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PRESS RELEASE 14th October 2022 Press Release Response to EPA Water Quality Report 2021

Today, the EPA Water Quality Report was published, which indicated what the EPA described as an ‘alarming’ decline in the quality of our estuarine and coastal waters and a continuing overall decline in water quality. According to Dr. Matt Crowe, Chairperson of the National Water Forum ‘this report is a wake up call for all organisations involved in managing and protecting our precious water resources and all citizens that can take action to protect or improve water quality. The EPA data clearly shows that water quality is going in the wrong direction but also provides the information needed to reverse this damaging trend over the coming years’. The report identifies the main causes of deterioration as:

- Run off of nutrients, sediments and pesticides from agricultural lands and farmyards,
- Activities such as land drainage, navigational dredging and the presence of barriers such as dams, weirs or culverts in water courses,
- Discharges of poorly treated sewage from urban wastewater treatment plants, domestic treatment systems and storm water overflows, and
- Run-off of nutrients and sediment from forestry operations.

The report also pinpoints the main activities affecting impacted water bodies as:

Agriculture - 63%; Hydromorphology – 24%; Forestry – 14%; Urban Waste water – 13% and Urban run-off – 12%.

The National Water Forum is the statutory national stakeholder body, bringing together a range of perspectives on water quality and water management together to inform water policy in Ireland. Members of the Water Forum all agree that we need to ensure the right measures are put in the right places to address water quality problems in Ireland.



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The EU Water Framework Directives requires that all waterbodies (individual rivers, lakes, streams, estuaries, coastal areas), must be at least ‘good’ status, with no further deterioration in any waterbody. Ireland has 4,832 waterbodies, where some require protection to keep them at ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ status, while others require improvement measures to bring them back to at least ‘good’ status. The EPA report clearly shows that water quality, overall, is deteriorating. Of particular concern, improvements being made through targeted action in recent years are being cancelled out by deterioration elsewhere.

The Water Forum believes that it is now essential that the Government identify targeted actions for each and every waterbody in Ireland, in an **outcomes-based approach** that will protect current status or improve it where necessary. The EPA report provides the evidence base to build this comprehensive approach and the time is now to start the work to reverse the declines in water quality witnessed over the past decades so that future EPA reports show overall improvements in water quality.

According to the EPA, 63% of impacted water bodies are affected by agriculture making this sector the largest significant risk to waterbodies. Currently, local authority catchment scientists are working alongside Agricultural Sustainability and Support Programme Advisors to help farmers address local issues on water quality and to identify and implement the right action in the right place. This new approach though is only happening in a relatively small number of areas and the Forum would like to see this approach expanded to all water bodies at risk from agriculture to accelerate the identification and implementation of the right action in the right place.

Similarly, the Water Forum have called for actions to be implemented to address all other significant pressures, such as physical alterations to waterways, forestry and urban wastewater, if we are to see real progress in improving and protecting Ireland’s waterbodies. The Forum has also asked Irish Water

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to provide a clear plan and timelines for how they will address risks to water quality from urban wastewater in order to eliminate urban waste water as a significant risk to water quality

Good water quality is essential for drinking water supplies, for bathing waters and to support a healthy aquatic ecosystem. It is essential we all take responsibility to protect our waterways from the impacts of various human activities.

END

[Water Forum submission to the draft River Basin Management Plan](#)

Note to the Editor

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce) was established in 2018 to provide a platform for public engagement on all matters relating to water management in Ireland and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It consists of 25 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations and sectors with an interest in water issues that includes the environmental sector, the agricultural sector, consumers including customers of Irish Water, the rural water sector, rivers trusts, angling, business sector, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, forestry, education, social housing and tourism.

In accordance with the Water Services Act, 2017, the Forum has advisory roles in relation to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), Irish Water (IW), the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC). The Forum is chaired by Dr Matt Crowe.

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