



The Water Forum's Vision for the 4th Water Action Plan

EPA Water Conference, June 2026

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Water Forum – 26 Members, 15 Sectors



Water Forum - Statutory Advisory Role

- To advise the **Minister** in relation to Government water policy including (i) water conservation; (ii) rural water services; (iii) the interests of the customers of Uisce Éireann.
- **To make recommendations to Uisce Éireann** in relation to policy documents and the performance of its functions.
- To advise and provide observations to the **Commission for Regulation of Utilities** in relation to the performance of Uisce Éireann.
- To advise the **Water Policy Advisory Committee** in relation to the development and implementation of the River Basin Management Plan, on matters pertaining to the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive and the management of the inland aquatic environment and water resources.
- To examine other water related matters, including carrying out research to support providing advice to the Minister.



Number 29 of 2017

Water Services Act 2017

Water Forum engagement on the implementation of the 3rd Water Action Plan

AFU Advice to	Focus of Advice	Time
LAWPRO & DHLGH	Sectoral Action Work Plans	Dec-24
WPAC	Sectoral Action Work Plans	Dec-24
DHLGH	Nitrates Action Plan Interim Measures Consultation	Dec-24
LAWPRO & DHLGH	Sectoral Action Work Plans Templates	Mar-25
DAFM	Agriculture Sectoral Action Work Plans	Mar-25
DHLGH	Hydromorphology Sectoral Action Work Plans	Mar-25
DAFM	Forestry Sectoral Action Work Plans	Mar-25
Uisce Éireann	Urban Wastewater Sectoral Action Work Plans	Mar-25
DHLGH	Heavily Modified Water Bodies Consultation	May-25
DHLGH	4th RBMP Timetable Work Programme	Jul-25
LAWPRO	Catchment Community Fora	Jul-25
LAWPRO	Catchment Community Fora	Oct-25
DHLGH	6th Nitrates Action Plan Consultation	Nov-25
DHLGH	Pre SWMI Workshop (Pre-consultation)	Nov-25
EPA	National Inspection Plan (septic tanks) Pre-consultation	Mar-26
WPAC	EPA Dashboard, Catchment Management Work Plans	Apr-26

Sectoral Perspectives related to the implementation of the Water Action Plan



Environmental Perspective

- Despite all the policies and plans, not seeing the trends on water quality improving.
- Sufficient evidence to highlight where more targeted measures are required, but we are not starting those difficult conversations, focusing on softer, easier to implement measures.
- Specifically we are not seeing high impact measures to address surplus nitrogen in catchments where it is needed.



