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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Irish Water's vision

Through responsible stewardship, efficient management and strong partnerships, Ireland has a world-class water infrastructure that ensures secure and sustainable water services, essential for our health, our communities, the economy and the environment.

### Transforming the Delivery of Water Services

Water is one of our most valuable resources and essential for sustaining life. Water circulates through the landscape influencing the locations of our towns and cities and fuelling our social and economic growth. Access to clean water and effective management of wastewater is a requirement for a modern society. However, clean water is expensive to produce and deliver. It is a complex process to turn water from our rivers, lakes and groundwater into clean drinking water and deliver it safely to each customer's tap. Wastewater must then be collected and treated before it can be reintroduced safely back into our environment.

The water services which each customer receives require significant funding for both the operation of the existing treatment plants and networks and for investment in maintaining and providing new infrastructure. Irish Water, as a new national utility, must promote an understanding and acceptance of the need for a new fully funded entity to deliver the water services of this country in the 21st century.

The creation of Irish Water has, for the first time, enabled a transformation of the way that water services are delivered in Ireland. A national utility has the scale to effectively and efficiently address the many issues and risks of delivering water services. Despite the work of the local authorities over 130 years, substantially more investment is needed across the country to address weaknesses in the current systems, including high leakage rates, varying drinking water quality standards, disruptions to supply and unacceptable wastewater discharges.

This Water Services Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to take, for the first time, a high level view of how water services should be provided, taking a national rather than local perspective and looking at a 25 year time frame as well as considering priorities for short term investment. The plan sets out the framework for future implementation plans and projects. It has been subjected to a Strategic Environmental Assessment and an Appropriate Assessment and these documents are also published and are available at <http://www.water.ie/about-us/project-and-plans/future-plans/>.

### Supporting Social and Economic Development

Reliable water services with the capacity for expansion will enable business and industry to grow and attract investment. Within the lifetime of this strategic plan, the emerging problems of water stress around the world will become more acute and sustainably planned water supplies in Ireland will be a key global competitive advantage. Future development of water services must be in line with agreed national and regional development plans. We will therefore work with regional planning authorities and other agencies in the forward planning of water services infrastructure to meet social and economic growth. Importantly, we will be an active consultee in the preparation of the revised National Spatial Strategy and will continue to support national and regional spatial planning policy as it evolves.

## Our Responsibilities

Irish Water is responsible for the public supply of drinking water to over 80% of the population. Our water supply responsibilities extend from the abstraction of water from wells, rivers, lakes and reservoirs, to treatment of this water such that it is suitable for human consumption and onward delivery to our customers' homes and business premises.

