

**Minutes of the meeting of the Water Advisory Body meeting with the Department of  
Housing, Planning and Local Government Water Division  
Thursday 9 July 2020 11am**

Venue: Online meeting via WebEx Video Conferencing

Attended by:

Chairperson Paul McGowan

Members Miriam McDonald Michelle Minihan

Martin Sisk Tom Collins

Secretariat John McCarthy Neill Dalton

Darren Browne

By Invite: Feargal Ó Coigligh (Water Division)

David Flynn (Water Advisory Unit)

Patrick O' Sullivan (Water Sector Finance)

Apologies: Eamonn Waters (Water Policy)

**1. Introduction**

The representatives of the Water Division were welcomed to the meeting by the WAB Chairperson. The Water Division and the WAB members introduced themselves to each other.

**2. New Programme for Government**

Feargal Ó Coigligh discussed the New Programme for Government in respect of the Water Division and confirmed it is broadly in line with the previous programme. He confirmed that the Programme for Government did not impact on the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's water functions and at that point no decision had been made to delegate any particular function. He advised that the Minister would prepare a white paper for Government in September focussed on matters relating to Irish Water.

Paul McGowan enquired as to whether the Minister will look to meet with the WAB in the near future. The Water Division confirmed it would be appropriate to meet at some stage

noting, however, the particularly hectic diary in the initial weeks of Government. Tom Collins confirmed An Fóram Uisce would be willing to assist in any way it can.

Michelle Minihan commented the New Programme for Government recognises current priorities for water services and would welcome the opportunity to hear how to best move forward with the review of Irish Water's Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities.

### **3. COVID 19 – Impacts and Response**

Paul McGowan confirmed the WAB had met with Irish Water at its last meeting and noted the despite the difficulties presented by COVID 19 it had managed to maintain critical operations for drinking water and wastewater. It is evident that Irish Water's capital programmes would be impacted due to funding being redirected to essential services and is constrained by not having access to capital markets that would allow it to borrow sufficient funds to continue these programmes. The WAB confirmed it will publish the minutes and Irish Water's presentation from the meeting. The Department welcomed the role of the WAB in highlighting investment gaps and that it was important that the need for sustained investment in our water and waste water infrastructure was understood by all.

Paul McGowan confirmed that as the work of the WAB was paused for a period of time it will produce 3 instead of 4 quarterly reports this year along with its annual report and the WAB is now continuing its work remotely and via video-conferencing.

Martin Sisk noted that Irish Water's presentation to the WAB at the last meeting acknowledged it has not planned for a second wave of COVID 19. Feargal Ó Coighligh confirmed that the Department maintained very close contact with Irish Water on Covid issues and received a daily report from the company during the height of the pandemic. He noted that Irish Water did have an emergency response plan in place.

### **4. Irish Water – Overall Programme Delivery**

Paul McGowan confirmed the WAB has requested Irish Water to undertake a two stage process review in respect of its procurement process. He noted the Scottish Water review of Irish Water and the recommendations contained in the report. It is yet to be confirmed if this

report will be published. The WAB wants to see stability in Irish Water's programme delivery and has concerns around its Capital Expenditure and delivery of projects in a timely manner.

The Department shared these concerns and noted various projects where Irish Water's initial budget was significantly lower than what was required. The Scottish Water report presented a great opportunity to progress Irish Water's journey towards an efficient and fully mature national water utility. Irish Water's SLA structure, the funding model and programme delivery were also factors in this regard. The Department was also working with Irish Water and NewEra regarding the implementation of the new Public Spending Code in bringing greater certainty and transparency to programme delivery.

Paul McGowan also noted with interest how improvements stated in the Scottish Water report, when implemented, would feed into improvements in delivery of Irish Water's projects.

Tom Collins noted concerns about de-risking the Dublin water supply, wastewater treatment facilities and the impact on the river basin management plan and water quality. COVID 19 has highlighted the funding constraints placed on Irish Water.

Martin Sisk noted that at previous meetings with Irish Water the company focused on the positives of its work and he would be concerned that the WAB are not getting a full and comprehensive view as to the areas Irish Water needs to improve on.

#### **5. Update on the Outputs Monitoring Group**

David Flynn provided an overview of the Outputs Monitoring Group. He confirmed the structure of the group is under review which may lead to updating its Terms of Reference and a copy of this would be provided to the WAB.

Michelle Minihan gave an overview of her time on the group in her role as a representative of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Paul McGowan confirmed from the WABs perspective it was important for the group to avoid overlap with other entities and placing unnecessary reporting burdens on Irish Water. He advised the WAB does not have any interaction with the group.

**6. Any Other Business**

The WAB and the Water Division meeting was very beneficial and agreed to meet again sometime in the Autumn.

**The meeting was brought to a close.**

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Decision</b>
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1.	Water Division are currently reviewing the OMG and its TOR.	Water Division to provide a copy of the updated TOR to the WAB.
2.	Next meeting between the WAB and the Water Division.	Agreed to meet again in the Autumn.