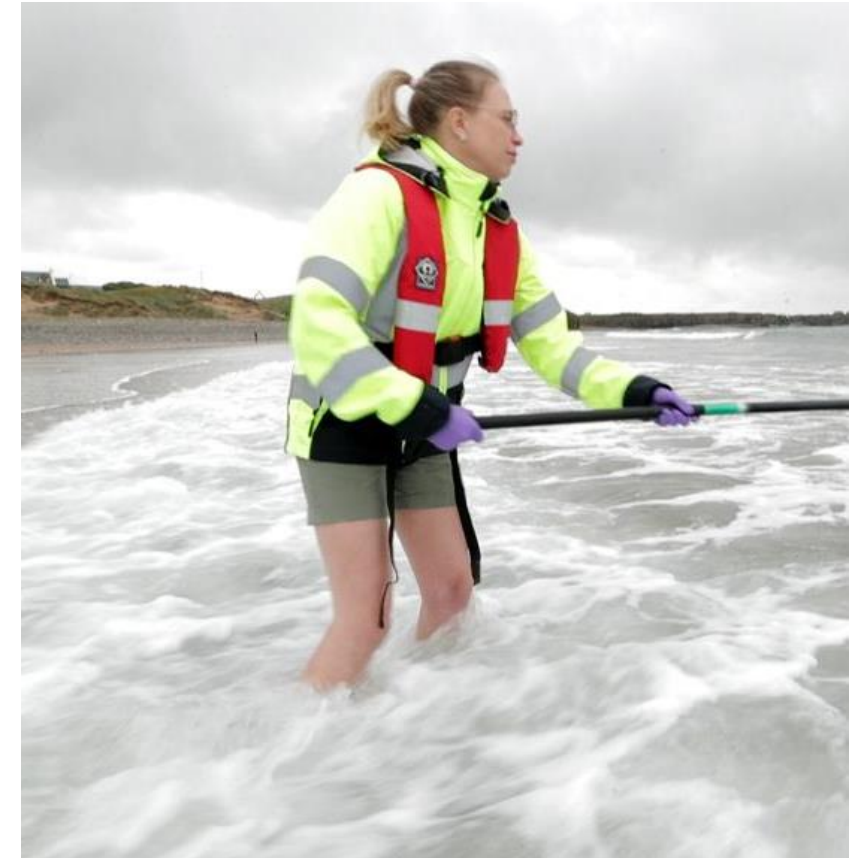
Agricultural Perspective

- Government policy has encouraged increased productivity over recent decades. Farmers have expanded their business and invested a significant amount of money in their farms.
- There is now significant effort to incorporate environmental/water measures – however measures will need to be resourced.
- There is uncertainty in the future of farming which complicates long term investment decisions – e.g. 6th NAP requires dairy farmers to put in place 20% more slurry storage.
- Potential unintended consequences of removing the derogation, in particular competing land pressure.
- Concern over the future of farming– less farm diversity, loss of family farms, less connection to local communities.



Trade Unions Perspective

- The successful delivery of the 4th plan will depend on workforce capacity, skills and long-term funding across public bodies, utilities, and local authorities responsible for implementation.
- Many barriers in WFD implementation reflect ongoing capacity constraints within delivery organisations.
- Increased ambition without corresponding investment in people risks non-delivery and unsustainable pressure on workers.
- Long-term implementation of the WFD requires strong, permanent in-house capability, supporting institutional knowledge and continuity.



Other Sectoral Perspectives

- **Tourism** generates €12 billion / year, attributed to unspoilt countryside and scenic beauty; concerns over declining water quality and its impacts on tourism, businesses and reputation.
- **Angling** generates €800 million / year. Concerns over poor water quality contributing to declining stocks of wild salmon and sea trout.
- **Community & Voluntary** groups recognise that protecting our water environment is directly connected to our communities, cultural identity and economic resilience.

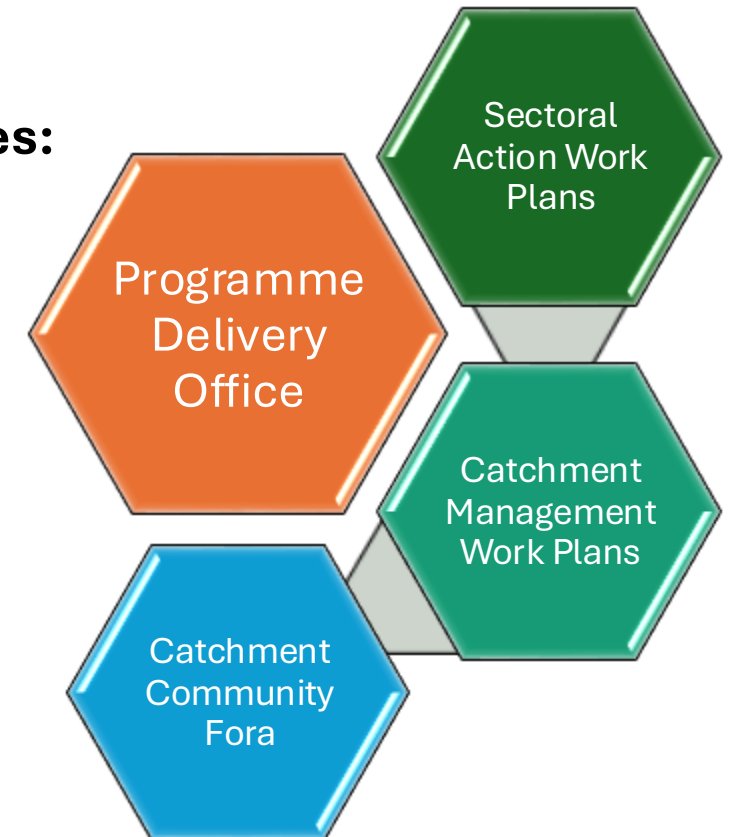


Water Forum Vision for the 4th Plan

Acknowledge developments in the 3rd Plan, which should evolve and strengthen in the 4th Plan through a relentless focus on implementation.

