

Water Conservation Workshop

Summary Report

4th June, Gibson Hotel



Purpose of the Workshop

The workshop was convened to support the development of a future National Water Conservation Strategy. It aimed to identify priority areas for inclusion in the strategy, explore where effort should be focused in the short, medium and long term, and consider the roles, responsibilities and coordination required to support delivery.



Workshop Programme

Session	Focus	Output
1) Opening & Context	Workshop purpose, role of the Working Group and how discussions will inform future policy development.	Shared understanding of workshop objectives and process.
2) Setting the Scene	Water supply and demand pressures, climate resilience, growth, policy context and need for strategic direction.	Common understanding of the rationale for water conservation.
3) Working Session 1: Identifying Priorities	Explore key water conservation challenges, opportunities and focus areas for a future National Water Conservation Strategy.	Priority areas to inform strategy development.
4) Working Session 2: Shaping Priorities & Building the Roadmap	Consider impact, sequencing and timing of priorities across short, medium and long-term horizons.	Early roadmap for the National Water Conservation Strategy.
5) Working Session 3: Delivering the Strategy	Explore roles, responsibilities, coordination, governance and implementation requirements.	Initial thinking on leadership, accountability and delivery structures.
6) Summary & Next Steps	Review key learnings and outline next steps for the Water Conservation Working Group.	Agreed next steps and close of workshop.

Stakeholders Represented at the Workshop

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

Water Policy, Water
Advisory Unit; Rural Water;
Building Standards

Uisce Éireann

National Federation of Group Water Schemes

Business / Commercial

20FIFTY; IBEC

Irish Green Building Council

Academia

TCD; UoG; TU Dublin

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU)

Water Forum Members

Public Water Consumers;
Rural Water; Tourism;
Environment; Agriculture;
Business; Social housing;
Education

County & City Management Association (Local Authorities)



- Responses were submitted anonymously through Mentimeter.
- Participants contributed words and phrases they felt should be prioritised in a future National Water Conservation Strategy.
- The responses were displayed as a word cloud. The size of each word reflects how frequently it was mentioned by participants.

Session 1: Identifying Priorities

- Participants first identified individual priorities through Mentimeter.
- These priorities were then explored through facilitated table discussions, helping to identify common themes, opportunities and challenges across sectors.
- A number of themes emerged consistently across the tables discussions:
- **Key Themes:**

Education,
Awareness and
Understanding the
Value of Water

Leakage, Metering
and Data

Water-Efficient
Buildings and
Standards

Water Stewardship
and Non-Domestic
Water Use

Session 1: Priority Themes Emerging from the Discussion

Education, Awareness and Understanding the Value of Water

- Strengthening water literacy across generations, from schools and communities to businesses and households.
- Improving understanding of the value, cost and scarcity of water, while making water use more visible in everyday life.
- Consistent messaging, community engagement and local storytelling were repeatedly highlighted.

Leakage, Metering and Data

- Leakage was highlighted as both a water conservation issue and a public confidence issue.
- Smart metering, leak alerts and improved visibility of water use were discussed as tools to support informed decision-making.
- Participants emphasised the importance of communicating metering as a tool for information, leak detection and conservation, rather than linking it directly to debates around water charging.

Session 1: Priority Themes Emerging from the Discussion

Water-Efficient Buildings and Standards

- Opportunities were identified to improve water efficiency through building regulations, planning, retrofit programmes and technical standards.
- Water-efficient buildings were viewed as a practical, long-term approach to reducing demand and improving resilience.
- Discussion focused on embedding water efficiency into the design, construction and operation of buildings and communities.

Water Stewardship and Non-Domestic Water Use

- Businesses, industry and other large water users were identified as important partners in supporting water conservation.
- Sectoral benchmarking and water stewardship were highlighted as ways to improve water-use performance across different sectors.
- Abstraction licensing provides opportunities to strengthen data, accountability and water resource management.

Theme 1: Education, Awareness and Understanding the Value of Water

Education, Awareness and Understanding the Value of Water

Opportunities

- Use schools, sports clubs and community networks to keep water conservation visible and relevant.
- Learn from established water literacy and awareness programmes in the UK and Scotland.
- Strengthen understanding of the links between water use, energy consumption and climate resilience.
- Clarify who is responsible for drought management in Ireland, including drought tracking and communications.
- Make the benefits of water conservation more visible at local level.
- Establish an Education Forum to coordinate action across key stakeholders, build on existing networks.
- Develop a strategy to target education across generations and embed water conservation in education. Requires leading organisation, clear roles and responsibilities, coordinated communications and a budget for education resources.
- Strengthen the role of local planning and development objectives in promoting practical water efficiency measures.
- Review of existing education programmes and policies to support a gap analysis of where action is needed.
- Messaging on leakage should distinguish between customer-side leaks, excess water use and leakage on public network.

