



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# WATER SERVICES POLICY STATEMENT

2024 - 2030

Prepared by the Department of  
Housing, Local Government and Heritage  
[gov.ie](http://gov.ie)

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# Executive Summary

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this Water Services Policy Statement is to build on the work of the previous Policy Statement and reflect the significant changes to the landscape of water services in the last number of years. The Policy Statement was prepared in accordance the Water Services Acts.

Since the publication of the Water Sector Transformation Policy Paper in 2021, significant changes have occurred in how water services are delivered, and will be delivered in the future. It was important to reflect these changes in an updated Policy Statement, not least for Uisce Éireann, as they take over full responsibility for water services delivery as a publicly owned national standalone regulated utility, and the local authorities cease their involvement by 2026.

The key themes in the previous Policy Statement have broadly been retained as a number of the current and future challenges remain in terms of delivering safe, reliable and sustainable water services. While they are applicable to all water services provided across the country, the policy objectives and priorities set out in this Policy Statement will be reflected in Uisce Éireann's next Strategic Funding Plan, which will be submitted to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage within the next three months.

## 2. Factor's influencing Water Policy

Water services policy does not operate in isolation and there are a variety of different factors that influence how policy is shaped. These include International Policy, Societal Factors and Environmental Factors.

International Policy – The three principal international policy influences are:

- The United Nations Strategic Development Goals;
- European Union water policy; and
- The OECD Principles of Water Governance.

Societal Factors that influence water services policy range from spatial planning through the National Planning Framework, to economic development and ensuring the demands for water and wastewater services can be met into the future and do not hinder economic development.

The influence of Environmental Factors on water services policy continues to grow as new environmental and climate targets are set. The Government's Climate Action Plans influence every aspect of drinking water treatment and supply and waste water collection and treatment. Water services will have to adapt and evolve if the ambitious targets are to be met within the timeframes agreed by Government.

In addition, Ireland's River Basin Management Plan sets out detailed programmes of measures to protect water bodies from harm caused by water abstraction and discharges from waste water treatment plans.

### **3. Governance and Oversight**

Good governance arrangements are key to ensuring water services are delivered in line with the relevant legislative provisions and government policy. Through the work of the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Environmental Protection Agency, Commission for Regulation of Utilities and local authorities, effective governance and oversight are in place for all aspects of water services delivery.

In addition to this, the involvement of wider stakeholder groups in the development of water services policy adds further rigour and transparency that goes beyond simple public consultation.

### **4. Policy Objectives and Priorities**

This Water Service Policy Statement will contribute to the development of water services policy in the short and medium term through the objectives and priorities established in the statement and it will provide a framework for Uisce Éireann to consolidate and develop public water services through its Strategic Funding Plan.

There will also be continued Exchequer funding to deliver improvements to private domestic water services in areas of rural Ireland where there are no Uisce Éireann water services. The Multi-annual Rural Water Programme (MARWP) is the main funding stream providing capital funding to address some of the key challenges faced by the Rural Water Sector and specifically those of the Group Water Schemes in maintaining, renewing and developing their systems and networks.

The structure of the Policy Statement sets out three main objectives and a series of related priorities that provide the Government's strategic approach to water services delivery in the period to 2030, and beyond.

The three key objectives are:

### **Availability & Reliability**

- Water services will support regionally balanced economic and social; development through accessible, dependable and reliable water services.
- The priorities under this objective are focussed on improving public and private water services through continued investment in infrastructure, both through Uisce Éireann and the Group Water sector.

### **Safety & Quality**

- Water services will be safe and protect human health;
- Prioritising the protection of drinking water sources, minimising contamination, and providing for robust, effective oversight by regulatory authorities will help to deliver on this objective.

### **Sustainability**

- Water services will be efficient, resilient and sustainable in the long term;

Under this objective, priorities are to ensure that public water services are sustainable, that climate targets are met for the sector, and that water conservation forms a cornerstone of water policy.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This Water Services Policy Statement identifies high level objectives and priorities for the provision of water services including drinking water supply and wastewater treatment over the period to 2030. It has been prepared in accordance with the Water Services Acts - an outline of the statutory requirements is set out in Appendix I.

The key underlying principles that inform the development and provision of water services include:

- Compliance with water-related European Union legislation;
- Delivery of UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation; and
- Implementation of the OECD Council Recommendation on Water<sup>1</sup>

Water services play an essential role in enabling economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The Government is therefore committed to the continued development of water services in Ireland that are reflective of best international practice. Building on major reforms over the last decade, public water services will continue to be delivered to the majority of the population by Uisce Éireann, the national authority for water services with responsibility for the functions assigned to it by the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2022. There will also be continued support provided to those communities and individuals not served by public water services and who provide water services for themselves.

The preparatory work for this Policy Statement has taken due account of the social and environmental context within which water services must be provided now and the trends that will impact the provision of services into the future. At a national level, there are immediate pressures to support housing and spatial planning policies. At the same time, continuing population growth, economic growth and the impacts of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/environment/resources/Council-Recommendation-on-water.pdf>

climate change will require significant investment in the quantum of service provision and essential quality improvements. At the international level, alongside the emphasis placed on water services by the United Nations, the European Union has extensive legal competence in relation to water resources and the provision of water services as set out in the Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive, Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and related legal instruments. There is work to be done to achieve full compliance with these requirements.

In preparing this policy statement the Department sought and has taken into account the views of key water sector stakeholders.

There have been significant changes to the landscape of water services over the last decade, including:

- The establishment of Uisce Éireann as the national authority for water services with responsibility for the functions assigned to it by the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2022;
- The Water Sector Transformation Policy Paper, and the Framework for the future delivery of water services have paved the way for an unprecedented period of change in public water services; and
- An Fóram Uisce and the Water Policy Advisory Committee have developed into robust platforms for advising and interrogating Government policy on water services.

Water services in Ireland are effective in serving the needs of society and the economy notwithstanding that there are some aspects that require and are receiving priority attention to address shortcomings. In order to achieve high levels of service and to bring the entire system to leading international standards as envisaged by Government, it is necessary to take cognisance of the present status of service provision and the existing policy framework that will impact future policy requirements. The key considerations for the purpose of this policy statement are outlined in this section.

