

Nationwide Water Conservation Order should be a turning point for how Ireland values water

The nationwide Water Conservation Order coming into effect today, should be a turning point for how Ireland values and uses water, according to The National Water Forum. While recognising that temporary restrictions are essential to protect drinking water supplies, the Forum says the introduction of the Order should prompt long-term action to reduce demand and build resilience to future droughts and climate pressures.

Chair of The National Water Forum, Dr Matt Crowe, said:

"Water Conservation Orders are an important measure to help protect essential drinking water supplies during periods of exceptional pressure, and we encourage everyone to continue using water wisely over the coming weeks.

"But the nationwide Order is also a reminder that building water resilience begins long before restrictions become necessary.

"If we want to reduce the need for Water Conservation Orders in the future, water conservation needs to become part of everyday life—not something we only think about during periods of drought."

The Water Conservation Orders come just weeks since The National Water Forum convened a national Water Conservation Workshop bringing together representatives from Government, Uisce Éireann, the group water sector, regulators, local authorities, academia, business and civil society to help inform the development of Ireland's future National Water Conservation Strategy.

The workshop identified four priority areas that will be central to building a more water-resilient Ireland:

- helping people better understand and value water through education and awareness;
- reducing water demand through leakage reduction, better data and smarter water use;
- improving water efficiency in homes and buildings through better standards and design; and
- strengthening water stewardship across business and industry.

The National Water Forum said the discussions demonstrated that while emergency restrictions play an important role during periods of dry weather, long-term resilience will depend on coordinated action across society to improve how water is valued, managed and used.

Dr Crowe said:

"Water conservation is about much more than asking households to use less water during dry weather.

"It is about creating a culture where water is valued by everyone. That means improving water efficiency in our homes, businesses and public buildings, reducing leakage, designing water-smart communities and supporting water stewardship across every sector.

"Building that culture of conservation is one of the most effective ways we can strengthen Ireland's resilience to future droughts."

The National Water Forum noted that its previous research has shown that practical water conservation measures can deliver significant environmental and economic benefits.

Its independent **Cost-Benefit Analysis of Domestic Water Conservation Measures** found that installing low- to moderate-cost water-saving technologies, such as efficient taps, showers and toilets, in new homes would cost developers **less than €180 per household**. Delivering these measures across the Government's Housing for All target of 303,000 new homes could **save 2.2 million cubic metres of water annually** at a national level, **cutting approximately €9.7 million in state costs** for water and wastewater services. The findings demonstrate that practical water conservation measures can not only reduce water demand and public costs but also help increase capacity for housing developments in areas facing water supply constraints.

Dr Crowe added:

"We cannot control when the next prolonged dry spell will happen, but we can decide how prepared we are for it. Today's Water Conservation Order should be more than a response to current pressures—it should be the catalyst for building a stronger culture of water conservation across Ireland."

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 27 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.

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