Challenges

- Water conservation lacks the visibility and public profile relative to energy efficiency.
- Sustained education and awareness programmes require long-term funding.
- Public trust can be affected by concerns about leakage.
- People can quickly lose their connection with water sources and supply systems.
- Education does not simply translate into behavioural change, which will require additional policy, funding and incentives.

Leading Roles:

Academics (could lead with sufficient resources), UE, NFGWS, Water Forum, EPA, Green Skills, Dept. of Education, CRU, Media

Theme 2: Leakage, Metering and Data

Opportunities

- Provide households and businesses with access to their water-use data through voluntary registration.
- Use leak alerts, flow regulators and continuous-flow alarms to identify water loss earlier.
- Build on lessons from the Mullingar smart metering pilot to plan for wider roll out.
- Use water-use data to support future planning, growth and housing development.
- Develop usage profiling to help users understand their consumption relative to similar users.
- Metering should be presented as a tool for information, leak detection and conservation. Messaging on meters needs to be carefully considered, delivered by multiple organisations at specific times of the year (e.g. dry/drought)
- Consider excess water usage charge, with careful branding as a positive initiative to support water conservation.
- UE demand management strategy and first fix free programme should be promoted and recognised as tools in conservation.
- Strengthen customer side leak initiatives, supported by the CRU, DHLGH
- Research on leak-related insurance claims to support incentives for flow regulators at properties and reduced insurance rates.

Challenges

- Metering remains politically sensitive and requires careful communication.
- Conservation measures can become conflated with charging debates.
- Engaging the relatively small proportion of users responsible for the highest levels of consumption.
- Messaging may need to be tailored during droughts and supply pressures.
- Significant cost and disruption to reduce leakage rates.
- Leakage investment often only maintaining leakage rates, rather than reducing it.
- Expansion of customer side leak initiatives requires regulatory approval (CRU) and policy direction and support (DHLGH)

Leakage, Metering and Data

Leading Roles:

DHLGH (DHLGH working group, water policy, WAU), Uisce Eireann, Water Forum to support messaging.

Theme 3: Water-Efficient Buildings and Standards

Opportunities

- Strengthen water efficiency in the NSAI national standards (SR50-3), along with Uisce Éireann codes of practice (UE operational guidance)
- Embed water efficiency in planning and building regulations, including the installation of flow meters or smart meters in new buildings to identify customer side leaks.
- Link water efficiency to green mortgages, retrofit grants and insurance incentives, reduced property tax.
- Research on leak damage to influence initiative to access lower home insurance if flow regulator is installed.
- Water efficient design should be demonstrated and considered in all newly designed and retrofitted developments.
- Public buildings and state-funded developments to lead by example.
- Increase uptake of Home Performance Indicator (IGBC), which includes water efficiency indicator.
- Establish a Built Environment Coordination Group to support progress in this area.
- Align water efficiency with housing, planning and resilience objectives.
- Education for plumbers, opportunity for water efficiency certification.
- Explore opportunity to include water efficiency in BER.
- Include water efficiency in decarbonisation zones

Challenges

- Water efficiency standards require robust methods for measuring compliance.
- Setting water efficiency in building regulations may require mandatory product labelling to support a validation method.
- Product labelling may require EU-wide approaches to avoid barriers to trade.
- EU regulatory frameworks can limit the transfer of approaches used elsewhere.
- Changing the BER is complex as it is European level, not national.
- Achieving support for changes to building regulations remains challenging.

Leading Roles:

DHLGH (DHLGH working group, water policy, WAU, building standards), Uisce Eireann, Developers, Construction Industry Federation, Local Authorities, IGBC, Engineers Ireland, Green Skills.

Water-Efficient
Buildings and
Standards

Theme 4: Water Stewardship and Non-Domestic Water Use

Water Stewardship and Non-Domestic Water Use

Opportunities

- Develop sector-specific benchmarks for water-use performance. Build on successful energy-efficiency support models.
- Position water efficiency as a competitiveness and resilience issue.
- Strengthen water stewardship programmes and advisory support for industry.
- Encourage alternative water sources and stronger business-community stewardship initiatives. Facilitate bottom-up sharing of best practice in sector-specific technology.
- Water efficiency targets could be set regionally, prioritised where supply demand deficit is greatest.
- Opportunities to share success stories by businesses who have increased their water efficiency.
- Identify opportunities to reduce freshwater demand through alternative sources, fit for purpose for different sectors
- Review supports for non-domestic customers to identify and fix leaks, could offer incentives in areas with water scarcity issues.
- Explore green business grants to include water efficiency.
- Coordination group could be established to discuss how this theme could be improved.