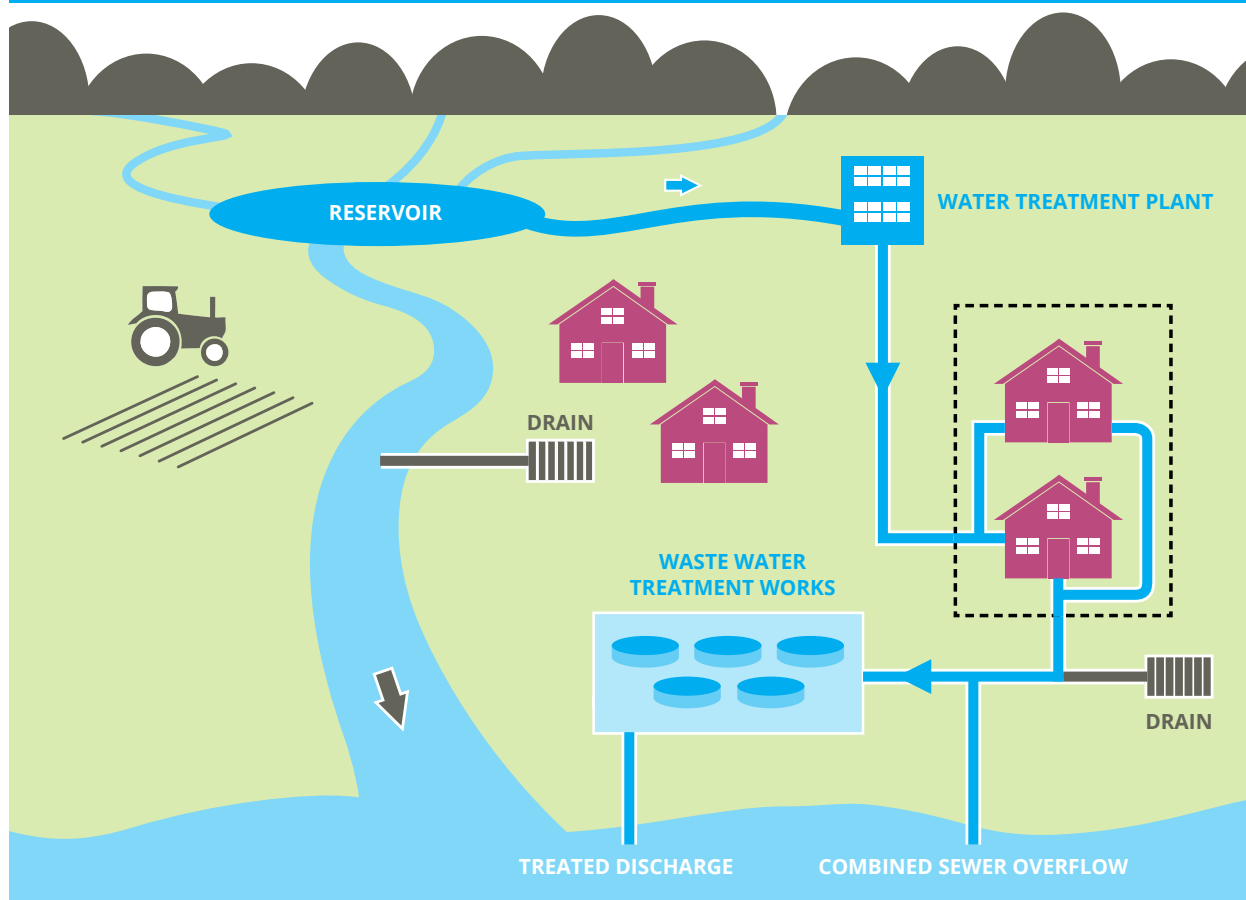
Our responsibilities for wastewater commence when effluent reaches the public wastewater network. We are responsible for its transfer to wastewater treatment plants, its treatment and the subsequent discharge of the treated effluent back into the water environment. We are also responsible for the treatment and disposal of the sludge that is generated from both our water and wastewater treatment plants.

Our environmental responsibilities are to ensure that the quantities of water that we abstract are sustainable and that sufficient water remains in water bodies to support the needs of the ecology and other water users. Our discharges to surface water and emissions to the atmosphere must comply with current legislation, including meeting our discharge license requirements in relation to the EU Water Framework Directive objective to achieve "Good" water quality status for all water bodies. We must also meet national targets for energy efficiency set by the Government.

We are not responsible for Group Water Schemes or private water schemes. While we do provide water to those Group Water Schemes which are supplied from the public network, we are not responsible for their distribution networks and other infrastructure such as reservoirs and pumping stations. We are also not responsible for private wells or septic tanks. The surface water drainage network and flood prevention works remain the responsibility of the relevant local authority or the Office of Public Works. Our responsibility in this area relates only to flooding from our combined sewers (foul sewers receiving stormwater flows), that are generally found in older urban areas. We intend to establish a memorandum of understanding with both the Office of Public Works and local authorities to reflect the complex nature of urban flood management and the responsibilities of each of the parties.

The extent of our responsibilities is illustrated in dark blue in the graphic below.