## 1.2 Water and wastewater services in Ireland

Key roles and responsibilities in relation to the provision of water services are set out in Appendix II.

Over 80% of our public water supplies are abstracted from surface water sources, including rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Groundwater sources, including boreholes and springs provide 20% of the raw water.

Every day Uisce Éireann supplies drinking water to over 80% of the population. A further 6% of people have their drinking water supplied by group schemes. The remainder of people get their drinking water from private wells, predominately in rural settings. Public group water schemes are group schemes that are supplied treated drinking water in bulk by Uisce Éireann, whereas private group water schemes abstract, treat and distribute drinking water to their members. The private group water schemes are generally co-operative groups delivering drinking water services to local communities in rural locations.

In relation to wastewater, Census data from 2019 indicates that two thirds of households are connected to public wastewater services provided by Uisce Éireann. The remaining one third of households have individual, group or other wastewater treatment systems. These systems are predominantly septic tanks.



Uisce Éireann also has approximately 174,000 non-domestic customer accounts, 43% of which are water only customers with the remaining 57% availing of water and wastewater services.

In contrast with other OECD member states generally, domestic customers in Ireland do not pay for water services other than the one-off charges for connection to the public network. With domestic customers accounting for approximately 90% of water customers (60% of water usage), Uisce Éireann is heavily dependent on the provision of Exchequer funding (approximately 80% of total funding) to meet both its operating costs and capital costs of maintaining and developing infrastructure to deliver effective water services.

Group Water Schemes are community-owned and community-operated water services that currently supply water to approximately 6% of the population. The Multi Annual Rural Water Programme (MARWP), administered by the local authorities on behalf of the Department, provides grant support to these schemes, for whom the National Federation of Group Water Schemes acts as the representative body.

### **1.3 Water Sector Transformation**

In 2021, The Water Sector Transformation Policy Paper was published by Government and charted the way forward for the completion of the transformation of the water sector in Ireland based on the integration of water services delivery within the organisation structure of Uisce Éireann.

The policy paper also recognised the need for engagement on a number of policy matters of concern to water sector workers in the context of the ongoing transformation process, specifically the constitutional referendum on ownership of water; the future sustainability of local government; and the governance arrangements of Uisce Éireann.

Following the publication of the Framework for the future delivery of water services in June 2022 by the Workplace Relations Commission, a significant amount of engagement has taken place between all stakeholders to the framework to ensure

the transformation process moves forward. Legal agreements between Uisce Éireann and individual local authorities are being put in place to provide for a secure and orderly transfer of responsibilities to Uisce Éireann and to allow for all necessary supports from local authorities to be provided. These supports will ensure continuity of supply and provide clear and transparent mechanisms for the transfer of responsibilities to be completed by 2026, as envisaged in the framework.

The Water Services (Amendment) Act, 2022 established Uisce Éireann as a stand-alone public water authority, and separated Uisce Éireann from its parent company Ervia. A new Board has also been established, along with other governance changes. One of the principal effects of these changes are enhanced accountability and auditing arrangements such that Uisce Éireann is now accountable to the Public Accounts Committee and its financial statements will be subject to a dual audit by its commercial statutory auditors and by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

## **1.4 Strategic Role of the Water Services Policy Statement**

The Water Services Policy Statement sets the high-level policy framework in relation to the provision of water services generally, including meeting the obligations to protect and enhance the environment. It defines the Government's strategic policy objectives and priorities that must be pursued in delivering and improving water and wastewater services. It also plays a specific role in guiding Uisce Éireann's future investment.

As required by Section 19 of the Water Services Act 2017 (see Appendix 1) Uisce Éireann must submit, within 3 months of the publication of the Policy Statement, a multi-annual Strategic Funding Plan to the Minister. This Strategic Funding Plan must specify the arrangements it proposes to make and measures it proposes to take to meet the policy objectives of this Policy Statement incorporating its estimated funding requirements for investment and operating costs together with sources of funding.

The approval of the Strategic Funding Plan by the Minister establishes the upper ceiling for State Funding over a certain period and therefore provides funding certainty on a multi-annual basis to Uisce Éireann. However, the actual Uisce

Éireann allowed operational expenditure and capital investment is decided on by the economic regulator, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU).

The sequence of actions flowing from this Water Services Policy Statement for Uisce Éireann's planning and funding arrangements is set out in Figure 1 below.



## 2 Factors influencing water policy

### 2.1 International Policy

**United Nations:** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. At the core of this agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the most relevant of which in this context is SDG 6: Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All, provides the basis for achieving water sustainability through:

- Access to safe drinking water;
- Access to sanitation;
- Improved water quality by reducing pollution;
- Substantially increased water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity;
- Implement integrated water resources management; and
- Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

These SDG 6 Targets are the guiding framework for the development and delivery of all new policy objectives for water services in Ireland. Ireland's National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 ties in all relevant national plans and policies. Through this revised Water Services Policy Statement, Ireland will look to strengthen this policy cohesion to try and accelerate progress in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**European Union:** The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) provides the overarching set of arrangements governing the management of water quality across Europe. It requires Member States to manage their water resources on an integrated basis to achieve at least 'good' ecological status and to avoid deterioration in the status of any waters. Related directives, often referred to as 'daughter' directives, deal with matters such as drinking water quality, urban wastewater treatment and bathing water quality. Ireland will shortly publish its Third River Basin Management Plan in accordance with the Water Framework Directive, covering the period to 2027.

In addition to the Water Framework Directive, relevant European legislation and policy in the context of influencing Ireland's water services include the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, the recast Drinking Water Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, EU obligations under the Aarhus Convention, the EU 8th Environmental Action Programme and the EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy.

**OECD:** As a member of the OECD, Ireland adheres to the OECD Council Recommendation on Water which was adopted in 2016. The OECD Council Recommendation on water is a concise and coherent international standard that provides high-level policy guidance on the management of water resources and the delivery of water services.

In addition to cross-cutting general principles, it reflects the OECD Principles of Water Governance, which were published in 2015.