Challenges

- Many businesses have limited visibility of their water use.
- Limited transparency in water use (non-domestic) nationally or regionally both from public water and private abstractions.
- Limited benchmarking and sector-specific data can make improvement difficult.
- Demand projections need to be refined for different sectors (data centres, pharmaceuticals, agri-food).
- Lack of oversight/advice to non-domestic users with private water abstractions on how to improve efficiency.
- Currently UE cannot offer supports to identify and fix leaks for businesses. Additional supports and incentives may be needed in water-scarce areas.
- Sometimes the cost of identifying and fixing leaks in a business is more than the cost of leaking water.

Leading Roles:

Uisce Eireann, 20FIFTY, IBEC, DHLGH

Session 2: Building the Roadmap

Participants explored how priority areas could be progressed in the short, medium and long term. While some actions could be implemented relatively quickly, others were recognised as requiring longer-term changes to policy, standards, infrastructure and behaviour. The table below summarises the key actions identified across the workshop.

Theme	Short-Term (0–4 years)	Medium-Term (5–9 years)	Long-Term (10+ years)
Education & Awareness	- Develop an education and awareness strategy to improve knowledge on water conservation. This should include a coordinated national messaging framework to reinforce awareness, practical actions and behaviour change. - Establish an Education Forum, building on existing networks and communications channels - Review of existing education programmes and policies to coordinate action and to support a gap analysis of where action is needed. - Strengthen Green Schools with water conservation - Identify funding needs and options to support education actions - Deliver an awareness campaign by multiple agencies/organisations with coordinated messaging on water efficiency. Identify what funding and initiatives are required to translate education to behaviour change at scale. - Develop education resources for contractors and developers. - Develop a national drought management plan to identify roles and responsibilities for drought tracking & communications.	- Develop water literacy programmes (learnings from UK) - Provide dedicated funding to support implementation of strategy. - Strengthen community engagement and stewardship programmes. - Identify how to translate education to behaviour change, through policy drivers/incentives	- Influence the school curriculum - Embed water literacy and awareness across society.

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Leakage, Metering & Data	• Communicate UE Demand Management Strategy and First Fix Programme across a range of organisations. • UE to strengthen initiatives to reduce customer side leaks, with regulatory approval by the CRU and policy direction by the DHLGH. • Continue and promote UE smart meter and flow regulator pilots. • Develop clear messages on the use of meters as a conservation tool, to understand demand and identify leaks, to be delivered by multiple agencies. • Strengthen communications to the public around leak detection and repair. • Commission research on leak related insurance claims to support flow regulators incentives	• Expand continuous-flow alarms • Leak alerts and customer-side interventions • Increase use of flow regulators	• Widespread smart metering and mature water-use data systems.

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Water-Efficient Buildings & Standards	• UE, with support of DHLGH, write a proposal to strengthen the NSAI SR50-3 to increase water efficiency across design, installation and operation of water fittings in buildings. • Engage with European Commission to recommend mandatory EU water labelling and water efficiency targets in the BER, to support water efficiency, linking to water efficiency targets within EU Water Resilience Strategy. • Continue to strengthen and promote Uisce Éireann Codes of Practice as operational guidance to increase water efficiency • Establish a Built Environment Coordination Group to progress work in this area, Schedule specific workshops to discuss opportunities to progress • Identify opportunities to include installation of flow meters or smart meters in new buildings to identify customer side leaks. • Identify opportunities to incorporate water efficiency into local planning and development discussions • Identify voluntary water-efficiency measures across the built environment • Identify options to include water efficiency in retrofit grants and green mortgages • Engage with EU to recommend mandatory water efficiency labelling, to support water resilience strategy	• Include water efficiency in retrofit grants and green mortgages • State-funded buildings to increase water efficiency (e.g. use IGBC Home Performance Indicator) • Use planning conditions and incentives to drive uptake • Engage with SEAI to include water in BER	• Mandatory EU water labelling • Water-efficiency standards embedded in building regulations and development practice • SEAI to include water efficiency in BER

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Non-Domestic Water Use & Stewardship	- Strengthen business engagement and water stewardship initiatives – reflect existing stewardship programmes and community & business partnerships to embed water efficiency across business & industry. - Prioritise engagement in areas where high non-domestic demand coincides with water scarcity or supply pressure. - Establish sectoral benchmarks for water efficiency improvements - Identify alternative water use options, fit for purpose for different sectors (e.g. water reuse, water substitution, reuse regulation, innovation opportunities). - Share best practice and success stories across different sectors - Refine demand projections for non-domestic demand across key sectors, to support planning decisions for growth across different sectors. - Develop a plan to engage with non-domestic users with private water abstractions (registered with EPA) on water efficiency - Develop platform to share non-domestic water use to improve data availability and transparency - Research and consider economic incentives versus cost barriers for fixing leaks and water efficiency measures. - Identify how water efficiency can contribute to positive business branding.	- Expand stewardship programmes and community-business partnerships. - Develop platform (similar to MOSL database) for water efficiency and water use data - Develop a plan/strategy to provide financial and professional support for SMEs to increase water efficiency.	Water stewardship embedded across business and industry, both from public water supplies and private abstractions

Session 3: Delivering the Strategy – A call to action

Participants identified the need for government leadership and coordinated action across multiple organisations. A National Strategy for Water Conservation can provide a roadmap to coordinate action. Delivery will depend on funding mechanisms, regulatory approvals and defined accountability.

