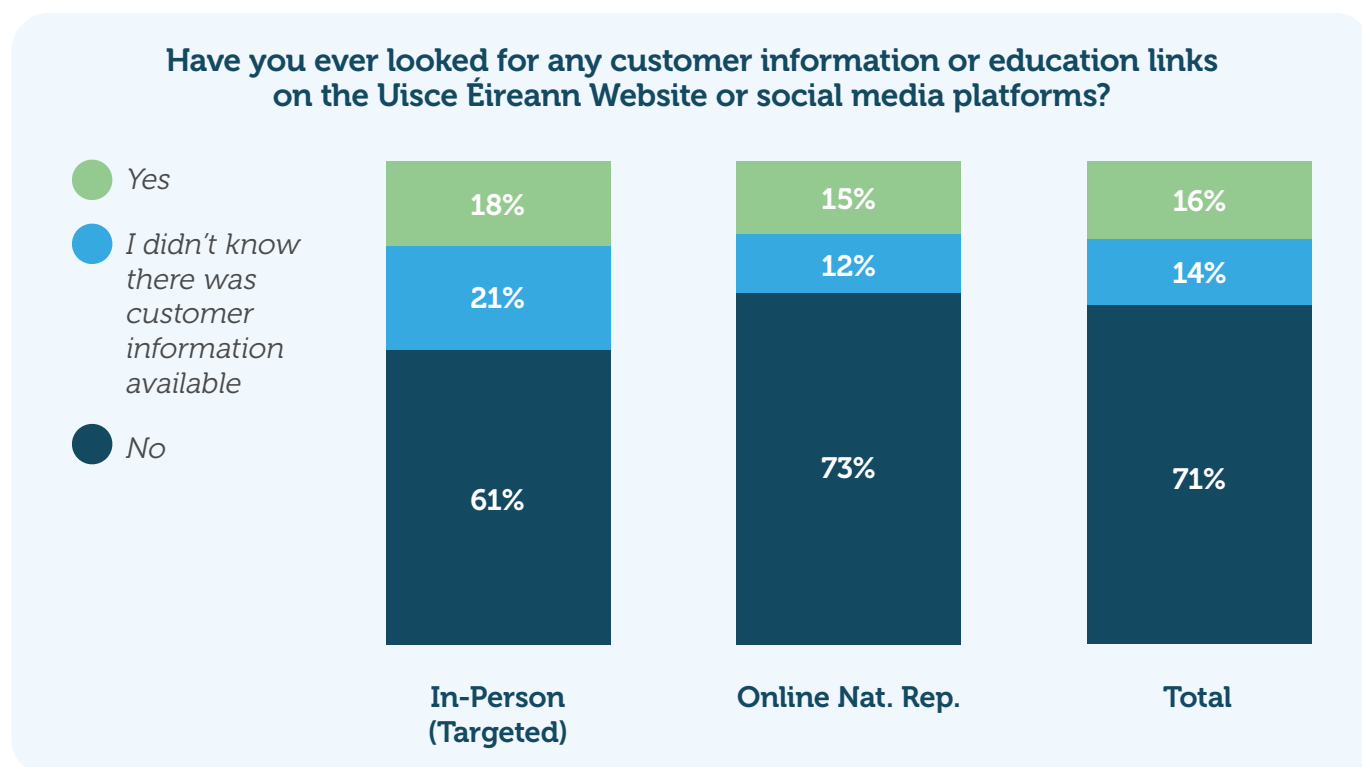


Figure 7: Survey Question - Have you ever looked for any customer information or education links on the Uisce Éireann Website or social media platforms?

# Policy Submissions & Recommendations

## Strengthening the National Inspection Plan for Domestic Wastewater Systems

### Water Forum input to the EPA on the next National Inspection Plan.

Ireland’s water quality is under pressure. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified domestic wastewater treatment systems (DWWTSs), such as septic tanks, as one of the significant pressures affecting our waters<sup>1</sup>. There are nearly half a million of these systems in Ireland, the majority serving single households.

These challenges highlight the need for stronger coordination, targeted action, and increased awareness to reduce impacts on water quality.

The Water Forum has submitted recommendations to the EPA as part of a pre-consultation engagement on the development of the National Inspection Plan (NIP) for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems 2027–2031, which sets out how domestic wastewater treatment systems are inspected and regulated. The Forum welcomed the opportunity to engage with the EPA in advance of the public consultation on the plan, which is due to take place later this year, and put forward recommendations aimed at strengthening the next NIP.

### The Challenge

- **High failure rates:** Over 50% of septic tanks fail inspection, often due to simple, preventable maintenance issues such as desludging.
- **Pressure on water quality:** Poorly maintained systems can pollute nearby rivers, lakes, and groundwater, including drinking water sources.
- **Need for stronger coordination:** A more joined-up approach across authorities is needed to manage domestic wastewater effectively.
- **Gaps in public awareness:** Responsibility for education and awareness on septic tank maintenance is unclear.

Figure 8: Summary of The Water Forum’s recommendations on the development of the National Inspection Plan for Domestic Wastewater Treatment

## Water Forum Recommendations to Strengthen Domestic Wastewater Management

### 1 Join Up the System

Develop a coordinated national approach to domestic wastewater by aligning roles across inspections, planning, grants and enforcement through a Sectoral Action Work Plan.

