

Newsletter



An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

Issue 24 / Summer 2026



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Policy Submissions & Recommendations

Helping Shape Ireland's 4th Water Action Plan

Ireland's 4th Water Action Plan will guide implementation of the Water Framework Directive over the coming years. As part of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) consultation on Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI), The Water Forum submitted recommendations to help strengthen the 4th Water Action Plan.

The submission recognises the progress made under the current Water Action Plan while identifying opportunities to strengthen implementation in the next cycle. As shown below, the Forum's recommendations focus on six priorities for implementation that support more effective delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives and better water quality outcomes.



Figure 1. The Water Forum's six priorities for strengthening implementation of Ireland's 4th Water Action Plan.



Addressing Ireland's key water pressures

Alongside its recommendations on implementation, the submission also includes recommendations to strengthen action on six significant pressures affecting Ireland's waters:

- **Agriculture** – Better target measures to local water quality issues, improve nitrogen use efficiency, and strengthen farmer education and advisory support.
- **Hydromorphology** – Clarify how the three Hydromorphology Sectoral Action Work Plans work together, define responsibilities across delivery bodies, and strengthen targeted measures to reduce the number of waterbodies at risk from this pressure.
- **Forestry** – Better link forestry measures to specific water quality issues, develop management approaches for legacy forests, introduce a forestry education programme, and strengthen sanctions for breaches of forestry licence conditions.
- **Urban Wastewater** – Complete the assessments needed to identify wastewater infrastructure requirements and clearly demonstrate what the planned investment of RC4 will achieve for the 197 waterbodies affected by urban wastewater.
- **Domestic Wastewater** – Develop a Sectoral Action Work Plan for domestic wastewater treatment systems to better coordinate action, strengthen public awareness of septic tank maintenance, and support community-led initiatives to reduce pollution.
- **Invasive Alien Species** – Urgently resource the new Invasive Species Bureau and develop a National Biosecurity Strategy with clear roles, responsibilities and national biosecurity protocols.

Overall, the submission calls for the 4th Water Action Plan to place a stronger emphasis on outcomes-focused implementation by strengthening sectoral delivery, targeted catchment management, governance, public participation, policy coherence and transparent implementation tracking.



Read the full submission [Water Forum Submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the Public Consultation on Significant Water Management Issues for the 4th Water Action Plan](#)

Building Public Trust in Water Services

A secure and resilient supply of safe drinking water is the most important interest of public water consumers. However, clear communication, reliable customer service and meaningful engagement are also essential to building public confidence in the water utility.

In April, The Water Forum published its **Position on the Interests of Public Consumers**, setting out recommendations for Uisce Éireann, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to strengthen how public water customers are informed, supported and engaged. The position draws on Forum member perspectives and national consumer research commissioned by the Forum, exploring public attitudes towards drinking water quality, customer service and communications.

The Forum's recommendations include:

- developing an **Uisce Éireann Communications Strategy** to provide a roadmap for building public trust through communications, education and community engagement;
- improving communication before, during and after supply disruptions, including increasing uptake of text alerts and better explaining the purpose and benefits of planned works;
- making information on local water supplies easier to access and understand through better signposting, plain language and improved access to local supply information;
- introducing a national 'know your water supply' campaign to help people better understand where their drinking water comes from, how it is treated and distributed, and why conserving it matters; and
- recognising **public trust** as a key performance indicator within the CRU's Performance Assessment Framework;

The position also highlights the importance of strengthening customer service, improving education and public awareness, increasing community engagement and making information more accessible. Together, these recommendations reflect the Forum's view that strengthening public trust requires not only safe and reliable drinking

water, but also open communication, accessible information and positive customer experiences.

As Ireland's public water services continue to evolve, the Forum believes these measures can help build greater public confidence while supporting long-term water conservation and strengthening confidence in public water services.

Following publication, The Water Forum formally submitted its position to Uisce Éireann. In July, Forum Chair Dr Matt Crowe and Senior Executive Officer Donal Purcell met with Uisce Éireann Chair Jerry Grant and CEO Niall Gleeson to discuss the Forum's recommendations and opportunities to strengthen customer communications, public trust and consumer experience.

 **Read the full Position:** [Water-Forum-Position-on-the-Interests-of-Public-Consumers-FINAL.pdf](#)

 **Read the Research that informed the submission:** [National Survey on Public Water Users: Communications and Customer Service, Commissioned by the Water Forum](#)





Sludge processing facilities at Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant, Dublin, Ireland's largest sludge processing facility. Image courtesy of Murphy.

Strengthening Ireland's National Bioresources Strategy.

The Water Forum responded to Uisce Éireann's consultation on its Draft National Bioresources Strategy, welcoming the development of a long-term strategy to support a nationwide, standardised and sustainable approach to wastewater sludge and bioresources management. The Forum also welcomed the proposed Bioresources Response Plans, which will help address gaps in the existing National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan, together with the Biosolids Assurance Scheme and ongoing research into innovative opportunities for the alternative reuse of bioresources.