Water Forum Submission on Significant Water Management Issues:

- Strengthening implementation (SAWPs, CMWPs)
- Supporting public participation
- Strengthening governance & policy coherence
- Addressing key pressures:
 - Agriculture
 - Hydromorphology
 - Urban Wastewater
 - Domestic Wastewater
 - Invasive Alien Species



Strengthening Implementation of 4th WAP

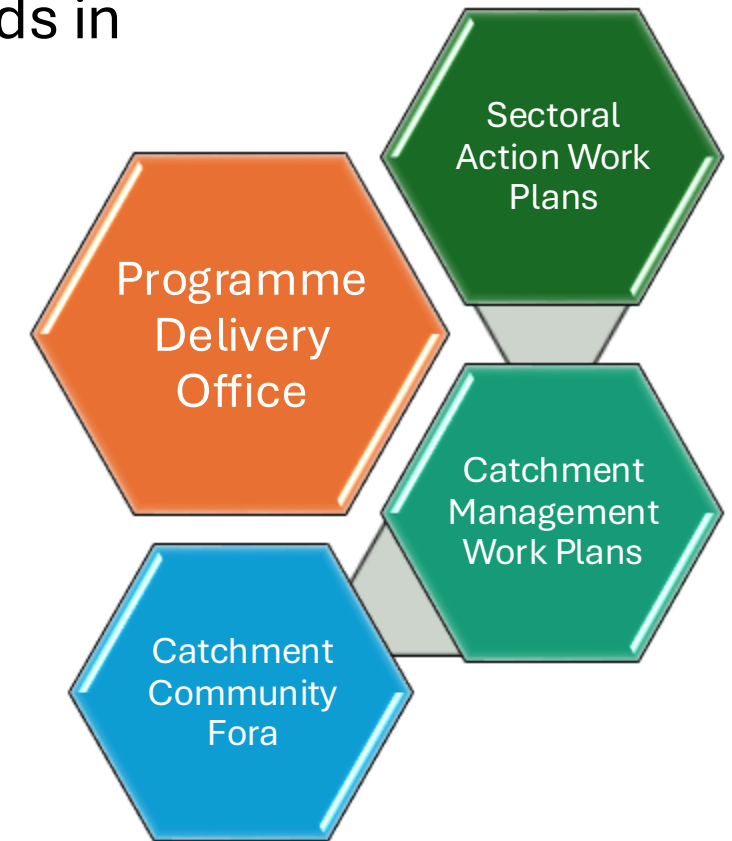


Sectoral Action Work Plans

- Sectors will need to increase their efforts to reverse trends in water quality, while also increasing protect measures to prevent further deterioration.

