



**Draft minutes of meeting with An Fóram Uisce (AFU)**

**Tuesday 13 September 2022, 12.15pm.**

Venue: Montpelier Suite, Ashling Hotel.

Attended by:

**WAB**

Chairperson Paul McGowan

Members Michelle Minihan Martin Sisk  
Dónal Purcell (also representing AFU)

Secretariat Claire Gavin Deirdre Byrne  
Valerie Longmore

Apologies Miriam McDonald

**AFU**

Chairperson Dr. Matt Crowe

Research Lead Triona McGrath

Members\* Barry Deane Jean Rosney  
Issy Petrie Gerry Quain  
Brendan Fitzsimons Martin McEnroe  
Neil Walker Liam Berney  
Sinéad O'Brien Dr. Elaine McGoff  
Bernie Connolly Charles Stanley-Smith  
Ollan Herr Tim Fenn  
Dr. Suzanne Linnane Dominic Cronin  
Denis Drennan Derrie Dillion  
David Wright Keith Hyland

\* This was a hybrid meeting and some members of AFU attended online.

## **Introduction**

The meeting was opened by the Chair of AFU, who thanked the WAB Board and Secretariat for attending the meeting and a brief tour de table introduced all those in attendance, both in-person and online.

### **Presentation by Chair of the WAB, followed by Q & A session.**

A presentation was made by the Chair of the WAB, which introduced the role and work of the WAB and provided background information on the Irish Water Customer Survey and the WAB's consideration of the Irish Water Regulatory Framework.

Key points included;

- The WAB is an independent voice focused on clear communications to improve public confidence in Irish Water.
- The survey of Irish Water customers noted that lines of communication are not clear and Irish Water is not proactive in contacting its customers when issues arise.
- The preference of Irish Water customers is to be notified of issues by flyer/mailshot and/or text message.
- With regard to the Irish Water Regulatory Framework, the WAB is considering whether it has a view on it and the overall regulatory powers related to Irish Water.
- The WAB is taking account of recent incidents where public health was at risk due to operational failures, such as in Gorey, county Wexford, as well as reports by the EPA and CRU and the levels of customer dissatisfaction expressed in the survey.
- The WAB is keen to engage with stakeholders, including AFU.
- The WAB is of the view that national investment priorities need to be aligned by Irish Water and relevant agencies.
- Measures that could be considered include licensing of Irish Water by the CRU, a comprehensive sanctions regime and powers of prosecution/High Court orders, if the utility fails to comply with obligations under the various Directives.

The Chair of AFU thanked the WAB for the presentation and noted that this meeting is a useful first step in engagement. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to hold similar meetings on an annual basis.

### **Question and Answer session**

In general, the AFU welcomed the direction the WAB is taking, in terms of listening to consumers' and Irish Water customers' concerns and is supportive of the work of the WAB. The key performance indicators used by the WAB to review Irish Water's performance were also welcomed. AFU is keen to use the opportunity for alignment that exists and to continue progress that has been made to date.

With regard to the Irish Water Regulatory Framework, the Chair of the WAB clarified that it is a high level review. The WAB is not seeking legal advice but is engaging with stakeholders and will give advice to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the matter in due course.

Further concerns raised by members of AFU included;

- Confusion which still exists around the respective roles of Irish Water and local authorities;
- Funding of Irish Water and if it was sufficient for what it is trying to achieve;
- Difficulties for the business sector;
- Lack of clear communication from Irish Water;
- Irish Water's accountability in relation to its large capital budget; and
- Public health implications when an issue arises.

The WAB advised that Irish Water has a substantial Capital Investment Programme and also explained that when the move to the Single Public Utility model is complete and all staff become Irish Water employees, there will be an opportunity to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities.

Other concerns were expressed which fall outside the remit of the WAB, such as matters related to planning, water services legislation and the environment. The WAB clarified that its role is to hold Irish Water to account and it does not advise Irish Water on the scope of its functions.

### **Conclusion**

The Chair of AFU noted that there is scope for more engagement with regard to Irish Water, particularly in relation to drinking and waste water treatment and source protection measures in new Drinking Water Directive and thanked the WAB for attending the meeting.