



Annual Report 2017



WELCOME TO AN FÓRAM UISCE'S FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairperson and Members of An Fóram Uisce wish to extend their welcome to their First Annual Report.

An Fóram Uisce (the Water Forum) was launched by Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government at its inaugural meeting held in Nenagh on the 27th April 2017.

Comprised of representatives of different sectors and organisations with an interest in water issues, An Fóram is tasked with increasing public and stakeholder engagement on water issues and to advise the Minister on such matters. The establishment of An Fóram was one of the commitments made under the draft River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021, published on 28 February 2017.

In welcoming the members to An Fóram, Minister Coveney said: “The Government believes that extensive public engagement is vital to improving how we manage this valuable resource and to raising public awareness of water as an environmental, social and economic resource. An Fóram will be independent, have discretion to determine its own work programme and its own means of communicating its views and analysis. An Fóram provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues about water as a resource, water quality, rural water issues, challenges facing issues Irish Water customers and implementation of the Water Framework Directive.”

Minister Coveney added: “Through ongoing debate and analysis, the Government expects the National Water Forum to enhance public understanding of water as a scarce, costly resource to abstract, treat and supply, one that should be conserved, protected and used sustainably. The findings and outputs of An Fóram Uisce will be taken into account by both the Water Policy Advisory Group and the National Co-ordination and Management Committee in informing both national policy and implementation of the second cycle River Basin Management Plan.”

Minister Coveney appointed Dr Tom Collins as chair of An Fóram. Dr Collins has chaired the Public Water Forum since its establishment.



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Chairperson's Statement

Dr. Tom Collins, Chairperson



Since its establishment, An Fóram Uisce has provided stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss, in detail, their concerns and considerations in relation to our most valuable resource and to have a real and effective input into decisions regarding the management of water. In so doing, An Fóram is becoming a vehicle for strengthening democratic input into our decision making regarding this fundamental and strategic asset. Such decisions are pivotal not only to society today but to the wider ecosystem and to posterity.

An Fóram facilitates the sharing of information and understandings and thus ensures that decisions made at national level reflect the concerns and considerations of stakeholders at local level. It is also required to inform public views on the links between clean water supplies, good water quality and public health, and the value of water as a resource. Monitoring public understanding and awareness of water issues is something An Fóram considers as part of its work programme.

In advising the Minister on objectives, approaches and initiatives relevant to the attainment of good status in our water bodies, An Fóram is charged to take on board the sometimes different or competing interests of its stakeholders while never departing from the core objective of water quality enhancement.

An Fóram must constantly challenge itself to bring added value to this national project,

complementing and critiquing the work of the many statutory bodies with a role in this field. Its diverse, interdisciplinary composition lends it a particular strength in this regard. Thus, it can contribute to the debate and the decision making on priorities; heighten public awareness of the water quality challenge through the many organisations represented on it; secure organisational buy-in or stakeholder consensus on conservation initiatives which might otherwise encounter public resistance and point to policy options which might not otherwise arise.

But there is also a sense that An Fóram must be inspired by higher ideals. These may be concerned with a commitment to the 'common good' and to ideals of democracy which can be traced back to Aristotle's ancient Greece. As Aristotle saw it, 'a state is something more than an investment; its purpose is not merely to provide a living but to make a life that is worthwhile'

(Riesing, C.D., Aristotle's Common Good-A Historical Analysis of Aristotle's Politics; Portland State University; 2014).

Worthwhileness was achieved where private, selfish aims were subordinated to those of the common, public good. If An Fóram is to transcend the role of a mere brokerage function between competing interests, it must be motivated by such an ethos. Considering the stake which future generations have in the deliberations and decisions of the current one on environmental issues, this ethical imperative becomes all the more important.

ABOUT AN FÓRAM UISCE

On the 27th April 2017, An Fóram Uisce was established, initially on an administrative basis, to provide a platform for public engagement in the drafting and implementation of the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland (2018 – 2021) and on all matters relating to water as an environmental, social and economic resource.

An Fóram provides an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and analyse a range of issues with regard to water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

An Fóram is responsible for facilitating public engagement on all matters relating to the Draft River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 published in February 2017. An Fóram will consider the priorities and goals of the Plan, monitor and report on its ongoing implementation and draw attention to any significant water related issues not yet fore-grounded in the Plan.

An Fóram is an independent entity and has discretion to determine its own work programme and means of communicating its views and analysis.

It consists of 27 members representing organisations and sectors with an interest in water issues including consumer groups, Irish Water consumers, community groups, river trusts, groups that participate in aquatic activities such as fishing and water sports,



sectors with a particular interest in water issues such as the agricultural and business sectors, the community and voluntary sector, the environmental sector and organisations representing rural Ireland and the group water scheme sector.