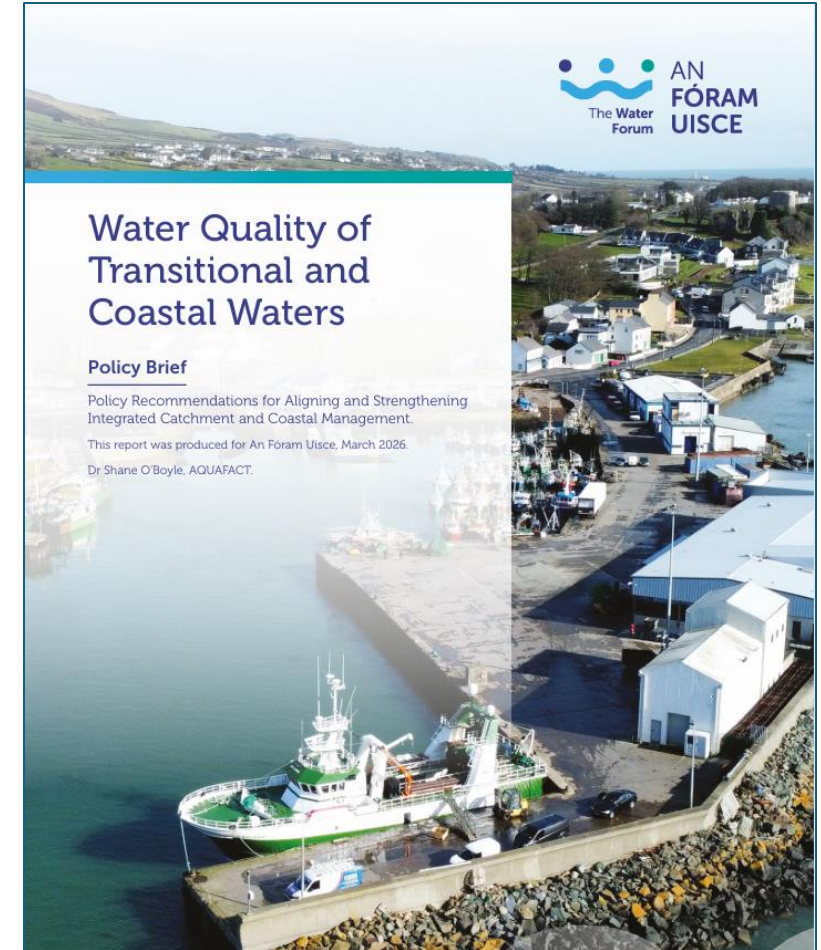
Catchment Management Work Plans

- ‘Activity tracker’ to targeting action through integrated catchment management.
- Substantial resourcing will be required to support implementation of targeted measures.



Transitional and coastal waters

- Implement a dual-nutrient management approach that addresses both nitrogen and phosphorus along the freshwater–marine continuum.
- CMWP should consider both the nutrients coming from upstream and expected ecological response.
- Apply targeted measures based on local conditions by aligning actions with the expected ecological response in estuarine and coastal waters – supported by a vulnerability index for estuaries.
- Strengthen governance structures to support coordinated implementation of the WFD and MSFD, with a combined implementation plan.



Governance and Policy Coherence

Governance

- The successful delivery of the 4th plan will depend on workforce capacity, skills and long-term funding across public bodies, utilities, and local authorities responsible for implementation.
- Calls for stable, long-term funding and permanent staffing posts to support the WFD implementation, including training and career pathways in relevant areas.

Policy Coherence

- Policy mapping national policies against the WFD obligations.
- Tagged co-benefits (climate, water, nature) across programmes of measures.
- Inter-departmental financing strategy to climate, water and nature.