DHLGH / Government Departments	The Water Forum	Uisce Éireann
• Lead development and publication of a National Water Conservation Strategy. • Lead coordination across government departments. • Secure funding for implementation, incentives and communications. • Identify opportunities to strengthen building regulations. • Create stronger links between water conservation, energy use, climate adaptation and other policy areas. • Involve the public in decision-making. • Develop a framework for water conservation that supports stakeholders. • Lead the development of a national drought management plan, identifying roles and responsibilities for drought tracking and communications.	• Engage more with the public on water conservation. • Strengthen communications and public awareness. • Build partnerships across government, utilities, academia, industry and communities. • Continue bringing scientific knowledge and evidence into policy discussions. • Lead communications strategy to educate the public.	• Improve communications to build trust in the utility. • UE, with support of the DHLGH, make recommendations to strengthen the NSAI SR50-3 to improve water efficiency in domestic dwellings. • Revise the Code of Practice further strengthen water efficiency • UE, with support of the DHLGH and CRU, strengthen initiatives to reduce customer-side leakage. • Strengthen communications around the need to identify and fix leaks. • Strengthen approach to deal with customer side leaks. • Identify areas of high non-domestic demand, increase transparency in this demand. • Facilitate bottom-up sharing of best practice in sector-specific technology.

Session 3: Delivering the Strategy – A call to action

CRU	EPA	IGBC	Academics
• Support conservation measures through funding. • Review and support funding for metering. • Review and supporting funding to strengthen efforts to reduce customer-side leaks • Review Uisce Éireann communications with customers to help build public trust.	• Identify EPA research opportunities to support water conservation / water efficiency, e.g. science-to-policy. • Develop a plan to engage with non-domestic users with private water abstractions on water efficiency	• Co-ordinate with key stakeholders (architects, engineers, developers) to strengthen water efficiency. • Lead / support working group on the built environment. • Share best practice in water efficient buildings. • Engage with banks re water efficiency in green loans.	• Support water efficiency pilots. • Coordinate/align education elements to support conservation. • Support/Lead courses on water conservation. • Lead research on water efficient technologies, including sectoral benchmarks for non-domestic users, water reuse/substitution and innovation opportunities.

Next steps

- Workshop report to be shared and discussed with National Water Conservation Working Group.
- Water Forum to develop a position following workshop, which will be shared with the National Water Conservation Working Group.
- National Water Conservation Working Group to develop piece of advice to the Minister for Housing Local Government and Heritage in relation to a future strategy for water conservation.

Workshop Attendees

Name	Organisation
Richaél Duffy	DHLGH/ Chair of Water Conservation Working Group
Nigel Hayes	DHLGH/ Water Advisory Unit
Keith Brennan	DHLGH/ Rural Water Section. New in the role.
Mary Turner	DHLGH Water Policy Unit
Sinead Cunningham	DHLGH Water Policy Unit
Paul McDermott	DHLGH housing section
Patrick Kenny	Environmental Protection Agency
Joe Gallagher	NFGWS
Brian O'Donovan	Uisce Éireann
Clare Lalor	
Kevin Murray	
Emma El Sahn	
Zuzana O'Neill	
Catherine Deegan	
Marion Jammet	Irish Green Building Council
Anna Daly	
John Gallagher	Trinity College Dublin
Rachel Peters	
Laurence Gill	
Edelle Doherty	University of Galway
Liam McCarton	Technological University Dublin
Paul Conheady	20FIFTY Partners
William McNeill	CRU
Rory Fallon	
Willie Sheehan	County and City Management Association

Name	Organisation
Donal Purcell	The Water Forum (Staff)
Divya Flynn	The Water Forum (Staff)
Aisling Corkery	The Water Forum (Staff)
Triona McGrath	The Water Forum (Staff)
Connie Rochford	The Water Forum (Public Water Consumer)
Keith Hyland	The Water Forum (Public Water Consumer)
Juan Pablo Martinez	The Water Forum (Business)
Steve Conlon	The Water Forum (Tourism)
Dominic Cronin	The Water Forum (Agriculture)
Mark Farrelly	The Water Forum (Rural Water)
David Wright	The Water Forum (Social Housing)
Karen Brosnan	Facilitator