Incorporating the OECD Principles of Water Governance into water sector policy guides the oversight and accountability arrangements for this Policy Statement through the OECD identified mutually reinforcing and complementary elements of:

**Effectiveness**, which is related to the contribution of governance to define clear sustainable water policy goals and targets at all levels of government, to implement those policy goals, and to meet expected targets;

**Efficiency**, which concerns the contribution of governance to maximising the benefits of sustainable water management and welfare at the least cost to society; and

**Trust and Engagement**, which deals with the contribution of governance in building public confidence and ensuring inclusiveness of stakeholders through democratic legitimacy and fairness for society at large.

## 2.2 Societal Factors

**Spatial Planning:** As the strategic planning policy arm of Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF) is the key strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of Ireland out to the year 2040.

The NPF anticipates a population increase of 1 million people and the creation of 660,000 net new jobs in the economy by 2040. Investing in our national water and wastewater infrastructure is of critical importance in delivering the projected new homes and jobs needed for this significant population increase.

In addition to facilitating optimal development in urban areas, water services are also essential to the strategic development and full participation of rural communities in achieving the strategic outcomes set out in Project Ireland 2040.

The ten-year National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the new NPF and will guide planning and investment decisions at national, regional and local level.

'Sustainable Management of Water and Other Resources' is one of ten strategic outcomes outlined in the plan.

**Economic Development:** CSO data has shown that Ireland's economy continues to prosper in an overall context. At both a domestic and commercial level, this places a continued pressure on water services infrastructure and the demand for reliable water services delivery. In particular, increasing commercial and industrial activity in the Greater Dublin Area is driving a demand for water and wastewater services that is approaching maximum available operational capacity.

Reliable, high quality water services are increasingly important to attract foreign direct investment into Ireland. In this context, and in terms of long-term security of supply, The NDP identifies key strategic investment priorities to address of water services infrastructure deficits and to enhance resilience and meet future demand increases.



## 2.3 Environmental Factors

**Decarbonisation:** The Government's 2023 Climate Action Plan (CAP2023) sets very ambitious targets for reductions in carbon emissions. These targets will act as the catalyst for improvements to infrastructure, replacement of older or obsolete equipment with more efficient equipment, and a general drive towards rationalising and streamlining service delivery. The CAP2023 has several environmental ambitions which are applicable to water services in particular. A renewed focus on providing not just a consistent supply of water to homes, but to provide clean water that is delivered in a way which is environmentally sound and sustainable will be an important aspect of water services going forward in accordance with CAP2023.

The Climate Action Framework for the Commercial Semi State Sector, which includes Uisce Éireann, was approved by Government in July 2022. The Framework consists of a series of commitments that Uisce Éireann should adopt. The framework will assist Uisce Éireann in determining how it can conduct their functions in a manner that is consistent with our climate ambitions: achieving a 51% overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and reaching net-zero no later than 2050.

Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan and the follow-on Regional Water Resources Plans set out the manner in which Uisce Éireann will go about achieving its climate objectives from a water supply perspective, in parallel to providing a safe, sustainable and reliable water supply to its customers.

The proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast), which is currently being negotiated sets very ambitious targets for national audits which will include the identification of the potential for cost-effective use or production of renewable energy. The final adopted Directive may contribute to the water sector reducing its carbon emissions considerably over the coming years.

**Climate Adaptation:** The National Adaptation Framework, developed under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, required the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to prepare a specific sectoral adaptation plan in relation to water quality and water-services infrastructure. The Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan was approved by Government and published on 31 October 2019<sup>2</sup>. This adaptation plan is focused on managing the risks from climate change for water quality and for water services infrastructure and describes the key risks and proposes necessary adaptive measures.



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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f5710-water-quality-and-water-services-infrastructure-climate-change-sectoral-adaptation-plan/>

**Water Quality:** Improvements to Ireland’s water environment are achieved through the programme of measures in the River Basin Management Plan. These measures are predominately designed to bring about physical, biological and chemical improvements in lakes, rivers and groundwaters, which act as receiving waters for treated wastewater and as sources for our drinking water.

Water is an important environmental indicator as part of Ireland’s Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP), and sufficient monitoring is necessary to track the in achieving RBMP goals. Reaching these goals will secure water resources to meet Ireland’s water needs both domestic and commercial while also improving the quality of our water and mitigating the impact of climate change. Protecting the aquatic environment, flood risk mitigation, improving the water quality and increasing the efficiency of our water management has never been more important.

There is much greater knowledge and awareness of the impact of human activity on our water resources associated with the impacts of drinking water abstraction, wastewater discharges and other activities on our rivers and coastal resources. In addition to this, there is also an awareness of the water quality issues in many rivers and lakes in Ireland. Pollution from nitrogen and phosphorus associated with agricultural activities, along with urban wastewater discharge are two of the most significant pressures on both surface and groundwater.



## 2.4 Existing policies relating to water services

The preparation of this policy statement has also had regard to:

- the “*Water Services Policy Statement 2018 - 2025*”;
- the report on the “*Future Funding of Domestic Water Services*” adopted by a Special Committee of the Oireachtas in 2017;
- *Ireland’s River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021* and Ireland’s draft RBMP 2023-2027;
- the “*Water Sector Transformation Policy Paper*” published in February, 2021; and
- the “*Framework for Future delivery of Water Services*” published in June 2022.

In addition, reports published by An Fóram Uisce, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and Uisce Éireann have been considered in the development of this policy statement



## **3 Governance and oversight**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Alongside the objectives set out in this policy statement and the supporting priority actions, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage monitors progress in the water sector generally and evaluates any need for change. This can mean a change of emphasis among the various priorities or pursuing new initiatives. In practice, annual reviews undertaken by both the EPA and the CRU as regulators, ensures constant feedback on the overall status of the water sector in terms of quality, performance, cost effective water services focused on customer needs and supporting economic growth and development.

These reports contribute to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage verifying progress on the delivery of the objectives of this policy statement. In addition to both regulators carrying out their governance and oversight duties, they also have a role in ensuring Uisce Éireann has the ability to carry out its role and responsibilities (in terms of adequate funding, access to the right resources and supports).

This section of the policy statement discusses the governance and oversight arrangements in place to ensure that the policy objectives are delivered over the lifetime of this policy statement.

