

Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands

Meeting – Wednesday 6 December 2023

Opening Statement on behalf of Uisce Éireann

Good morning An Cathaoirleach, Members of the Committee.

I am Anthony Skeffington, Water and Wastewater Regional Operational Manager at Uisce Éireann. I am joined here today by my colleague Des Joyce, Water Specialists Lead and Ted O'Reilly, Asset Planning Manager for Wastewater. We, with our colleagues, work together in overseeing the planning, delivery and management of Uisce Éireann's water services.

We welcome the invitation to address the Committee today and to take the opportunity to provide information on some of our activities in delivering water services to rural areas and the islands of Ireland.

To start by briefly setting out Uisce Éireann's vision and purpose...

We are Ireland's national publicly owned water services utility responsible for the delivery of secure, safe and sustainable water services for the people of Ireland. Our purpose is to rise to the challenge of delivering transformative water services that enable communities to thrive. Our vision is a sustainable Ireland where water is respected and protected, for the planet and all the lives it supports.

The Water Services Acts 2007-2020 set out the arrangements for and oversight of the delivery of water and wastewater services by Uisce Éireann, with our primary function being to provide clean drinking water to customers and to treat and return wastewater safely to the environment.

To deliver this, we work closely with our economic regulator, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, who are also here today; our environmental regulator, the Environment Protection Agency, as well as with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and all Local Authorities in the development of a number of strategy, planning and investment processes.

Through our investment plans we are prioritising and improving water and wastewater services across Ireland...

Uisce Éireann's Strategic Funding Plan and Capital Investment Plan set out our ambition for the building, repair and upgrading of Uisce Éireann water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants, and water and sewer networks.

From 2020 to 2024, we are investing €5.35 billion to improve and deliver the infrastructure required to make this country not only competitive internationally, but also to improve the quality of life for its citizens and protect the environment.

Our approach to planning and providing water services for growth is evidence based and future-proofed...

We look at national data, policies and plans that have a direct impact on where investment should be prioritised or which have a dependence on the public water and wastewater infrastructure such as housing policies, job growth policies, environmental policies and climate action plans.

To this end, Uisce Éireann has published its first National Water Resources Plan for the long-term, safe and sustainable water supply needs for the country over the next 25 years.

The plan is underpinned by four Regional Water Resources Plans for the North West, South West, South East and Eastern & Midlands regions.

Making progress as regards housing connections is also a top priority for Uisce Éireann and a dedicated team and initiatives have been put in place to support our role in the delivery of the Government's Housing for All Programme.

Together, these investment and resources plans provide the basis for the delivery of water services in rural parts of Ireland into the future...

The delivery of water and wastewater capacity is vital to support economic growth both locally and nationally.

Supporting the Department for Rural and Community Development who are here today, we are working to deliver specific actions under the *Our Rural Future* Policy and the *Our Living Islands* Policy.

Our key action within Our Rural Future is to invest in infrastructure, including water and wastewater infrastructure, to support the development of rural towns and villages.

Since Uisce Éireann's establishment in 2014 as a national utility we have:

- Built or upgraded 195 water and wastewater treatment plants.
- Built or rehabilitated 390km of wastewater network sewer and 2,640km of water network.
- Invested €750 million to eliminate raw sewage discharges, with over 70% of these discharges now removed.
- Removed 300 Public Water Schemes from the EPA's list of at-risk supplies.

In 2022 Uisce Éireann delivered €1,061m in Capital Expenditure delivering water and wastewater projects and programmes across the country, prioritising the most urgent improvements in water quality, wastewater capacity and compliance, leakage reduction, and sustainability. In 2023 this investment will rise to €1.2 billion.

Our Operational Expenditure is also an investment in the operation and maintenance of the existing assets in towns and villages across Ireland.

We are currently investing €250 million per year to reduce leakage on our water network, with leakage rates reducing from almost 46% in 2018 to 37% at the end of 2022.

Additionally, the Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme was established in direct response to requirements for rural support and is captured in Our Rural Future and Uisce Éireann's Capital Investment Plan 2020-2024.

This is a national programme to cater for growth in smaller towns and villages with existing Uisce Éireann infrastructure.

Local Authorities supported the programme by identifying and prioritising communities in need of investment and Uisce Éireann has announced a total of 50 projects to progress across the country.

Finally, we are supporting the Government's Islands Policy...

Uisce Éireann is progressing with a number of initiatives to support the supply and maintenance of water services to Islands that have public water and wastewater infrastructure.

In line with the recently published *Our Living Islands* National Policy, we are undertaking feasibility analyses in a number of areas which will inform the direction of future investment.

The provision of water services on some of the Islands presents a challenge due to limited water availability, environmental constraints, and the logistical challenges of servicing infrastructure not on the mainland. We may need to find alternative solutions.

Nevertheless, Uisce Éireann has already carried out a number of improvement works to water infrastructure on a number of the islands including:

- An upgrade to the water treatment plant on Achill Island which improved the quality of the water and the capacity of the plant to treat higher volumes of water.
- Upgrade of disinfection systems to Inisturk and Clare Island over the last 3-4 years.
- Leakage reduction works to the Aran islands has been carried out to get leakage down to the minimum or the economic level of leakage.
- Innovative works were carried out to Inis Meáin and Inisturk to provide treatment against Trihalomethanes (regulated disinfection by-products).
- We are also scoping works to develop the best feasible solution to resolve water quality and water availability issues on Whiddy Island, the three Aran Islands and Inishbofin.

To conclude our opening remarks...

We'd like to thank the Committee Members for the invitation to meet this morning and we are happy to respond to as many questions as possible. We will of course take away more specific queries and respond to the Committee in follow up.

Go raibh maith aghaibh.

ENDS