The Water Services Act 2017 provides the statutory basis for An Fóram. The Act also provides for the dissolution of the Public Water Forum (whose remit was primarily concerned with issues pertinent to Irish Water and the Regulator) and the National Rural Water Services Committee (the committee for addressing issues regarding rural water), with their functions being incorporated into An Fóram.

Dr. Tom Collins, who has been the chair of the Public Water Forum and a former Chair of the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee, was appointed as chair of An Fóram.

An Fóram is headquartered in the Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh with Ms Sharon Kennedy as Senior Executive Officer and Ms. Carol McCarthy as Senior Engineer (LAWCO).



MISSION STATEMENT

The role of An Fóram is, in the first instance, to identify a vision for our water bodies – as clean and healthy waters, supporting biodiversity and providing the basis for positive economic and cultural life.

An Fóram is charged with ensuring that all stakeholders are regularly reminded of this vision and their role in achieving and supporting same.

An Fóram will provide a unifying platform for multiple and sometimes competing interests to work together in a collaborative manner, and drawing on each other's expertise and experience, address the many challenges to the vision.

An Fóram also has a role in inspiring, informing, educating and challenging all stakeholders in matters relevant to this vision.

All of our activities should seek to achieve at least one, if not more, of these outcomes.

An Fóram will support the implementation of the River Basin Management Plan and will actively monitor progress. If and when required, An Fóram will provide positive critical analysis of progress and issues which are of concern or which could compromise achieving our vision in relation to clean and healthy waters.

Based on its understanding of the vision and having regard to its interactions with stakeholders, An Fóram is responsible for drafting recommendations in relation to the ongoing development of national policies and strategies in relation to all water issues and working with all stakeholders and state agencies in achieving the common and shared goal as contained in the River Basin Management Plan of restoring our waters to good status.



TERMS OF REFERENCE

The role of An Fóram is referred to in the draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 to 2022. The Plan also states that An Fóram will have discretion to determine its own work programme and means of communicating its view and analysis and that its work and output will be completely independent.

In considering its role in that context, the members of An Fóram have identified its terms of reference as follows:

An Fóram is committed to facilitating stakeholder engagement on all water issues at a national, strategic policy level with the common goal of improving water quality.

An Fóram will debate and analyse issues related to integrated catchment management and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, including, but not limited to:

- Water as a resource;
- Issues of water quality;
- Rural water issues including oversight of the Rural Water Capital Investment Programme ;

- Water issues relating to climate change and;
- Issues affecting customers of Irish Water.

An Fóram will submit reports and recommendations to the Water Policy Advisory Group (WPAC) and the National Co-ordination and Management Committee (NCCMC) in relation to national policy in order that these be considered by the relevant Department(s) with responses conveyed back to the Forum including, if possible, attendances at a meeting of the Forum.

An Fóram will endeavour to enhance public understanding of the value of water and the water environment.

An Fóram will promote effective public participation, including the raising of public awareness on issues affecting water quality and to monitor progress.

An Fóram will prepare an Annual Report on its work.



PRINCIPLES OF AN FÓRAM UISCE

The following are the principles by which the members of An Fóram have agreed to conduct all aspects of their business.

Transparency and openness

All documents will be made available to the Members and Fóram minutes will be published on adoption.

Fairness

The decisions/outputs of the Forum should be representative of the views of the group as a whole.

Equality and respect

All Members will be afforded equal opportunity to voice their opinion and contribute to the work of An Fóram.

Efficiency

It is recognised that time and resources will be limited. Therefore the work and meetings of An Fóram will be managed in as efficient a manner as possible.

Collegiality and tolerance

The Members of An Fóram will work together in the spirit of collegiality and tolerance.

Common goal

The Members of An Fóram will work together towards a common goal of an improved water environment for all.



Photograph taken at the launch of An Fóram Uisce on the 27th April 2017.



Membership of An Fóram

At the end of 2017, An Fóram had 27 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality and also public water consumers. Approximately 50 different organisations were involved in the nomination of members during early 2017.