### 2 Target the Highest Risks

Focus inspections on high-risk systems by prioritising Zone 1 (within 100m of at-risk waters) and further strengthen targeting of inspection to include drinking water source areas.

### 3 Strengthen Prevention

Improve awareness and promote regular maintenance and desludging to reduce preventable septic tank failures.

### 4 Support Community Action

Promote community-led initiatives and catchment-based approaches to improve awareness, maintenance, and participation.

### 5 Protect Public Health

Further strengthen the targeting of inspections where private wells are present, supported by targeted education on the public health risks of contamination of private wells from septic tanks.

<sup>1</sup> Refer [here](#) for the full list of significant pressures published by the EPA.

<sup>2</sup> Link [here](#) for full Water Forum submission to the EPA on the National Inspection Plan for DWWTS (2027–2031), 2026.



# Engagement & Collaboration

## The Water Forum Engages with Uisce Éireann on Customer Communications and Service



Figure 9: Water Forum members meet with representatives from Uisce Éireann in Colvill House, Dublin

The Water Forum welcomed the opportunity to meet with representatives from Uisce Éireann to discuss the findings of its national survey *Public Water Users: Communications and Customer Service*, alongside related policy recommendations and next steps for improving engagement and communication with public water users.

The meeting explored how people receive information about their water supply, what customers expect during incidents, and how communication and customer service can improve for households and communities across Ireland.

A central theme emerging from both the survey and the meeting was the importance of timely, clear and accessible information, particularly during unplanned outages or boil water notices when people need updates quickly and reliably.

The Forum welcomed Uisce Éireann's demonstration of its "In Your Area" geolocation service, available on the Uisce Éireann website, which provides real-time local information on water quality issues, outages and supply disruptions. Discussions explored how this service, alongside text alerts, could help ensure customers receive important updates more directly during incidents.

Uisce Éireann noted that while many outages are unplanned and cannot be communicated in advance, customers value reactive text alerts and uptake of the service increases significantly during supply incidents. The "In Your Area" service is available at: <https://www.water.ie/in-your-area>

Discussions also explored how communication with customers has changed since responsibility for water services moved from local authorities to Uisce Éireann, and how customer expectations for faster and clearer updates continue to grow.

The discussion reinforced the importance of public awareness around water services and conservation. Findings from the Forum's earlier 2023 survey showed that public water users are significantly less likely than to know where their water comes from relative to those connected to Group Water Schemes, highlighting the need for greater public understanding of water sources, treatment and water conservation.

Overall, the meeting provided an opportunity to discuss how communication with public water consumers can continue to improve, helping ensure households and communities receive clear, timely and accessible information about their water supply.

## Visit to the Uisce Éireann National Laboratory, Ballysimon, Co. Limerick



Figure 10: Water Forum members outside Uisce Éireann National Laboratory in Ballysimon, Co. Limerick

In March, members of the Water Forum visited the new Uisce Éireann National Laboratory in Ballysimon, Co. Limerick — a major new facility that will support water and wastewater testing services across Ireland.

The 3,800 square metre laboratory will have capacity to carry out up to 1.2 million tests annually and is expected to become fully accredited and operational by March 2027. Once complete, it will operate seven days a week testing drinking water and wastewater samples from across the country. Around 90 staff will work on site, bringing experience from backgrounds including chemistry, microbiology, pharmaceuticals and forensics. The laboratory has also achieved an “Outstanding” BREEAM design rating — the first laboratory in Ireland and only the third in Europe to receive this recognition.

During the tour, members met staff, viewed the laboratories and learned more about the scale of national water quality monitoring. The facility will focus on high-demand parameters such as E. Coli, turbidity and chlorine, while also preparing for future testing needs around antimicrobial resistance (AMR), microplastics and trace contaminants.

Members were particularly interested in discussions around emerging contaminants and the challenges of testing at ultra-low concentrations. As EU requirements continue to evolve, the laboratory is preparing for future testing needs in this area, while some specialised analysis will continue to be outsourced as methods and standards develop internationally.

One of the highlights of the visit was learning about the national sampling operation behind the laboratory. The sample sorting facility is expected to process up to 400 bottles per hour, supported by more than 100 sampling officers working across the country. Members heard how these officers are trained not only in technical procedures, but also in public engagement, as they regularly enter homes and interact with people from many different communities.

The visit also introduced members to the “One Health” concept, which promotes greater data sharing between organisations such as the EPA, HSE, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and local authorities to build a more joined-up understanding of risks across drinking water, wastewater and the wider environment.

There were also a few lighter moments during the day. Members enjoyed hearing about the dedicated Taste & Odour Laboratory — effectively the home of the facility’s “water sommeliers”. Staff explained that taste and smell are often the first things people notice about their water, so checks are carried out to ensure water not only meets standards but also tastes and smells right to customers.

The Water Forum would like to sincerely thank Uisce Éireann for hosting the visit and for sharing their time and expertise with members. We would also like to thank all members who attended and contributed observations throughout the day.

It was encouraging to see such an advanced and forward-looking facility supporting water services in Ireland, and The Forum looks forward to seeing the laboratory fully operational in the months ahead.



Figure 9: Water Forum members during the tour of Uisce Éireann’s National Laboratory



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