

# Newsletter

An Fóram Uisce - looking after Ireland's water resources

Issue 14 / Winter 2023



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## The Water Forum sponsor their second Water Award at the BT Young Scientist and Technologist of the Year competition.

The Water Forum would like to congratulate students Caolan, Daithi and Matthew and their teacher, Mr Shane Ó'Breacáin of Coláiste Ailigh in Co. Donegal on winning the Water Forum sponsored Water Award at the BT Young Scientist Competition. The winning project is titled: *Staidéar ar*

*éifeacht feirmeoireacha, tithíochta agus tionsclaíochta ar bhithéagsúlacht inbheartabrach abhainn Leanainn* (An investigation into the relationship between the number and variety of invertebrates and the quality of the water in terms of nutrient level and pH).





**Bernie Connolly, Water Forum member presents the prize to the students from Colaise Ailigh, at the BT Young Scientist and Technologist Competition.**

The students carried out an assessment of water quality and habitats in the uninhabited upper reaches of the Leannan River, the middle reaches where there was more people and farming and the lower reaches which has industry and towns. Using biological, chemical and physical tests they found the upper reaches have healthy ecosystems, the middle reaches had increasing phosphorous levels in the water, and the lower reaches had phosphorous levels above recommended levels. The researchers identified reduced numbers and diversity of 'good' invertebrates in the lower reaches also. However, they state that they would need further studies at different times of the year to adequately assess and confirm their findings.

The project showed the benefits of schools engaging with Regional Colleges as the students collaborated with the Centre for Freshwater Studies at Dundalk Institute of Technology to use the laboratory facilities and get assistance with interpreting the results. Over 1,700 projects were submitted for assessment to participate in the competition, 550 made it through to the RDS Exhibition, and while there was only a small number of winners the standard of research and presentations was very high. Bernie Connolly a member of the Water

Forum, presented the award to Caolan, Daithi and Matthew and well done to them.

The Water Forum would like to thank the members who helped out at the Stand over the days of the Exhibition.



**Students from Monaghan Institute who developed a survey for the Water Forum joined Forum members and staff at the Water Forum Stand.**

The Water Forum collaborated with the Computer Science Department at Monaghan Institute whose Level 6 Software Design class developed a survey for school students attending the Exhibition that aimed to assess their knowledge of water and how they cared about water. Over the 3-day event more than 750 students completed the survey and we will share the results at a later date but early indications are that the vast majority of students say that it is important to learn about water.

# Policy update

## Climate change policy recommendations are presented to the Climate Change Advisory Council

The Water Forum Climate & Water [policy brief](#) was submitted to the Climate Change Advisory Council and shared with the Climate Advisory Regional Offices (CARO) and the recommendations were submitted to Local Authorities to support the development of local County Climate Action Plans.

In November, a representation from the Water Forum – An Fóram Uisce met with members and staff of the Climate Change Advisory Council and Climate Adaptation Committee to highlight the importance of including water management in climate adaptation plans.

The Climate Change Advisory Council is an independent advisory body tasked with assessing and advising on how Ireland can achieve the transition to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral economy. The Water Forum is a statutory stakeholder body set up to advise on the management of Ireland's water resources. Research commissioned by the Forum on the potential impacts of climate change on water quality and quantity and on the development of a National Framework for Domestic Water Conservation provides significant learnings for climate action and adaptation planning.

The Forum's position was presented by Dr Triona McGrath, Research and Policy Lead. Triona highlighted the challenges posed to water management as a result of climate change.

The Forum's recommendations included the need to take an **integrated catchment-based approach** to planning for climate adaptation and mitigation so that Drought Management Plans and Flood Management Plans can be developed at catchment level.

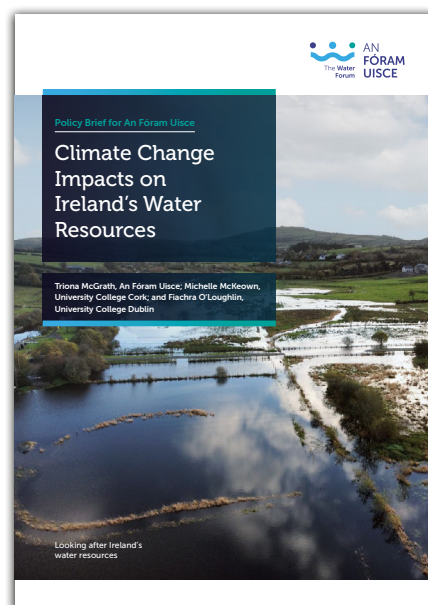
**Co-ordinated governance and policy coherence** is essential to support the alignment of climate, water and biodiversity objectives for optimum environmental benefits so account of both the benefits and trade-offs for climate, water and nature get be considered.

Uisce Éireann state that up to 66% of its water supply zones are in supply deficit in drought and dry periods. To help address this challenge the Forum recommends that **water conservation** could be used as a measure for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. There is an opportunity for the public sector to lead by example in this space by making buildings more water efficient in their Climate Action Plans.