Agriculture

Thomas Cooney (IFA)
Derrie Dillon (Macra)
Patrick Rohan (ICMSA)
Michael Spellman (ICOS)

Angling and water sports

Martin McEnroe (Angling)
Dr. Tim Butter (Water Sports)

Business

Neil Walker (Ibec)

Community and Voluntary

Gerald Quain (Irish Rural Link)
David Wright (Voluntary Sector)

Education

Dr. Suzanne Linnane (DKIT)

Environment

Bernadette Connolly (Cork Env Forum)
Ollan Herr (ZWAI)
Mindy O'Brien (Voice Ireland)
Sinead O'Brien (SWAN)
Charles Stanley-Smith (An Taisce)

Fisheries/aquaculture

Francis O'Donnell (IFPO)

Forestry

Brendan Fitzsimons (Tree Council of Ireland)

Consumers

Jonathan Small (CCPC)
Connie Rochford (Irish Water Consumer)
Keith Hyland (Irish Water Consumer)

Rivers trusts

Dr. Thomas Harrington (Maigne RT)

Rural Water

Barry Deane (NFGWSS)
Jean Rosney (NFGWSS)

Social Housing

Kevin Ryan (ICSH)

Trade Unions

Liam Berney (ICTU)

Tourism

Tim Fenn (IHF)



WORK PROGRAMME 2017

a. Establishing An Fóram

From late March onwards, the following actions were taken in order to establish An Fóram on an administrative basis:

- **Completion of the nomination process** – the nomination process commenced in late March 2017 and was substantially completed in advance of the launch in April. A number of further nominations were made after this time with all nominations concluded by September..
- **Clarification in relation to remit** – An Fóram considered and finalised its Terms of Reference and Standing Orders.
- **Arrangements for meetings** – An Fóram agreed to meet every six to eight weeks. Standing Orders agreed by An Fóram set out arrangements in relation to meetings and agenda.
- **Development of profile and identity** – An Fóram has developed its own logo and brand.
- **Communications** - An Fóram's website has been launched.

b. Transferring the roles of the Public Water Forum and the National Rural Water Services Committee to An Fóram

The National Rural Water Services Committee was established in accordance with the Water Services Act 2007 and was responsible for a range of actions in relation to rural water services. The Public Water Forum was established in accordance with the Water Services Act 2014 and has been active since then. Having regard to the provisions of the Water Services Act 2017, the role of the both bodies will be subsumed into An Fóram. A number of members of the PWF have been nominated onto An Fóram including Irish Water Customers and stakeholders. A number of the stakeholders on the NRWSC have nominees on An Fóram. The process of incorporating the roles and duties of both bodies into An Fóram's remit commenced during the year and these requirements are reflected in the Terms of

Reference of An Fóram. It is intended to establish sub committees within An Fóram to deal with rural water and public water issues, in due course.

Secretariat duties for the PWF transferred to the secretariat of An Fóram on its establishment in May 2017. Four further meetings of the PWF were held from that date until the end of the year.

An Fóram notes the role and achievements of both bodies and the contributions of their members and would like record their appreciation of same.

c. Meetings of An Fóram

The launch of An Fóram took place on the 27th April in the Abbey Court Hotel, Nenagh and 5 further meetings were held during the year, details as follows:

- 6th June 2017 Abbey Court Hotel, Nenagh, County Tipperary
- 2nd August 2017 Ashling Hotel, Dublin
- 12th September 2017 Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise, County Laois
- 10th October 2017 The Spencer Hotel, Dublin
- 21st November 2017 Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, County Laois

The meetings usually commence at 10.30 am and are completed by 4 pm. Attendance at the meetings averaged at 81%, breakdown as follows:

Barry Deane (100%); Bernadette Connolly (80%); Brendan Fitzsimons (80%); Charles Stanley Smith (100%); Connie Rochford (100%); David Wright (60%); Patrick Rohan (100%); Derrie Dillon (80%); Suzanne Linnane (80%); Thomas Harrington (80%); Tim Butter (60%); Tom Collins (100%); Francis O'Donnell (40%); Gerald Quain (80%); Jean Rosney (100%); Jonathan Small (40%); Keith Hyland (100%); Kevin Ryan (100%); Liam Berney (40%); Martin McEnroe (100%); Michael Spellman (100%); Mindy O'Brien (80%); Neil Walker (100%); Ollan Herr (80%); Sinead O'Brien (100%); Thomas Cooney (80%); Tim Fenn (40%).

d. Building relationships

In understanding the importance of developing its level of understanding and engagement, An Fóram commenced the process of forging a relationship with the various agencies and implementing bodies with responsibility for water quality issues. Representatives from the various organisations have presented at meetings and also informal meetings between the Chairperson and Executive and representatives from other agencies have taken place.