**Figure 1** Extent of Irish Water's Responsibilities



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## Our Assets

Control of water services assets, with a value of more than €11 Billion, transferred from 34 local authorities to Irish Water in January 2014. This large portfolio includes several thousand reservoirs, water and wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, approximately 60,000 km of water pipelines and 25,000 km of wastewater pipelines. At present, we supply drinking water to 3.3 million people through 856 water treatment plants as well as the collection and treatment of wastewater from over 1,000 separate agglomerations. Due to the fragmented nature of water services, previously managed across the local authorities, the level and quality of data and records vary widely. Consequently, we will be carrying out detailed asset surveys to increasing levels of detail, prioritising critical assets.

We do know that the condition of our assets varies from very good to 'at risk of failure' or in some cases the asset has actually failed. The scale of the remedial works required has not yet been fully quantified. Of particular importance, is the fact that a significant number of water supply zones are vulnerable to microbiological contamination. Leakage from our water supply networks is at unacceptable levels and well above international norms. Many of our wastewater treatment plants do not meet the legal limits for discharge back to the water environment. Infiltration of groundwater into our wastewater collection network also presents difficulties for the adequate treatment of effluent prior to its discharge.

## Our Strategic Plan for 25 years

The preparation of this Water Services Strategic Plan is required under Section 33 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, with the purpose of stating the objectives for Irish Water in the provision of water services and the means to achieve those objectives over the next 25 years. As a public plan, it has been subjected to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Union (EU) SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) and Appropriate Assessment (under the EU Habitats Directive) and these documents are also published for review.

This is the first Water Services Strategic Plan of Irish Water and it will be reviewed on at least a five yearly basis to ensure that the plan continues to be appropriate and captures the strategic objectives needed to provide efficient and effective water services for Ireland. The reviews will also be informed by changes in legislation and better information, especially on asset performance, demographics and climate change. Future reviews will also benchmark our performance against the targets set out in this plan and allow for revision of these targets to achieve our long term objectives.

An interim review is also planned to ensure alignment with the new National Spatial Strategy, the new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and River Basin Management Plans which will be developed in the next few years.

## Our Commitment

"We believe that all of our customers should receive a safe and reliable supply of drinking water and have their wastewater collected and safely returned to the environment.

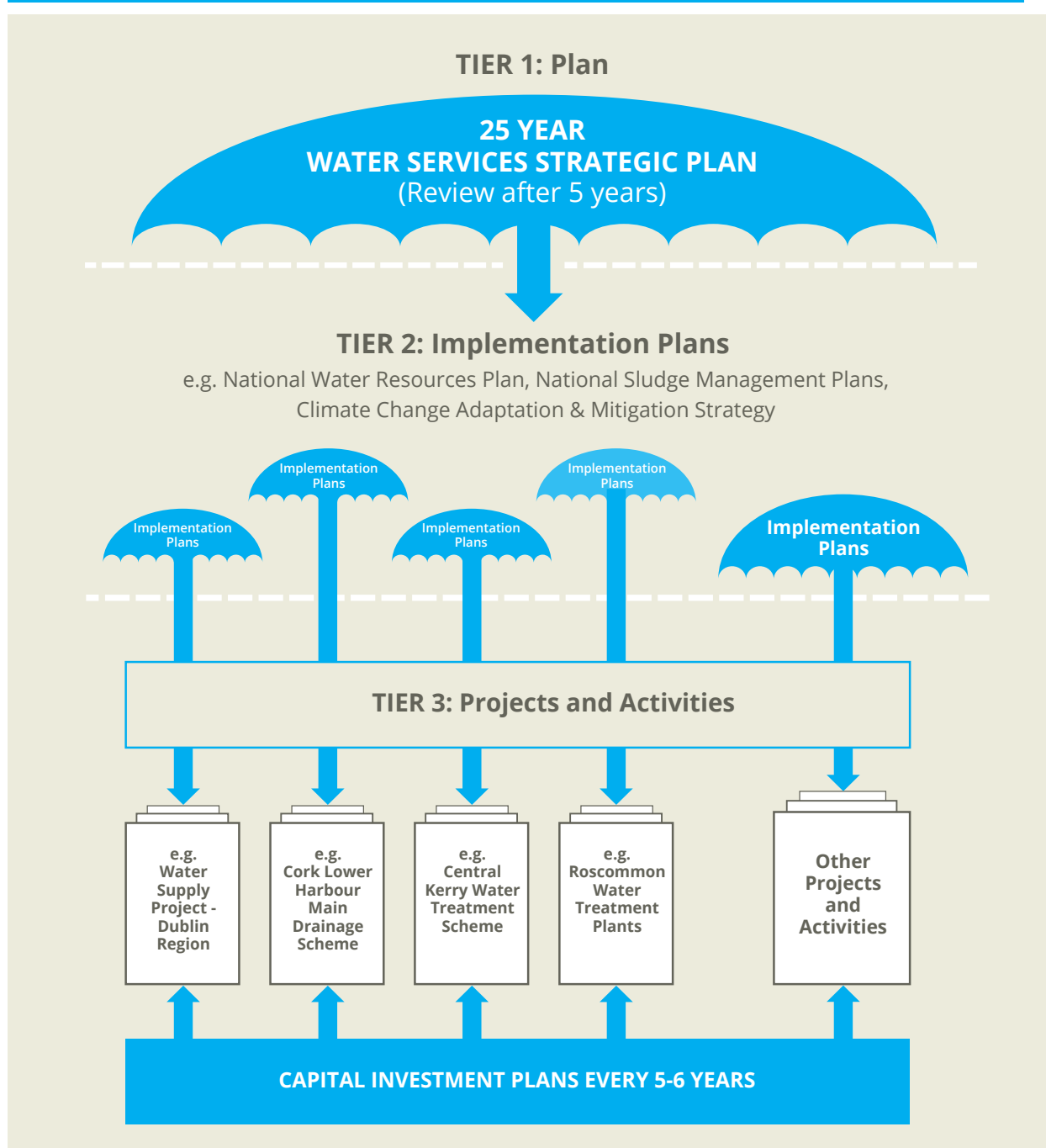
We will protect the environment in discharging our responsibilities and support Ireland's social and economic growth through appropriate investment in water services."