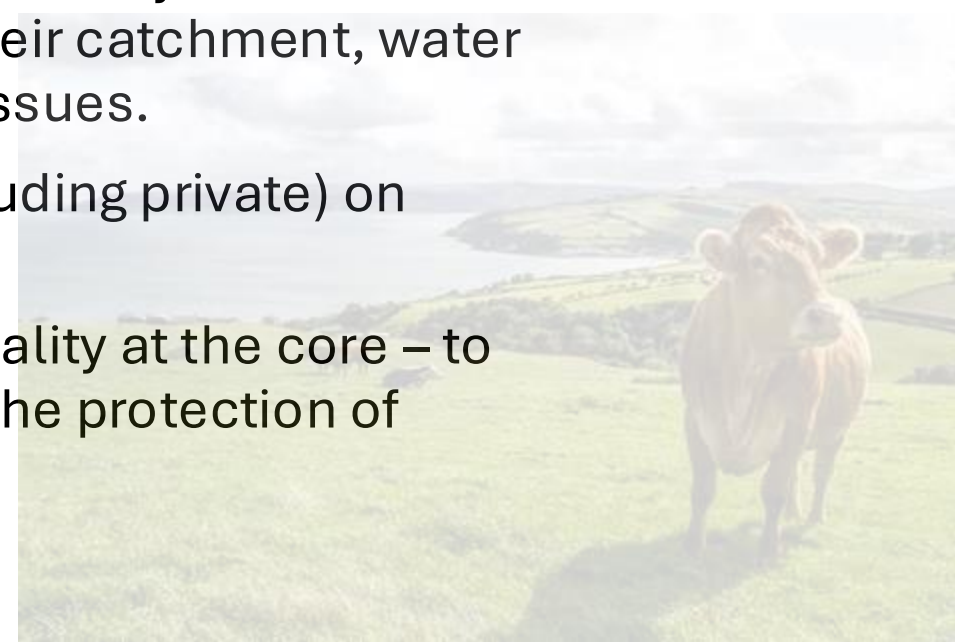
Public Participation

- The ambition for CCF into 4th cycle should remain high, with roll out of CCF across all catchments, harnessing expertise from existing networks.
- Resourcing the CCF will be critical, resource gaps will need to be identified to allow for wider roll out into 4th plan.
- CCF to identify approach to engage with wider community within a catchment.
- 4th WAP to be supported by Communications Strategy to educate and engage with wider public (water literacy, access to information, consistent messaging).



Agriculture

- Agricultural measures (NAP, EIP, Ag Inspections) should be linked to expected outcomes for specific pollutants.
- DAFM to develop strategy to target training and advice on nutrient balances and water based nitrogen used efficiency for non-derogation higher-stocked farms.
- DAFM lead an education campaign for all farmers, where every farmer receives a pack with their BISS applications with information on their catchment, water quality issues, targeting measures to address specific issues.
- Initiative to align messaging from all farm advisors (including private) on catchments, water quality and targeting measures.
- Strategy to support the family farm model with water quality at the core – to support farm diversification, generational renewal and the protection of waterbodies.