In addition to presentations given by the Members of An Fóram, a number of guest speakers were invited to present on a range of issues including:

- Mr. Cian O'Líonaín, Principal Officer, Water Quality Section, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (27th April 2017 and 10th October 2017)

- Mr. Matt Shortt, Director of Services, Local Authorities Water and Communities Office (27th April 2017)
- Mr. Andy Fanning, Programme Manager, Office of Evidence and Assessment, EPA (2nd August 2017)
- Mr. Pat Duggan, Principal Advisor, Water and Marine Advisory Unit, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government ((10th October 2017)
- Ms. Ann Phelan and Mr. Ray Spain, Local Authorities Water and Communities Office (10th October 2017)
- Mr. John Breen, Director of Services, Kerry County Council and representative of the National Co-Ordination and Management Committee (November 2017)
- Ms. Jenny Deakin, Senior Catchment Scientist, EPA (November 2017)

An Fóram is most appreciative of the support and contributions given by these guest speakers.

e. Submissions made by An Fóram during 2017

An Fóram has a responsibility to comment and submit in relation to national policies pertinent to water quality. During the course of the year, An Fóram submitted responses to a number of consultation processes which are summarised as follows:

The draft River Basin Management Plan -2018 to 2021 (August 2017)

In its submission on the draft River Basin Management Plan, An Fóram draws attention to a number of recurring themes relating to water quality which are of particular concern. Having regard to the multiple pressures on water quality and the diversity of their sources including, inter alia, agriculture, forestry, industry and housing, An Fóram recommends that the challenge of improvement of water quality be addressed from multiple perspectives and in a coherent manner. An Fóram also emphasises the urgency of tackling the many issues that contribute to the decline in water quality and the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in attending to this work.

An Fóram makes a series of recommendations in relation to the on-going development of a robust and effective catchment management programme. This programme must be based on the scientific data contained in the EPA report and activate the various measures that are required in order to halt the deterioration in water quality and improve the quality of all waters to good status. Progress will require the commitment of significant resources at national level, the alignment of activities by all relevant state agencies and the activation of real citizen engagement.

An Fóram considers its position to be pivotal in the context of encouraging and facilitating engagement on the one hand and on the other hand, challenging policies, resource allocations and actions with the single focus of the continuous improvement of water quality in Ireland.

The National Planning Framework: Ireland 2040 (November 2017)

In its submission on the draft NPF, An Fóram Uisce considers that the draft presents an opportunity to provide a considered and balanced framework for the future development of this Country. The challenges associated with such a framework are many in the context of balanced regional development, equitable distribution of investment and resources and an opportunity for all to benefit from future development.

All of these aspirations must be fore-grounded in the absolute need to protect and restore the quality of all our waters - rivers, lakes, coasts and also groundwaters. These requirements, which are provided for statutorily in the Water Framework Directive, must be centre stage in the context of all decisions with regard to land use planning and development planning & control.

An Fóram considers that the Draft NPF requires strengthening in relation to these requirements and that the considerations with regard to the Water Framework must be explicit.

An Fóram appreciates that the challenges are great but equally, it is fully understood that the development of our economy impacts upon and is itself impacted by the well-being of our built and natural environment and the well being of human health. All are inextricable linked. All are all individually and collectively at stake.

The Nitrates Action Programme (November 2017)

An Fóram Uisce notes the provision of the Nitrates Action Plan and understands the challenges of the Agricultural Sector in implementing Food Wise 2025 whilst ensuring the protection of the environment on which its success or otherwise is deeply rooted. We note the growing realisation within the farming community of the inextricable relationship between a clean environment and a progressive food sector.

In its considerations since establishment, the members of An Fóram have expressed their serious concerns at the vulnerability of our water resources; with the challenge of addressing the poor quality of a major proportion of Ireland's water bodies and with the need in a general sense to reconcile the economic needs and aspirations of Irish society with the needs of maintaining a high quality aquatic environment.

Having regard to these concerns, An Fóram generally welcomes any plan or programme which is designed to assist or encourage best practice or, to eliminate or mitigate bad practice, in the context of environmental management.

An Fóram notes the measures referred to in the NAP which are designed to assist in the protection of water sources as part of catchment management initiatives. Having regard to

the overriding governing principle of the Draft RBMP being 'the right measure in the right place', An Fóram would need assurance that the mitigation strategies proposed in the Plan do in fact amount to the right measure in the right place.

Copies of the full text of these submissions are attached at appendix 1.

f. Financial arrangements

The expenses incurred by An Fóram are provided for by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The secretariat duties for the PWF were transferred to the secretariat of An Fóram in May 2017 and four further meetings of the PWF were held during the year.

During 2017, a total of €95,820 was expended between both Fora, broken down into the following categories:

- Meeting expenses – €8,151
- Travel for members – €11,099
- Secretariat salary and travel expenses – €41,475
- Office overheads, communications, training and IT – €11,327
- Logo design – €13,776
- Report on water outage (PWF) - €9,992

Acknowledgements

Mr. Tom Collins and Ms. Sharon Kennedy would like to thank the members of An Fóram for their support, enthusiasm, hard work and commitment during the year.

An Fóram would also like to thank the following organisations for their support during 2017.

- The members of the Public Water Forum
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.
- EPA
- Local Authorities Water and Communities Office (LAWCO)
- National Co-Ordination and Management Committee