The Forum's submission identifies a number of recommendations to help strengthen the Strategy and protect Ireland's water environment. Above all, the Forum recommends that the Water Framework Directive should be recognised as the overarching legislation for water quality protection and that every element of the Strategy should be assessed against its requirements. It also recommends including the EU Drinking Water Directive within the Strategy's key legislative framework to strengthen the protection of drinking water source catchments.

The Forum also highlights the need to urgently identify alternative reuse options for sewage sludge and biosolids, particularly in light of upcoming restrictions on autumn land spreading and recommends clear timelines for completing and implementing this research. It further recommends prioritising alternative reuse and recovery pathways in environmentally sensitive drinking water source catchments and ensuring decisions on bioresources management are integrated with drinking water source protection.

The submission also calls for clearer national monitoring requirements, including monitoring for emerging contaminants, together with greater transparency through the publication of monitoring results and compliance trends. Additional recommendations include periodic monitoring inspections at industry discharge points, contractor training on best practice for the reuse of biosolids on land, and stronger risk management measures to protect waterbodies and drinking water source catchments during the transport and storage of bioresources.



Read the full submission: <https://thewaterforum.ie/app/uploads/2026/09/AFU-Submission-to-UE-on-the-Draft-National-Bioresources-Strategy.pdf>

Building a Culture of Water Conservation

One message emerged more strongly than any other: **Ireland needs to place a greater value on water**

This summer's prolonged warm weather brought water conservation firmly into the national conversation. The introduction of Water Conservation Orders in parts of the country, followed by a nationwide Water Conservation Order, aims to protect drinking water supplies during a period of exceptional pressure while also prompting a broader conversation about how Ireland can build long-term water resilience.

One message emerged more strongly than any other: **Ireland needs to place a greater value on water.**

Water remains largely invisible in everyday life. It arrives when the tap is turned on, yet the investment, infrastructure, treatment and natural resources that make it possible are rarely considered. Improving public understanding of the value and scarcity of water, together with the effort required to deliver safe drinking water, was identified as the foundation for building a stronger culture of water conservation.

To open the workshop, participants were asked a simple question: **"What are the key water conservation focus areas?"** Their responses are captured in the word cloud below. The exercise provided an early snapshot of the different perspectives in the room, while also highlighting the ideas that resonated most strongly across sectors.





Cross-sector discussion on the practical actions needed to support a future National Water Conservation Strategy.

Building on these initial reflections, discussions throughout the day converged around four priority themes for strengthening water conservation in Ireland:

- **Education, awareness and understanding the value of water** – strengthening water literacy and making water more visible in everyday life through coordinated education and communications.
- **Leakage, metering and data** – improving information on water use, supporting leak detection and helping people better understand the role of metering in water conservation.
- **Water-efficient buildings and standards** – embedding water efficiency into planning, building regulations, technical standards and retrofit programmes.
- **Water stewardship and non-domestic water use** – supporting businesses and other non-domestic water users through better benchmarking, data, advisory support and opportunities to improve water efficiency.

Together, the four themes highlight that building a stronger culture of water conservation will require coordinated action across homes, businesses, communities and Government.

The workshop also explored practical actions that could begin immediately, alongside longer-term measures requiring changes to policy, regulation, standards, infrastructure and investment. It considered the complementary roles of Government, Uisce Éireann, regulators, industry, academia and The Water Forum in delivering a future National Water Conservation Strategy.

The full Water Conservation Workshop Summary Report is available to read [here](#).



Participants sharing perspectives on the priorities for strengthening water conservation in Ireland.



Panel discussion at the EPA Water Conference 2026 on strengthening action to improve Ireland's water quality.

EPA Water Conference 2026: Strengthening the Measures

This year's EPA Water Conference brought together policymakers, regulators, researchers, local authorities, community organisations and water sector professionals to discuss one of Ireland's biggest environmental challenges: improving the health of our rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters.

Opening the conference, Minister Christopher O'Sullivan acknowledged that while recent

EPA reports show Ireland is not yet seeing the improvements in water quality needed, there are also encouraging examples of progress across the country. His message was clear: achieving healthier waters will depend on stronger collaboration, targeted action and learning from the initiatives that are already delivering results.

The conference also marked the launch of the [EPA's Water Quality in 2025: An Indicators Report](#), which showed little improvements in water quality and reinforces the need to accelerate action if Ireland is to achieve its water quality objectives.

Water Forum – 26 Members, 15 Sectors



The Water Forum's multi-stakeholder membership brings together diverse sectoral perspectives on Ireland's water resources.

