



New water supply for Dublin strategically important for our entire country

It is said that Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Future generations might say the same of us when it comes to the matter of water. A multifaceted environmental crisis which includes- but is not confined to –climate change threatens everything that is life giving and nurturing in water. A resolved national drive to save and protect this most vulnerable and most essential asset is paramount.

The National Water Forum was established in 2018 as a statutory forum of stakeholders, essentially charged with the task of coming up with an agreed national strategic approach to this most pressing issue. The Forum recognises that we must all draw on the well and that managing the queue and protecting this well – both for humanity and for the ecosystem in general - is now an urgent priority.

It is against this background that the Forum has approached its consideration of the proposal to supply Dublin and a corridor of Midland towns with water from the Shannon. The resilience of Dublin's water supply is an area of immediate concern which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Dublin drives our national economy. Revenue generated from Income Tax and Corporate taxes from Dublin provides for public services throughout the country, including our schools, third level education, medical cards, hospitals and security. For this reason, the Forum is agreed on the need for an additional water supply for Dublin on the scale proposed by Irish Water.

While we absolutely support water conservation and tackling leakage and unaccounted for water problems, these alone will not deal with the fundamental structural problem of Dublin's water supply – namely its excessive reliance on a single source.

The Forum is concerned that we rely so heavily on the Liffey as the primary source of Dublin's water supply, providing all the water both to the Poulaphuca and Leixlip water treatment plants. Accounting for 85% of Dublin's water, the Liffey is a critical artery supporting all aspects of life in the capital city. A disruption to this source could have potentially catastrophic effects on the city and the need to spread risk to at least one other major source is paramount.

Added to this concern is the fact that the main treatment plants are at, or close to, maximum capacity and so there is very little buoyancy to cope with peak demand or a situation where one of the plants is taken out of operation.

This is not to say that a more effective and ambitious leakage detection programme is not required in Dublin, nor that the current leakage levels are acceptable. Leakage detection and resolution, however, will be just one of a number of courses to be pursued in meeting Dublin's water needs. Leakage reduction will reduce water demand but, even at its most ambitious will not, on its own, address the issue of water security and water resilience in Dublin.

There is, therefore, an immediate requirement that a substantial alternative water supply for Dublin is put in place as a matter of urgency. This will not only spread risk but also ensure that the headroom between production capacity and demand is increased. It could not be considered that Ireland is a water stressed country. However, many of our critical water services are in poor condition and require significant investment.

The projected growth of the Dublin Region, as provided for in the National Planning Framework, presents a real and immediate challenge in terms of water supply. The NPF states that *'A new long-term water supply source for the Eastern and Midland Region, which includes the Dublin Water Supply Area (DWSA), is needed by the mid-2020s, to provide for projected growth up to 2050 and contribute to resilience and security of supply for the region. This requires infrastructure provision to be guided and prioritised in a manner that can benefit the greatest possible number of areas within the country'*.

The importance of public confidence in relation to the resolution of this strategically important issue is of great concern from a wide range of perspectives. In this regard we are aware that the Environmental Impact Assessment has yet to be undertaken and we await its outcome. We are concerned that other environmental considerations are fore grounded in the strategic priorities of Irish Water and of general national policy as they affect water. These include an increased emphasis on water conservation, initiatives to reduce demand and a concerted emphasis on source protection.

Notwithstanding all these considerations, the immediate and long-term issue of providing a secure, resilient and adequate water supply to the Greater Dublin Area is paramount. Its early resolution is imperative to secure the future of both our capital city and the country as a whole.

Ends. (878 words)

- *Dr Tom Collins, Chair of An Fóram Uisce (the Water Forum)*

An Fóram Uisce (The Water Forum) was established in June 2018 in accordance with the provisions of Part 5 of the Water Services Act 2017 and is the only statutory body representative of all stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's water bodies. Its 28 members represent a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality and public water consumers.