### **3.2 Legislative framework and Exchequer funding**

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage is responsible for the policy and legislative framework for the water sector and for the administration of the Exchequer funding that is necessary to support the provision of water services. In this regard, the Government has committed to holding a referendum to provide constitutional protection over the public ownership of the national utility that provides water services to the majority of the Irish population.

The provision of water services is critically dependent on the provision of resources by the Exchequer for operations, remediation, capital maintenance and expansion. The funding required to support the objectives of this Policy Statement will be sought

through the established CRU regulatory process, within the constraints of the Government's budgetary planning and estimates process.



### **3.3 Inclusive approach to policy development**

Water service provision impacts all society, domestic and non-domestic, resulting in a large stakeholder community. While as a general rule, key policy development is opened to public consultation where practical, the nature of the water sector is that there is an added value in the establishment of dedicated structures to bring differing perspectives to bear on policy challenges. Alongside liaison with service providers and regulators the Department engages with two bodies that are assigned specific roles by statute.

## **An Fóram Uisce**

An Fóram Uisce / the National Water Forum is a statutory body established in 2017 to advise the Minister on water policy and management in Ireland and provide stakeholder input into policy development. The Forum provides an interface between science, citizen/stakeholder engagement and water policy. With five full-time staff and 26 members representing sectors such as agriculture, business, industry, education, community and voluntary, environmental NGOs, fishing, recreation, trade unions and Uisce Éireann customers, the Forum gathers a wide variety of perspectives to contribute to policy development.

## **The Water Policy Advisory Committee**

The Water Policy Advisory Committee was established in 2014 to provide policy advice and assistance to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and on broader water resource issues. The Committee is also responsible for providing advice on and support for the making of river basin management plans including the programme of measures as part of those plans. Membership of the Committee consists of nominees of all relevant Government Departments and State Agencies:

## **3.4 Quality and environmental compliance**

In terms of environmental regulation and upholding standards for drinking water supply and waste water collection and treatment, the EPA takes a lead role in regulating Uisce Éireann operations, with local authorities acting as the supervisory authority for group water schemes. This work is funded through the Water Division of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The work of the EPA encompasses the full cycle of water use, including monitoring of raw water source quality, regulation of public drinking water supply and wastewater collection and treatment, and licensing and control of discharges to the water environment. The scope of the EPA's oversight and control will expand in 2024 with the

commencement of licensing of significant abstractions under the Water Environment (Abstractions & Associated Impoundments) Act, with further responsibilities likely to arise following transposition of the recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.



### **3.5 Effective economic regulation of water charges**

It is generally the case that in the relationship between the service provider and customer, the customer is the weaker party and that is the basis for the general laws relating to consumer protection. In the case of natural monopolies – such as the provision of water services – additional regulatory measures are necessary to provide incentives to service providers to control pricing, drive operational efficiencies and to ensure that services are provided to an appropriate standard. The CRU is charged with the task of economic regulation of Uisce Éireann. The regulatory oversight process entails:

- Setting Uisce Éireann’s operational budgets through a revenue control process, which requires the setting of efficiency targets and ensuring Uisce Éireann can cover its costs while delivering improved services;
- Approving the Uisce Éireann connection policy and connection charges; and
- Monitoring and reporting on Uisce Éireann's performance to ensure that revenues are spent in the best interests of its customers and that Uisce Éireann maintains a strong customer focus in.

Given that the citizens of Ireland, through their taxes, are and will continue to be the main contributor in meeting the costs of water services, it is imperative that value-for-money is achieved from this expenditure of public money. Assets must be managed in an economic and efficient manner ensuring that the least cost arises for those paying for water services. The maintenance of an effective regulatory regime, and its review and development as appropriate will continue to be at the core of water service policy over the term of this statement.

Economic oversight of Uisce Éireann is entrusted to the CRU. This includes the protection of the interests of customers of Uisce Éireann. The CRU liaise regularly with the Department on matters pertaining to the funding of Uisce Éireann operations, the development of capital and operational investment plans, and the long-term approach to provision of water services. Uisce Éireann reports regularly to the CRU on customer service, the quality of the water services and wastewater services it provides and how it delivers on infrastructure projects in its Capital Investment Plan. The CRU, in turn, publishes reports on their assessment of Uisce Éireann’s performance.

### **3.6 A focus on users not served by Uisce Éireann**

The focus of rural water policy is on those households that are not served by Uisce Éireann. Approximately 15% of households do not get their drinking water from Uisce Éireann. Of these 6% are supplied by group schemes and the remainder get their drinking water from private wells.

The Department provides funding support to Group Water Schemes and to individual households. Group Water Schemes can avail of both Operational and Capital

funding to maintain and improve the quality, quantity and reliability of the water services they provide. Individual households may avail of financial assistance or capital works for their Domestic Waste Water treatment Systems (Septic tank) and their private water supply (well)

The MARWP is the main funding stream providing capital funding to address the challenges faced by Group Water Schemes in maintaining, renewing and developing their systems and networks. The core purpose of the MARWP is to provide the necessary funding to address infrastructure deficits that are having an impact on the provision of safe and secure drinking water supplies.

The MARWP contains nine individual funding measures and each is directed at a specific activity e.g. source protection, water treatment, network improvement.

### **3.7 Uisce Éireann**

Uisce Éireann is statutorily obliged to comply with reporting requirements set out in the Water Services Acts and in the Companies Acts, which includes submitting financial accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General for statutory audit along with being accountable to the Committee of Public Accounts.

Uisce Éireann is also obliged to comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and is subject to a range of obligations relating to business planning and reporting. These include a Shareholders' Expectation letter and accompanying Annex (Oversight Agreement) provides details of the Ministers' expectations for the Board of Uisce Éireann on an annual basis. Among other things the Chairman is formally required to report twice yearly to the Minister. Uisce Éireann is also required to annually submit a five-year rolling Business and Finance Plan to the Minister, which acts as an update of the Strategic Funding Plan.

The Department maintains ongoing contact with Uisce Éireann on both a formal and informal basis with regard to financial and business matters. In combination these measures ensure that there is rigorous oversight of Uisce Éireann's performance relative to its mandate from Government.

### 3.8 Collaboration and Partnership

Given the distribution of roles and responsibilities relating to water services, there is an imperative for collaboration between the various national agencies in a true spirit of partnership to deliver the best outcomes for Ireland. This is increasingly important in the context of the water transformation programme, guided by the *Framework for the Future Delivery of Water Services*.

