

Tara Foley - Wastewater Compliance Analyst with Irish Water

Born and bred in the Treaty County!



Irish Water is Ireland's national regulated water utility and is responsible for providing water and wastewater services throughout Ireland. Their scientists help contribute to their mission, which is to ensure all customers receive a clean, safe, and reliable supply of drinking water and have their wastewater collected and safely returned to the environment.

Tara Foley is an Environmental Scientist and is part of the Environmental Regulation Wastewater Compliance Team within Irish Water. Her team is responsible for the governance of Irish Waters drinking water and wastewater

The Wastewater Compliance team ensures the sampling, monitoring and all statutory and non-statutory reporting requirements are fulfilled. They protect the health and well-being of the people of Ireland and protect the environment in all their activities.

As part of Science Week, Irish Water will be showcasing some of its scientists who strive to make our water and wastewater services safer for everyone. They will also be discussing their science path, how they use it at work, and give a few tips for anyone interested in pursuing a career in the science field.

Where are you from?

I am a Limerick woman, born and bred. I grew up and went to school in Clarina and I am currently building a new home in Askeaton. I haven't managed to see past the Treaty County. I was born here, I went to college here, I work here, and now I'm building a home here – sure how bad!

What do you do with Irish Water?

I am a Wastewater Compliance Analyst, and I am responsible for supporting the Regional Compliance Specialist. I ensure that all sampling, monitoring, and reporting

requirements are fulfilled as set down in the wastewater discharge licences that we issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This includes managing monthly compliance monitoring results from each wastewater plant, assisting with complaint management, and reporting of any incidents that may occur at wastewater treatment plants to the EPA as our regulator. I also attend enforcement and sampling audits at our wastewater treatment plants with the EPA. It is a highly reactive role, challenging and very fulfilling.

Tell us about your career to date.

I completed an Environmental Science degree at the University of Limerick in 2013. I began my career as an Environmental Geoscientist with an environmental services company in Limerick and then moved on to a chemistry laboratory where I spent three years as a Senior Chemical Analyst & Field Technician. Before Irish Water, I worked briefly with another environmental consultancy company. I have really put my science degree to good use, it has allowed me to work in lots of different areas already since graduating.

Why did you choose science as a career?

I always had a love for nature and animals. In school, my favourite subjects were geography, biology, and agricultural science, so it felt natural for me to go down this road. I had always hoped to go down the ecology road eventually, but once I started working in the water industry, I never looked back. Maybe one day I will pursue this side of my career but that is what is so good about science; the career choice is so vast.

What's your favourite thing about working as a scientist?

As an Environmental Scientist, you get the opportunity to work in a huge range of areas from energy, waste, circular economy and ecology to climate action. I love working outdoors, even in the rain, and getting to meet so many different people and personalities. Every day is a school day.

The best part of your job with Irish Water?

Irish Water has a vital role in Irish society. To provide clean safe drinking water and take wastewater away and return it to the environment safely. Our role is to protect the health and well-being of the Irish people and support economic growth. To do all of this sustainably makes for a hugely challenging career.

My role is so important in that, I am responsible for assisting the local authority in complying with the conditions of their Wastewater Discharge and Certificate of Authorisation licenses. This means working closely with different teams and groups and our common goal is to ensure our wastewater treatment plants do not cause harm to our waterways.

Who's your hero in the field of science and why?

David Attenborough. His work from back in the day to now just amazes me. I feel like I am where he is when I watch one of his programmes. I particularly found his recent work on climate change to be informative but terrifying at the same time!

Outside of work, what do you enjoy doing?

I am happiest outdoors and most of my spare time is taken up with caring for our horses and dogs, which I love. I love heading out for walks particularly around Curraghchase and I also love to cook - as a child I watched Darina Allen over cartoons.

How can I be more sustainable with water?

Irish Water put a big focus on the "Think Before You Flush" campaign, where we work with An Taisce to educate people on why pee, paper and poo are the only things that should go down the loo. Nothing else. Everything else should go in the bin. By ensuring we all do this, we can reduce sewer blockages, reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses, and reduce the risk of pollution in the environment harming wildlife, such as fish and birds and associated habitats. There are great tips and advice on Irish Water's website <https://www.water.ie/conservation/>

How can I be more sustainable?

I always find myself saying what can I do, I'm only one person but there are so many little things we can do that make a difference. I love to shop local and visit my local fruit and veg market on a Friday when I can. I also think small things in the home like recycling and reducing food waste can save money and is positive for the environment. Saving water in the home is a big one for me, and I am conscious of time spent in the shower, brushing my teeth and when washing up. But a little bit goes a long way. There are great tips and advice on Irish Water's website <https://www.water.ie/conservation/>

Your advice for anyone interested in a career in science?

I think the opportunities available these days are amazing and a role in science can offer so much - teamwork, technical and non-technical training, leadership skills and a sense of achievement once you have finished every day. There is always a new challenge and a new problem to be solved, and this makes every day interesting. For anyone thinking of a career like mine, I would highly recommend having a look at the documentary we made a few years ago, [The Story of Water](#). It gives a great insight into what we do, and how we all need to play our part in protecting our most precious resource – water.