

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

An Bille um an gCúigiú Leasú is Tríocha ar an mBunreacht (Uisce faoi Úinéireacht Phoiblí)
(Uimh. 2), 2016

Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No.2) Bill 2016

4th May 2017

Opening Statement by Deputy Joan Collins, T.D

Chairperson, Committee Members,

Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for inviting me to appear before it today to discuss the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No.2) Bill 2016 and the proposed constitutional amendment contained therein.

This proposed constitutional amendment seeks to address significant concerns which have been strongly expressed by the public in relation to the possible privatisation of public water services. The public have indicated their strong desire to have the public water supply protected from privatisation. This issue as a matter of public importance has been reflected in the Report of the Expert Commission on Domestic Public Water Services which recommends constitutional protection from privatisation is provided for public water services. This recommendation has also been reiterated in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Water.

It been recognised by both the Expert Commission and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Water that the appropriate means of addressing this issue is to through our Constitution as the people's document. Constitutional protection can ensure that the responsibility for the protection, management and maintenance of the public water system remains the responsibility of government, and that this key public resource remains in public ownership into the future. This then also ensure that the public interest can remain at the heart of decision making into the future.

Providing Constitutional protection also prevents the threat of a government being strong armed by an external authority or otherwise into transferring key assets and responsibilities to private interests. It essentially puts it 'off the table' and ensures the public water system and access to it is secure and protected into the future on behalf of the Irish people.

The proposed amendment is designed to clarify and copper-fasten state ownership of the public water system as distinct from privately owned and operated water systems in the form of Group Water Schemes and private wells and boreholes. These privately owned water systems are not in public ownership.

The proposed amendment is also designed to clarify and copper-fasten the government's responsibilities in terms of protecting, managing and maintaining the public water system in the public interest. Greater levels of protection and accountability into the future will be achieved through the proposed amendment

Ends