The scale of investment needed across the Uisce Éireann infrastructure portfolio to achieve compliance with current obligations, together with new obligations arising, for example, from the recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive will require a significant timescale to deliver. In addition, there will be major challenges such as adapting storm and combined sewer systems to climate change and providing for growth that will need to be addressed in collaboration between Uisce Éireann and the Local Authority sector.

It will therefore be vital that the Department, EPA, CRU, Uisce Éireann and local authorities work together to face these challenges. Collaboration will be needed to develop policy, legislation, funding arrangements and agreeing approaches to implementation of regulations which enable the best outcomes for Ireland.

## 4 Policy Objectives and Priorities

This Water Services Policy Statement builds on the progress made during the lifetime of the previous statement and will contribute to the development of both public and private water service policy in the short to medium term. The objectives and priorities established in this statement, insofar as they relate to public water services, will be reflected in Uisce Éireann's next Strategic Funding Plan<sup>3</sup>. It will provide a framework for Uisce Éireann to consolidate and develop public water services as the national standalone, publicly owned, regulated utility into the future.

The key objectives for water services in the period to 2030 are:

**1. Availability & Reliability: water services will support regionally balanced economic and social development through accessible, dependable and reliable water services**

The priorities under this objective are focussed on improving public and private water services through continued investment in infrastructure, both through Uisce Éireann and the Group Water sector.

**2. Safety & Quality: water services will be safe and protect human health**

Prioritising the protection of drinking water sources, minimising contamination, and providing for robust, effective oversight by regulatory authorities will help to deliver on this objective.

**3. Sustainability: water services will be efficient, resilient and sustainable in the long term**

Under this objective, priorities are to ensure that public water services are sustainable, that climate targets are met for the sector, and that water conservation forms a cornerstone of water policy.

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<sup>3</sup> Required under Section 34A of the Water Services (No, 2) Act 2013 as inserted by section 19 of the Water Services Act 2017

Achieving these objectives will require input from all actors in the water services sector, primarily Uisce Éireann, and leadership from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



## **Objective 1: Availability & Reliability**

### **Water services will support regionally balanced economic and social development through accessible, dependable and reliable water services**

#### **Outcomes sought**

Ireland's future economic and social progress is critically dependent on upscaling our capacity to deliver reliable, sustainable high quality water and wastewater services. Public water supplies face long term pressures from increasing demand due to anticipated population and economic growth. The key outcomes sought in respect of this policy objective are that users are not subject to outages or constraints over normal usage and new connection and service requirements can be met where appropriate, so that water services do not impede economic growth or the development of new housing for plan-led development in accordance with our planning frameworks.

#### **Priorities**

##### **Investing to maintain existing water services**

Ensuring that current water and wastewater services are maintained requires ongoing infrastructure investment in maintenance and renewal activities. Identifying and addressing risk to the provision of water services will provide resilience and ensure outages and failures in the public system are minimised.

To fulfil this objective, Uisce Éireann needs to:

- Develop its capability to ensure that the performance of its networks and infrastructure is maintained and enhanced to the requisite standard and to achieve optimum balance of service risk and whole life cost;
- Deliver the strategic capital investment programme set out under the NDP over the period 2021-2030 to improve resilience in areas most vulnerable to shortfall in water supply and wastewater services, and identify further long term

investments that will improve the security of supply and reduce the cost of service provision; and

- Work in partnership with other stakeholders, such as local authorities and Government Departments and agencies, responsible for economic and social planning and infrastructure provision, to identify opportunities for innovative and sustainable improvements in service delivery.

## **Planning and delivering new capacity**

Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan is a 25-year strategy to ensure Ireland has a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable public drinking water supply for its customers.

In accordance with that plan Uisce Éireann will explore and pursue the scope for the interconnection of water supply networks and deliver larger and more secure and sustainable water sources serving regional schemes, particularly in the eastern region. Currently the River Liffey supplies approximately 85% of the water requirements for 1.7 million people in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). This high dependency on the Liffey results in a serious vulnerability to risks such as prolonged drought and/or contamination, notwithstanding the projected increased demand from population growth in the eastern region which further undermines the sustainability of the Liffey as a water source. For these reasons, securing a larger and more sustainable water source to supply the eastern region will be critical to futureproof our water supplies.

In parallel, Uisce Éireann will continue to build greater resilience in its water services infrastructure to ensure that there is headroom across the existing network to deal with outages and planned maintenance. An on-going risk assessment and risk management approach based on best available information adopted by Uisce Éireann is an important aspect of building the necessary resilience in the public network.

The continued provision of wastewater capacity, particularly in the major population centres, is required to support housing and economic development in line with

growth priorities set out in the National Planning Framework. Central to this will be the completion of the Greater Dublin Drainage Project.



### **Timely access to new connections.**

The objectives of the Government's strategic approach to housing identified in Housing for All and the National Planning Framework will need to be provided for in terms of both treatment and network capacity.

Housing for All aims to provide for greater flexibility in how critical infrastructure is delivered. As part of that focus on access to infrastructure, Uisce Éireann has developed an accreditation scheme for self-lay of water services infrastructure in public roads by developers to connect to Uisce Éireann's water distribution and wastewater collection networks. Developed in consultation with industry and the CRU, this initiative provides greater flexibility in infrastructure provision and valuable upskilling for the sector.

Related initiatives such as the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund and the Major Urban Housing Delivery sites will also be supported in investment plans and programmes to help deliver effective water services infrastructure connections.

## **Providing economic and technical support to community-owned water supplies and wastewater systems**

The Department's MARWP is an important capital funding stream to improve the quality, quantity and reliability of the water services provided to rural dwellers where no public water services are available through Uisce Éireann.

The funding provided contributes to ensuring that Government objectives for delivering increased housing supply, addressing existing deficits, ensuring environmental compliance and revitalising our towns and villages are delivered. Continued investment in rural water and appropriate wastewater infrastructure is important to ensure a continued supply of good quality drinking water to rural communities. The local authorities play a key role in providing advice on grant supports available and technical support to the operators of community-owned and operated water services. Overall, the alignment of the MARWP with Government policy contributes to ensuring that Ireland has secure, resilient, high-quality drinking water supplies and appropriate levels of wastewater treatment.

