



**CHAMBERS  
IRELAND**  
IN BUSINESS FOR BUSINESS

## **Response to Water Supply Project: Eastern and Midlands Region – Options Working Paper 20 July 2015**

### **Introduction**

Chambers Ireland is the largest business network in the State. With almost 50 Chambers located in every major town and city in the country, we are well positioned to understand the needs and concerns of the business community and to represent their views.

We welcome the publication of the Options Working Paper (OPW) and note that many of our contributions to the Project Need Report have been addressed in Appendix A.

### **Proposed Constraints**

In forming a view of an emerging preferred option, we accept that a number of constraints exist, including protected habitats and species, the water framework directive, designated sites, and existing infrastructure.

Chambers Ireland acknowledges that many of the constraints listed are required to be considered under EU and national law, and so we are satisfied that the proposed constraints criteria should be taken into account when reaching an emerging preferred option.

### **Proposed Assessment Criteria**

Chambers Ireland is broadly satisfied with the proposed assessment criteria to evaluate one technical option over another.

Given the potential for the Water Supply Project to underpin economic growth in the entire Eastern and Midlands region, we do, however, suggest that the economic dividends of all options also are considered when reaching a preferred option.

As set out in our response to the Project Need Consultation, we welcome the initial identification of a 'benefitting corridor' that will benefit from the transportation of treated water en route to Dublin. Through the inclusion of a benefitting corridor in capital infrastructure decision-making, return on investment will be maximised to support economic activity and new investment throughout the Midlands and East, including in county Tipperary, Offaly, Meath, Westmeath and Laois. We believe that this return on investment should be a factor in identifying a preferred option.

Given the urgent need for increased supply to the Eastern and Midlands area, it is worth considering whether timeframe of successful delivery should be considered as a criterion. The lack of headroom in the Eastern region in particular has the potential to result in significant losses to the economy if additional supply is not provided as soon as possible.

In respect to the capital and operational costs of each option that satisfies the environmental criteria, we propose that any differences in cost between the options is evaluated and clearly presented. Ultimately, the cost of the Eastern and Midlands project will feed into customer tariffs. Since Irish Water must not only be able to meet the demand for water, but also to deliver water services at an efficient cost, it is imperative that all projects of this scale are delivered in a cost effective manner and do not unnecessarily increase the costs to domestic and non-domestic users. Consequently, we consider it appropriate that the cost of delivery (including any potential or likely delays) is considered carefully when making a final decision.

### **Communication**

As previously expressed, Chambers Ireland considers the water supply project for the Eastern and Midlands Region a matter of great national importance, and so we would like to be kept informed about project updates by email.

### **Conclusion**

As set out above, Chambers Ireland is broadly satisfied with the proposed evaluation methodology used to identify a preferred option. In light of the scale of the Eastern/Midlands project and the economic consequences of water outages or shortages in this area, we suggest that economic dividends are given greater emphasis in the evaluation process.

We trust that the project team will consider these recommendations and look forward to further progress on this strategic project.