**Sectoral Adaptation Plans** need to address the future challenges posed to water resources by a changing climate, for example, the degradation of peatlands can result in increased trihalomethanes (a carcinogenic) in drinking water supplies; or the potential for increased cyanobacterial blooms in lakes which can pose a threat to drinking water sources and recreational waters.

The presentation was followed by a short Q&A and the committee showed interest in future engagements with the Forum as new Climate Action Plans are developed.

### [Policy Brief for Climate Change Impacts on Ireland's Water Resources](#)



# Update on the River Basin Management Plan

In our Winter Newsletter of 2022, we have a detailed article on our submission on the draft River Basin Management Plan for 2022-2027 and the work we carried out with agencies and officials at the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) in the preparation of that submission. Over the past year, we have continued to work with department officials on the draft plan which we are hoping will be finalised in the coming weeks and launched before our next Newsletter!

The challenge has never been greater while the window of opportunity to protect water, nature and prepare for climate change is continuing to close. When the next plan is in place implementation will need to be swift and effective.



# Research Update

## Water Services Consumer Communications & Satisfaction Survey

The Water Forum commissioned a survey of public and private water consumers to determine their views in relation to their awareness of water issues and opinions on communications with water service providers. The online survey, carried out by Interactions Research & Evaluation considered consumers (1) knowledge of water supply, quality and security; (2) satisfaction with supplier communications; and (3) water conservation awareness.

Recruited as a demographically representative sample of the population in terms of gender, age, region and social background, 1,518 adults, completed the online survey in August 2023. The survey was also made available to Group Water Scheme members, 177 of whom completed responses. 81% of the sample were connected to a public water supply provided by Uisce Éireann, 12% were connected to Group Water Schemes and 4% sourced their water supply from private wells.

54% of those surveyed reported a lack of knowledge of where water supply comes from, whereas 82% of those on private group schemes consider themselves knowledgeable, likely due to a closer connection to their supply. This would suggest that a widespread education and awareness campaign is necessary to build knowledge of water supply and treatment.

56% of the nationally representative sample reported satisfaction with their water supply and quality, with 24% registering dissatisfaction. 43% of those that experienced issues (41% had experienced issues in the past year) reported dissatisfaction.

75% of private well owners do not test their wells annually as recommended by EPA guidance, 27% reported testing every 2-5 years and 26% never test their well water quality. EPA Guidance states that water quality in private wells should be tested annually.

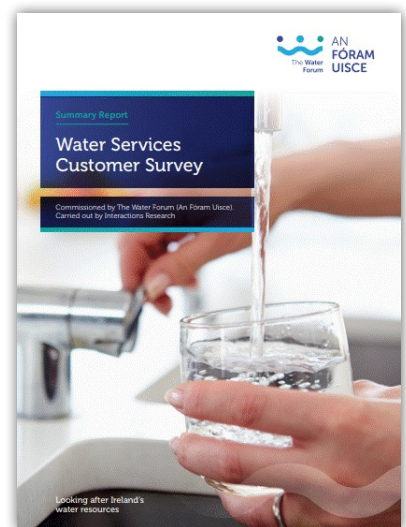
74% of those surveyed reported that they would implement water conservation measures, but they do not know how much water they use or how to conserve water in their homes.

26% of water consumers do not know who to contact if there is an issue with their supply and 55% reported that they would like to have more communications from their water supplier.

The findings of this survey shows that water consumers would welcome better communications with service providers. Increased communications, knowledge of water supply and treatment and awareness of water conservation would help to develop a water smart society that truly values water resources.

Actions to address the gaps identified in consumer understanding might include:

- The widespread lack of knowledge should be addressed as the foundational pieces of a public information campaign, to include where drinking water comes from and how it is treated.
- A significant intervention is called for to educate private well holders on water quality and well maintenance and encourage action to address risks to supplies.
- Water service providers need to improve communications with their customers to address the perception of widespread drinking water quality issues and, if possible, to provide data on customer water usage.
- There is a need for education and awareness on how to increase water efficiency in the home, to take advantage of the strong consumer support for water conservation.



# Education and Awareness Update

The Forum's fifth Factsheet has been launched in this past quarter. There has been a number of new Marine policies implemented in the past few years and these are outlined in the Factsheet. The Marine Planning Framework aims to provide guidance on the sustainable management of Ireland's marine resources to balance, ecological, economic and social objectives. In 2022, Ireland increased its maritime protected area from 2% to 8.3% with plans to reach 10% by the end of 2023 while the Marine Protected Areas Bill commits to protect 30% of our maritime area (twice the size of our landmass) by 2030.

Find out more in Factsheet 5, now available to download from our website.

There is also an [Infographic](#) on Water is Worth Saving in the Home.

Previous Newsletters and all Policy Briefs, Research Reports and Policy Submissions are also downloadable from our website [www.thewaterforum.ie](http://www.thewaterforum.ie)

## Water Forum Factsheet 5 – Marine Waters