## **Providing targeted economic support (grants) to householders with their own water supply and/or wastewater treatment**

The Government's vision for water services, whether publicly provided by Uisce Éireann or otherwise, is that they are delivered and developed in line with the applicable regulatory standards. Delivery must be in compliance with legal obligations, in a fair, equitable and cost-effective manner and in keeping with the principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Capital funding will continue to be provided to householders, to carry out improvements to defective individual water supplies to a house (private wells) and domestic wastewater treatment systems (mostly septic tanks). Currently just over 10% of the rural population rely on individual water supplies (commonly called private wells) for their household water supply needs while over 30% of the population rely on domestic wastewater treatment systems for their household wastewater disposal needs.

Grant aid will also continue to be provided under the MARWP to facilitate expansion of the piped water supply network provided by Uisce Éireann and the Group Water Scheme sector. Support is provided to communities who wish to connect to the public network where existing individual water supplies to a house are a risk to human health or the water environment.

## **Provide access to drinking water fountains at key locations nationwide**

The Programme for Government commits to developing a scheme between local authorities and Uisce Éireann to provide drinking water fountains nationwide to reduce plastic bottle litter. This commitment is reinforced by the recast Drinking Water Directive requirements for EU Member States to take the necessary measures to improve access to water intended for human consumption.

Pilot projects are being undertaken by Uisce Éireann, local authorities and the Group Water Sector to install drinking water fountains. A review following this pilot will inform further steps in meeting these commitments.

## **Objective 2: Safety & Quality**

### **Water services will be safe and protect human health**

#### **Outcomes sought**

A safe drinking water supply is essential to the day-to-day activities of households, communities, social services and the economy. The key outcomes sought in respect of drinking water are that supplies are safe and wholesome on an ongoing basis and that any public health interventions restricting human consumption or directing that water be boiled before being consumed are minimised. Having unsafe water supplies is a risk to public health, inconveniences daily life and inhibits economic activity.

#### **Priorities:**

#### **A risk-based approach to investment in treatment and networks**

As outlined in Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan, Drinking Water Safety Plans, incorporating Drinking Water Source Protection Plans are currently being developed. These plans seek to ensure water supplies are assessed against short-, medium- and long-term risks, and to ensure supplies comply with water quality standards. This will ensure that there are up-to-date and reliable plans in place to deal with known, commonly occurring risks to public health, including, but not limited to, cryptosporidium, trihalomethanes (THMs), disinfectant by-products, lead, pesticides, aluminium, manganese and turbidity.

A substantial proportion of the Government's investment in water services, through Uisce Éireann and the MARWP will be directed at both addressing the water supplies on the EPA remedial Action List (RAL) and remediating the wastewater treatment plants included on the EPA Wastewater Priority Areas list.

## Reducing exposure to contaminants of concern

There are well documented issues around the occurrence of trihalomethanes (THMs) in both public and private water supplies resulting from non-compliance with the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive. Initiatives are being implemented by Uisce Éireann to address non-compliances with THM requirements on public water schemes. Local authorities, the Department and the individual Group Water Schemes are taking actions to rectify issues with private water supplies that are noncompliant with THM requirements.

Ongoing implementation of the National Lead Strategy is necessary to mitigate health effects of lead in drinking water and to ensure public health considerations are central to water services policy and decisions. This includes communicating to households, businesses and State property owners on the risks arising from lead piping and exposure to lead in drinking water, and the grants available to remediate lead piping in domestic settings. The recast Drinking Water Directive requires a national risk assessment of domestic distribution systems to evaluate the risks relating to lead and Legionella. Where risk to human health is identified monitoring and appropriate measures to reduce risks will be required.

There are well documented issues around the occurrence of trihalomethanes (THM's) in both public and private water supplies resulting from non-compliance with the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive. Initiatives are being implemented by Uisce Éireann to address non-compliances with THM requirements on public water schemes. While local authorities, the Department and the individual Group Water Schemes are taking actions to rectify issues with private water supplies that are noncompliant with THM requirements.

There will be a continued focus on the identification and mitigation of the public health risks associated with disinfection by-products such as THMs and other emerging contaminants in public water supplies.

## **Implementation of source protection measures**

The recast Drinking Water Directive requires the implementation of Drinking Water Safety Plans for Water Supplies. At present, the implementation of Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan is a key cross-cutting element in ensuring water source sustainability, providing a focus on where pressures exist on abstractions.

The implementation of the system of registration and regulation of water abstractions provided for under the Water Environment (Abstractions and Associated Impoundments) Act, 2022, will contribute to the effective management and conservation of water. In addition the regulation of abstractions will concentrate efforts on conservation measures, particularly where the potential risk of over-abstraction exists.

The focus of these controls will be to ensure that waterbodies continue to meet their environmental objectives and that water abstraction levels will be sustainable and resilient in light of future uncertainties around water availability and climate change. The Water Environment (Abstractions and Associated Impoundments) Act 2022 requires that existing abstractions over a certain threshold or abstractions deemed significant are subject to a licence application process. This may be a challenge for some larger abstractions, particularly those operated by Uisce Éireann, in ensuring sustainability of water supplies.

## **Effective regulatory oversight of water services**

In the context of safeguarding the quality of drinking water supplies, both public and private, the overall management and implementation of the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2023, including the delivery of source protection and drinking water safety plans will be overseen by the Drinking Water Expert Group which is chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The EPA is the Supervisory Authority for Uisce Éireann in relation to the quality of drinking water supplied to the public. It publishes an annual report on Drinking Water Quality and maintains a register known as the Remedial Action List (RAL) of water supplies which it deems to have certain treatment deficiencies and to present a risk to human health.

The EPA reports separately on the quality of private water supplies not provided by Uisce Éireann. A large focus of the capital funding provided under the Department's MAP is on improving the infrastructure of Group Water Schemes that have a history of water quality deficiencies, inadequate treatment and/or other related risks.

