

## **An Fóram Uisce Response to EPA Water Quality Indicators Report 14/7/21**

The Water Forum welcomes the EPA Water Quality Indicators Report 2020 published today. While there are some welcome improvements in water quality in 345 rivers, 230 rivers show a decline. The increase in the highest quality sites from 20 in 2019 to 41 this year is encouraging but there is a long way to go to repair the impacts of the last 40 years of human activity in Ireland that has resulted in deteriorating water quality across the country, reducing our pristine water bodies from 532 (EPA report 2019) to the 41 reported today.

Protecting water resources and ecosystem is essential for public health, environmental protection and economic well-being. The UN World Water Development Report 2021 identifies a need for a multi-value approach to water governance. This approach aims to engage with the whole social, cultural, economic and wider political system in protecting water resources. In order to achieve healthy sustainable water resources, good water governance should recognise multiple values and the active participation of a varied set of actors.

Essentially, we need to value water more. Water resources are critical for drinking water, agriculture, industry, business and energy production. The report today shows that agriculture and food production are having serious impacts on water quality. A secure food supply should not come at a cost to the environment. The financial support from the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), along with increased intensification of food production, has kept the price of food low. This can lead to increased food waste which has significant economic and environmental costs. Outside of the dairy industry, most farms are not viable without CAP supports. The new CAP needs to be underpinned by the principle **public money for public goods**, i.e., supporting farmers to protect nature first.

Many farmers throughout Ireland are willing to transition to sustainable farming practices but may be restricted from doing so because of reduced farm payments. The Water Forum, in its recent submission on the Agri-Food Strategy, urges the Government to support mainstreaming of results-based payments whereby farmers are rewarded for attaining environmental outcomes for water, air, climate and ecosystems.

As the UN notes the political system and policy alone cannot protect water resources. The Water Forum is a stakeholder body with representation from business, environmental organisations, farming organisations and consumers with a statutory role to advise on water policy in Ireland. The Forum's policy ***Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management*** recognises that water has a value to everyone, its management should involve everyone. This framework proposes that farmers and all members of local communities (businesses, consumers and interest groups) are given an opportunity to actively participate in the development of action plans for water quality improvements and protection in their local rivers and water bodies.

The draft 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan will be published shortly and will outline the actions that Ireland must take to achieve good water quality in all its waters. The launch of the draft plan will be followed by a public consultation that will provide an opportunity for everyone to have a say on how our rivers and water resources should be managed to protect this extremely under-

valued resource. The Forum believes that the long running if not endemic pattern of water quality deterioration in Ireland must be reversed within this new cycle and failure to do so will have far reaching consequences for all aspects of Irish society-economically and socially as well as from an environmental perspective.

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#### Notes to Editors

An Fóram Uisce - The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

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