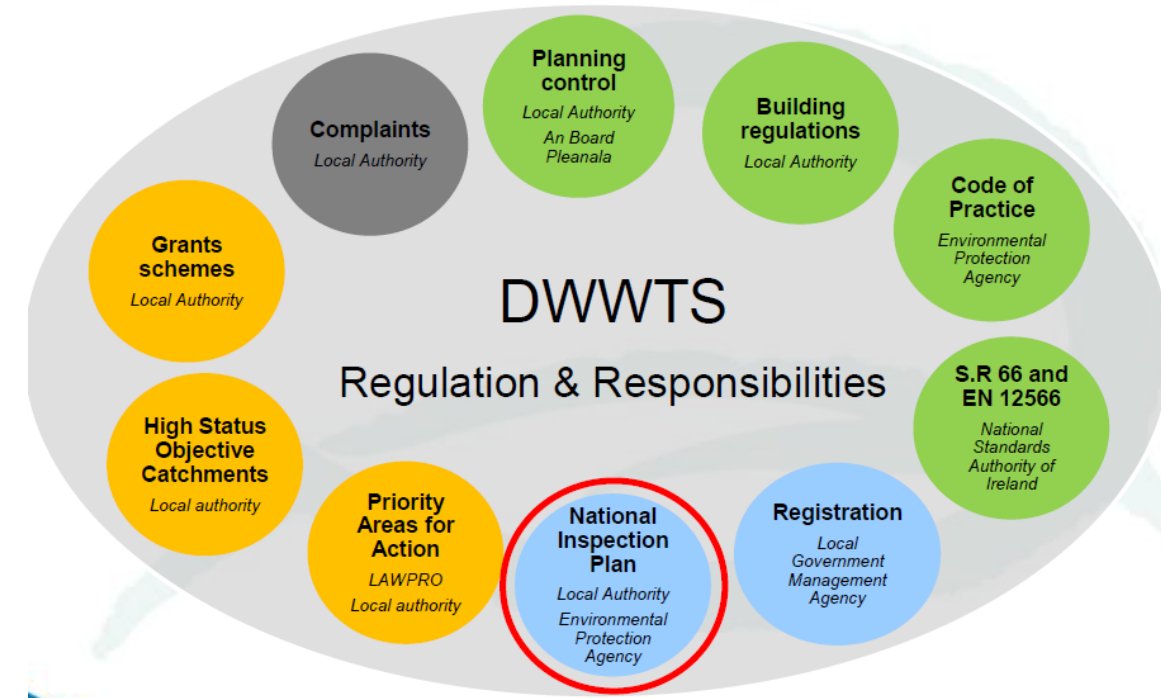
Urban wastewater

- The Forum has concerns that the assessments to identify mitigation measures for waterbodies at risk from urban wastewater are not complete.
- It is not clear what Uisce Éireann's Capital Investment Plan 2025-2029 (RC4) will deliver for the Water Framework Directive.
- Following the publication of RC4, that the SAWP is updated to present what RC4 will deliver for the 197 waterbodies at-risk from the pressure.



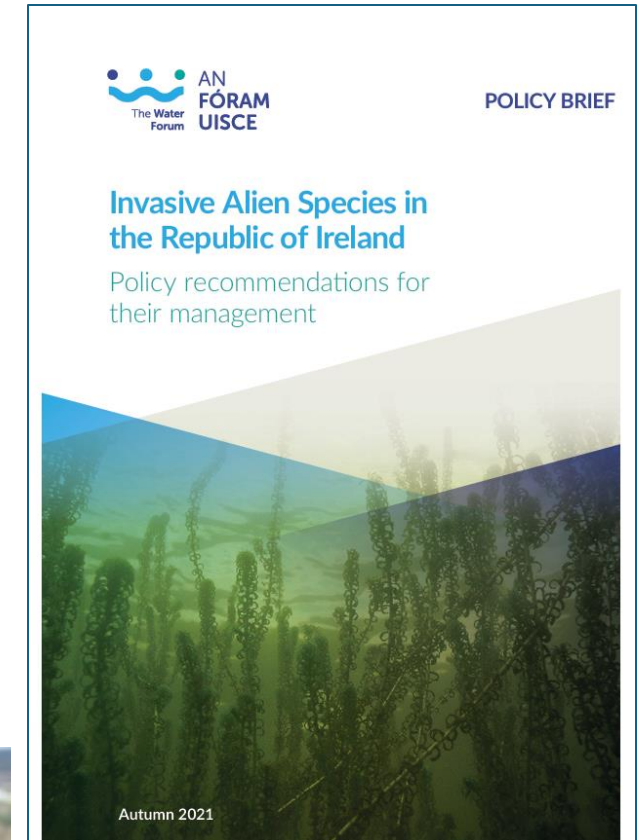
Domestic Wastewater

- A Sectoral Action Work Plan should be developed for DWWTS, to define the different roles and responsibilities of the leading authorities to address this pressure.
- A SAWP should include action for education and engagement, planning and building control, grant scheme and resourcing.
- The 4th plan should significantly increase education efforts to reduce the failure rate of septic tanks (59% in 2025).
- CCF should consider community initiatives, such as community desludging, taking learnings from pilot projects completed by the NFGWS.



Invasive Alien Species

- The Forum welcomes the Invasive Species Bureau, a new partnership between the NPWS and the NBDC, and plans to develop a National IAS Strategy.
- Resourcing requirements to support the Invasive Species Bureau and to manage IAS in Ireland need to be identified and addressed urgently.
- A National IAS Management Strategy should be developed as a matter of urgency, which outlines the roadmap to managing IAS, along with identifying key roles and responsibilities.
- The SAWP for IAS should be developed and implemented to support the 4th WAP.



Key Messages for the 4th Water Action Plan

- **Financing Strategy** – develop an inter-departmental financing strategy for water, climate and biodiversity measures.
- **Funding & Staffing** – provide long-term funding and permanent staffing to support WFD implementation.
- **Implementation** – increased ambition for SAWP and move to targeting action in CMWP
- **Communications Strategy** – build water literacy and public awareness of the value of water.
- **Agriculture** – strengthen training for non-derogation farmers, align farm advisor messaging, and support the family farm model.
- **Domestic Wastewater** – develop a Sectoral Action Work Plan with a strong focus on education and awareness.
- **Invasive Alien Species** – identify resourcing needs and urgently deliver a National IAS Strategy and Sectoral Action Work Plan.