The EPA is the environmental regulator for Uisce Éireann relating to urban wastewater treatment and it licenses / certifies wastewater treatment plants depending on the agglomeration size. The continuation of the work of the EPA is critical to regulating the wastewater sector, progressing national compliance with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and delivering on objectives relating to urban wastewater pressures highlighted in the River Basin Management Plan. Efficient and timely decisions around wastewater discharge authorisation applications will be key to achieving the required environmental outcomes for receiving water while also facilitating economic growth and development.

Under the draft RBMP 2022-2027, the role of the EPA will be strengthened in line with enhanced functions under recent legislation, including the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations, 2023. Into the future, the EPA will continue to play a central role in the long-term management and oversight of water services through its wide variety of responsibilities under the RBMP, the Drinking Water Regulations and Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.

## **Objective 3: Sustainability**

### **Water services will be efficient, resilient and sustainable in the long term**

#### **Outcomes sought**

The policy outcomes for this objective are for water services to be sustainable in the long term, to contribute to meeting national and global objectives for biodiversity, climate and water body status and to operate as efficiently as possible.

Water in Ireland is sourced primarily from surface water bodies and to a lesser extent from groundwater. The protection of these resources is critical to meeting future water supply requirements while avoidance of contamination at source is preferable to seeking to decontaminate water in the treatment process. Another key component of sustainability is water conservation which has the dual benefits of reducing the levels of water abstraction and reducing operational costs in water supply. This will result in the water sector becoming sustainable, efficient, resilient to climate change and making strong progress towards net zero carbon by 2050 and positive outcomes for overall water quality.

#### **Priorities**

##### **Decarbonise the energy and materials used in water services**

Decarbonisation measures under CAP2023 will form a large component of Ireland's drive to meet its carbon reduction targets by 2050. The first stage of the decarbonisation journey requires a focus on efficiency and a lot of work has been done by Uisce Éireann to date in enhancing the energy efficiency of water services investments and processes taking account of the full life cycle of equipment and infrastructure. Beyond this, when all efficiencies have been realised the next stage will be to decarbonise the energy that is used by ensuring it is from renewable sources. Reductions in energy consumption and flexibility in its energy demands are further opportunities for Uisce Éireann to improve its overall energy performance. Uisce Éireann will develop an Energy Strategy to achieve these aim. As part of all

new projects, the embodied carbon of materials used as well as the process emissions in the operation of assets will be given due consideration.

The draft recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive sets very ambitious targets for energy neutrality in the wastewater sector along with requirements for on national audits which will include the identification of the potential for cost-effective use or production of renewable energy. The final adopted Directive text, will result in the water sector making its contribution to the reductions required to meet carbon emissions targets in the coming years.

### **Investment to reduce leakage**

Every day we currently lose about 37% of our treated water through leaks before it even reaches our taps. This is generally termed unaccounted for water (UFW). Leaks are difficult to find because they occur in the vast and complex below-ground distribution network. Ageing distribution networks and damage to pipelines from general wear and tear requires repairs and replacement of pipework to ensure continuity of supply and maintenance of water quality standards. Progress on improving Ireland's leakage rates is being made through Uisce Éireann's National Leakage Reduction Programme which runs to the end of 2030.

The recast Drinking Water Directive requires Uisce Éireann to assess leakage levels within its distribution networks before the end of 2025. Following this assessment, the EU Commission will determine appropriate national leakage rate thresholds. Where leakage levels exceed this national threshold an action plan to reduce leakage will be prepared and submitted to the EU Commission.

The current targets of 20% UFW may not be sufficient to meet the EU Commission set thresholds, which have yet to be determined. A high level of ambition is required for leakage levels to ensure Ireland meets the recast Drinking Water Directive requirements and delivers meaningful reductions in UFW. In addition reducing leakage levels will make more water available for population and economic growth while reducing the abstraction demands on water supply sources both surface water and groundwater.

Leakage reduction is currently addressed through a national leakage management system and by targeting resources at areas of highest leakage and lowest headroom across water networks, including through capital investment. In 2018 the rate of leakage nationally was 46%. Following a period of sustained work and investment, the national leakage rate currently stands at 37% and Uisce Éireann are aiming to achieve a national leakage rate of 25% by the end of 2030 through a combination of investment and operational measures.

Uisce Éireann continue to deliver the 'First Fix Free' repair scheme for domestic customers. The scheme has resulted in repairs capable of delivering savings equivalent to a combined total of 192 million litres of water a day. Under the scheme Uisce Éireann assists householders by notifying them when a suspected leakage is occurring within the boundary of their property and offering a free first fix. Utilising meter read data to identify the most significant leaks has proven to be key in ensuring efficient operation of the scheme. This allows the more significant leaks to be prioritised.

## **Water Conservation**

Water is a precious resource and although there is enough annual rainfall in Ireland, we are limited in how much water we can take from the environment. By using only what we need, we can all play our part in safeguarding our water for our future. The Programme for Government commits to the introduction of a Household Water Conservation Charge. The aim of such charging provisions is solely to encourage water conservation and not for the purpose of raising revenue.

Uisce Éireann's National Water Resources Plan introduces three solution pillars (Lose Less, Use Less and Supply Smarter) to ensure we have sustainable and reliable water supplies to meet our future needs. The installation of water meters provides valuable information on water consumption rates to the water supplier. This information is used to manage the service delivery, plan for future demand and identify excessive water usage. The identification of excessive water usage allows the water supplier to engage directly on demand management with the occupier. Excessive water usage is regularly associated with customer side losses through leakage. As a water conservation measure, meters give the water supplier the

capability to identify potential leaks quickly through an analysis of its customer's usage profiles.

In relation to public water services, Uisce Éireann must continue to communicate the importance of water conservation to its customers. This work will be supported through the provision of demand data to domestic and non-domestic users, as well as communicating information to customers on ways to conserve water, reduce usage and minimise leakage.

An Fóram Uisce published a Policy Position on Water Conservation in June 2023. This position outlines the need for and the importance of water conservation in Ireland. The priority recommendations call for:

- A committed Government strategy for water conservation incorporating a program of actions to implement water conservation nationally; and
- The establishment of a national water conservation team to lead that water conservation strategy.

The Department appreciates the need for developments in terms of water conservation and is committed to working with An Fóram Uisce to build upon their current research to realise the most effective outcomes in terms of enhancing the delivery of water conservation nationally. It is expected that both incentivised and mandated measures will be considered in terms of driving water use behaviour to reduce individual consumption.