The Water Forum was pleased to contribute to this year's programme, with Dr Triona McGrath presenting the Forum's recommendations for strengthening the implementation of Ireland's next Water Action Plan. Her presentation highlighted opportunities to improve governance, strengthen collaboration across organisations and catchments, and support more effective delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives.

Alongside the policy discussions, several speakers showcased practical examples of how partnership is already making a difference. Ross MacDonald

demonstrated how Group Water Schemes continue to show the value of community leadership and local stewardship in protecting drinking water sources, while Eoin Kinsella shared the collaborative work underway to restore Ladies Island Lake in County Wexford. His presentation was a reminder that restoring damaged waters is a long-term process, requiring communities, farmers, scientists, agencies and government to work together around a shared plan. He also stressed the importance of good communication, strong stakeholder engagement and setting realistic expectations about the time needed to achieve lasting improvements.



Water Forum members and staff at the EPA Water Conference 2026

Building Water Resilience

A conference connecting policy, action and communities



12 November 2026 | Tullamore Court Hotel

How can Ireland turn the ambitions of Europe's new Water Resilience Strategy into practical action?

As Ireland holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, **The Water Forum – An Fóram Uisce** will bring together leading voices from Ireland and Europe to explore how we can build a more water-resilient future.

The conference will open with a keynote address by Professor Henk Ovink, Executive Director of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water and former Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Netherlands. Henk will explore how the way we value water shapes decisions about climate, development, investment and long-term planning.

He will be joined by Veronica Manfredi, Director for Zero Pollution, Water Resilience and Green Cities at the European Commission. Veronica leads the Commission's work on water resilience and will share a European perspective on the new Water Resilience Strategy, its ambitions and what its implementation will mean in practice. Representatives from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will bring the Irish perspective, exploring what the Strategy means for Ireland and the decisions needed to put it into action.

We will also hear from experts delivering projects on the ground, including nature-based solutions, river restoration and drinking water source protection. The final session will explore how we can connect people with water and support them to take an active role in protecting and restoring their local

waters, including through Catchment Community Fora and citizen science. Bringing together people working across **water policy, research, industry and communities**, the conference will provide an opportunity to share knowledge, learn from practical action and consider how different sectors can contribute to a more water-resilient Ireland.

Interested in attending? Register your interest and we'll keep you updated with further information about the conference and attendance. [Register Your Interest](#)

BUILDING WATER RESILIENCE

A conference connecting policy, action and communities

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

9:00 REGISTRATION & REFRESHMENTS

9:45 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

SESSION 1 - POLICY FOR WATER RESILIENCE

To explore the EU and Irish Policy Landscape on water resilience

Session chair: Matt Crowe, Chair of An Fóram Uisce

10:00	KEYNOTE ADDRESS VALUING THE WATER CYCLE	Henk Ovink, Global Commission on the Economics of Water
10:30		
10:45	EU WATER RESILIENCY STRATEGY	Veronica Manfredi, Director, Water Resilience, European Commission
11:00	IRELAND'S PATH TO WATER RESILIENCE	Colin Byrne, DHLGH
11:00	PANEL DISCUSSION/ Q&A	
11:30	COFFEE BREAK	

SESSION 2- ADDRESSING PRESSURES TO RESTORE AND PROTECT THE WATER CYCLE

To explore challenges, learnings and scaling up

12:00	NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS IN IRISH AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES	Mary Bourke, Trinity College Dublin
12:15	EVOLVING APPROACHES IN RIVER RESTORATION PRACTICE	Rossa Ó'Briain, Inland Fisheries Ireland



BUILDING WATER RESILIENCE

A conference connecting policy, action and communities

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

12:30	ADDRESSING FORESTRY PRESSURES IN HIGH STATUS OBJECTIVE WATERBODIES	Mark Desmond, Waters of LIFE
12:45	ADDRESSING URBAN WASTEWATER PRESSURES AND BUILDING RESILIENCE	Ted O'Reilly, Uisce Éireann
13:00	PANEL DISCUSSION/ Q&A	
13:30	LUNCH BREAK	
	SESSION 3: CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH WATER	
	<i>To showcase the role of communities in restoring and protecting water</i>	
	<i>Session chair: Dr. Fiona Regan, DCU</i>	
14:30	MAKING WATER MATTER - UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF WATER	John Joyce, International Water Association
14:50	COMMUNITIES TAKING A LEADING ROLE DRINKING WATER SOURCE PROTECTION	Mark Farrelly, National Federation of Group Water Schemes
15:05	GIVING COMMUNITIES A VOICE THROUGH CATCHMENT COMMUNITY FORA	Aisha Philips, Galway Bay SE Catchment Community Fora
15:20	CITIZEN SCIENCE - CONNECTING COMMUNITIES WITH WATER	Susan Hegarty, Dublin City University
15:20	PANEL DISCUSSION/ Q&A	
16:00	CONFERENCE CLOSE	

**Tullamore Court Hotel,
12th November 2026**



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