## Planning for the Future

This Water Services Strategic Plan sets the context for subsequent implementation plans. These implementation plans will detail the programmes of works to be completed in specific water service areas, for example, water resource planning, sludge management planning, climate change adaptation and mitigation and wastewater compliance. Each implementation plan will ensure that we comply with our legal obligations, meet the objectives of this Water Services Strategic Plan and our performance targets. The implementation plans will also take into account the findings of other relevant national, regional and local plans (e.g. river basin management plans and regional development plans).

The relationship of this (Tier 1) Water Services Strategic Plan to the (Tier 2) implementation plans and the future (Tier 3) projects is illustrated in the graphic below.

**Figure 2** Relationship of this Tier 1 WSSP to the Tier 2 plans and Tier 3 projects



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## Our Strategic Objectives and Aims

The Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government has issued a Ministerial Direction (Water Services Strategic Plan Direction 2014) which sets out the form that this plan shall take and directs the plan to follow a customer-focussed approach with identifiable time-bound and measureable objectives. The direction also states that the plan should address the following seven thematic headings:

- **Challenges and Strategic Priorities;**
- **Meet Customer Expectations;**
- **Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply;**
- **Provide Effective Management of Wastewater;**
- **Protect and Enhance the Environment;**
- **Support Social and Economic Growth; and**
- **Invest in Our Future.**

The latter six headings form our strategic objectives whilst not being in any particular order of priority. We will address these strategic objectives in partnership with our customers, our economic and environmental regulators, industry and other stakeholders to develop innovative, holistic, sustainable solutions whilst providing value for money:

## How this Document is Laid Out

The document presents the challenges and strategic priorities in the next chapter. This highlights the current and future challenges which we face in the provision of water services to customers and for the protection and enhancement of the environment. Our current priorities are also identified.

The six strategic objectives are presented in separate chapters. For each objective, we detail our understanding of the current situation, key challenges, what our customers can expect from us in the future and our high level strategies to address the challenges. Indicators and targets, against which our performance can be assessed, complete each chapter.