To help drive this conservation effort, a national water conservation working group will be established to advise the Minister on a future strategy for water conservation and prioritisation of resources during periods of water stress.

In their considerations, this working group should take account of, amongst other things:

- The recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services as they relate to water conservation, and
- The Water Forum Policy Position on Water Conservation.

## **Implementation of the Programme of Measures in RBMPs**

A priority objective of this Government is to bring wastewater services to full compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and wastewater discharge authorisation requirements. This is a long-term process which will require substantial levels of planning and investment over a sustained period to bring the existing infrastructure up to a standard that is comparable to any other EU Member State and a responsive licensing process that aligns with delivery of upgrade works. Currently a recast of the Urban Waste Water Directive being re-negotiated by the EU and the Member States. This is likely to mandate higher levels of treatment, which will require an acceleration of the investment in certain areas.

In addition to the larger wastewater collection systems operated by Uisce Éireann there are legacy issues associated with wastewater treatment infrastructure established by property developers where the infrastructure has not been taken in charge and is not part of the public system operated by Uisce Éireann. This Developer Provided Infrastructure will be tackled by Uisce Éireann and relevant stakeholders on a phased basis taking account of the most effective long term solution and environmental risk.

Supporting the protection of sources for public drinking water supplies is also identified as an important outcome from the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021. This prioritisation of source protection will be carried forward into the next River Basin Management Plan through the proper implementation of the requirements of the Drinking Water Directive.

## **Integrated Drainage Planning**

Enhanced collaboration will be required in the near future between Uisce Éireann and local authorities to develop integrated urban wastewater management plans. These plans as proposed in the recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, set objectives, to reduce pollution from storm water overflows in the combined sewer system owned by Uisce Éireann and also to reduce urban runoff pollution from the storm sewer systems owned by the local authorities. The integrated drainage plans should promote the adoption of nature based Sustainable Urban Drainage (green infrastructure) as a climate adaptation measure.

## **Addressing risks of pollution where public sewers are not provided**

The Department provides capital funding to householders to carry out improvements to defective domestic wastewater treatment systems. Poorly performing, maintained, or located domestic wastewater treatment systems are highlighted in water quality reports as a pressure on water bodies. Such defective septic tanks can impact on the water quality in our rivers, lakes and groundwater. The funding available under the grant schemes are administered by the local authorities on behalf of the Department.

Working in partnership with stakeholders, the Department will continue to review the grant schemes and implement changes as necessary to ensure ongoing improvements that can assist in reducing pollution of surface and groundwater and delivering Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework Directive as delivered through the RBMP.

### **Statutory basis for the Water Services Policy Statement**

Section 32A of the Water Services (No, 2) Act 2013 as inserted by section 18 of the Water Services Act 2017 requires that a policy statement be prepared that will set out, “the policy objectives and priorities of the Government regarding the provision of water services in the State”.

In preparing the Statement, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage is required to have regard to:

- the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (as amended) and the latest River Basin Management Plans;
- the most recent reports on the monitoring of drinking water and urban wastewater prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency under Sections 58 and 61 of the Environmental Protection Act, 1992;
- regulations on wastewater treatment made under section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act, 1992;
- the need to prevent or abate risks to human health or the environment;
- any policy of the Government relating to spatial planning objectives;
- any policy of the Government relating to the promotion of economic development; and,
- the need for efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the provision of water services.

The Water Services Act, 2017 also requires that a water services policy statement shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas as soon as may be after its preparation.

## Appendix II

### Roles and responsibilities in water services

The **Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage** leads in policy making for the water services sector overall and for funding Uisce Éireann with regard to domestic customers and the private water supply sector.

The **Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU)** is the economic regulator, and is responsible for ensuring that Uisce Éireann operates in an economical and efficient manner.

The **Committee for Public Accounts (PAC)** is a standing committee of Dáil Éireann which focuses on ensuring public services are run efficiently and achieve value for money. Since the commencement of the Water Services (Amendment) Act, 2022, Uisce Éireann is accountable to the PAC.

The **Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG)** is responsible for the audit of accounts across a wide range of State activities to ensure that public funds and resources are being used in accordance with the law. Since the commencement of the Water Services (Amendment) Act, 2022 Uisce Éireann's financial statements are subject to a dual audit by its commercial statutory auditors and by the Comptroller and Auditor General;

The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** is the drinking water quality regulator, responsible for enforcing the Drinking Water Regulations for public water supplies. The EPA is also responsible for auditing the local authorities' yearly monitoring plans and reporting every year on water quality in both public and private water supplies.

The EPA also has responsibility for authorising wastewater discharges and, once the Water Abstractions Act, is commenced, water abstractions.

The **HSE** is responsible for public health and must be consulted by Uisce Éireann or the Local Authority where there is a failure to meet the standards in the Drinking Water Regulations, or where there is a public health risk.

The **local authorities** are the drinking water regulators for private water supplies which covers group water schemes and small private supplies.

The **National Federation of Group Water Schemes** are the representative body for the group water scheme sector.

**Uisce Éireann**, as the national utility for water services, provides drinking water to over 80% of the population and wastewater services to about 66% of households.

### Drinking Water supplies

**Public water supplies** are supplies where Uisce Éireann manages the abstraction, treatment and distribution of treated water. These supplies are covered by the Drinking Water Regulations and the Water Abstractions Act (once commenced) and are regulated by the EPA.

**Public group schemes** are supplies where a group water scheme, set up by the local community, manages the distribution of treated water to the users. Uisce Éireann manages the abstraction and treatment of the water.

**Private group water schemes** are supplies where a group water scheme, set up by the local community, manages the abstraction, treatment and distribution of treated water. They are generally supplied by springs or wells

**Small private supplies** are supplies serving a commercial or public activity such as hotels, pubs and restaurants, crèches and national schools. The owner or manager of the activity manages the abstraction, treatment, and delivery of the water. Small private supplies are also mostly supplied by wells.

**Household wells** serve individual private homes, mostly in rural areas. Household wells are also referred to as private wells. The householder is responsible for managing this type of supply.

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