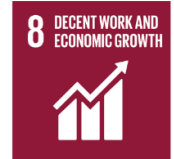




**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



Uisce Éireann Public Consultation on the Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region

Submission by Chambers Ireland

March 2025

Contents

Key Points	3
About Chambers Ireland	4
General	6
Meeting Ireland's Housing Needs	6
Capacity and security of supply	8
Competitiveness and Investment	9
Environmental Sustainability	10

Key Points

- The Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region project should be acknowledged as a critical addition to Ireland's water infrastructure.
- The lack of capacity in Uisce Éireann's Network constitutes a constraint on the efficaciousness of the National Development Plan. This project goes some way to alleviating these problems.
- Significant capital investment is required to ensure that adequate and efficient water services are available in every community.
- The availability of adequate and efficient water and wastewater treatment infrastructure has a direct effect on the competitiveness of businesses, foreign direct investment and empowering our indigenous businesses to grow.
- The Project is essential to the success of Housing for All.
- While the benefits of this project are significant, it should not detract from the aim of reducing leakage in the current system or limit the application of new technologies to improve efficiency.
- The project is critical to our sustainability as it strengthens our resilience to climate change by ensuring a secure and reliable water supply for growing populations and industries.

About Chambers Ireland

Chambers Ireland is an all-island business organisation with a unique geographical reach. Our members are the Chambers of Commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member Chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities.

Our Network has pledged to advocate for and support the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As SDG Champions, we use the Goals as a framework to identify policy priorities and communicate our recommendations. We have a particular focus on five of the goals encompassing decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9) and climate action (SDG 13).¹ In the context of the current consultation, SDGs 6 (Water and sanitation), 9, 11 and 13 are the most relevant.

Safeguarding sustainable water supplies is a core priority of the Chamber Network and we are fully in favour of increased resourcing of our water and wastewater infrastructure. We have consistently advocated for increased investment in water infrastructure and in our General Election manifesto we called for the commitment of a multi-annual funding structure.²

Similarly, investing in such infrastructure has a direct effect on the competitiveness of businesses, foreign direct investment and empowering our indigenous businesses to grow. In addition it critically affects our ability to meet the objectives of the National Development Plan. Policy

¹ The Chambers Ireland SDGs. Available at: <https://chambers.ie/sustainable-development-goals/>

² Chambers Ireland General Election Manifesto: https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/29.10.24_Chambers-Ireland_General-Election-Manifesto_Final.pdf page 8.

should hence reflect the stark reality that adequate utility infrastructure is critical to meet the demands of a growing population³ and our modern, competitive economy.

³ Per the Central Statistics Office, the population is projected to increase by 1,821,500 by 2057
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-plfp/populationandlabourforceprojections2023-2057/populationprojectionsresults/>

General

The Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region is a once in a generation project and is the first major ‘new source’ water infrastructure in the region in the last 60 years. It aims to deliver a safe, secure, sustainable source of water supply necessary to support our growing population and economy, including the demand for housing. If delivered, the project will enable the State to adapt to the mitigate effects of climate change by diversifying our water supply sources.

The project proposes to abstract water from Parteen Basin, upstream of Parteen Weir on the Lower River Shannon, utilising a maximum of 2% of the long-term average flow at Parteen Basin. It is proposed that the water will be treated near Birdhill, Co. Tipperary and treated water will then be piped through counties Tipperary, Offaly and Kildare to a termination point reservoir at Peamount in County Dublin, connecting into the Greater Dublin Area water distribution network.

Chambers Ireland welcomes this project and in line with our point elsewhere in our submission, this much-needed investment in our water infrastructure will be conducive to achieving goals in housing. Equally, the project will help mitigate concerns regarding security of supply for both businesses and homes in a region covering a vast area of the State.

Meeting Ireland’s Housing Needs

Increasing our national supply of housing is contingent on holistic, long-term capacity-building of the essential infrastructure that is needed to not only build a house but to ensure it is serviced by reliable and clean water supplies. The Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region constitutes an essential element of the State’s combined infrastructural capacity which is needed to meet the critical housing supply challenge.

In a general sense, there should be an increased focus on higher-density living and coordinated urbanisation which will mean better connectivity and more efficient distribution of public services and essential resources. However, it is important that the development of regional infrastructure

is not neglected across the country and that a balanced approach to investment in water and wastewater treatment – in parallel with investment in transport and grid infrastructure - ensures that all towns and regions across the country can benefit.

The project feeds directly into the Government’s Housing for All programme.⁴ Similarly, the draft 2025 Programme for Government promises to increase capital investment in housing and further accelerate the Housing for All programme. The target of building 300,000 homes by 2030 is stipulated in the new Programme for Government to meet increasing demand and constraints across the country, which compounds the reasons for how essential the project is to help meet the demand of that increase in housing.⁵

Promoting compact growth and high-density development is a key enabler to achieving this scale-up, targeted towards existing available and in-development infrastructure capacity, along with an efficient planning and consenting process to support it. As an example, long-term domestic housing plans for the Greater Dublin Area, where approximately half of the proposed housing targets are focused, will not be realised without the timely delivery of the project. Equally, the increase in population in the affected regions support the expedited delivery of the project.

⁴ Chambers Ireland are of the opinion that the targets in Housing for All should be expanded in any updated version of the Plan considering the findings of the ESRI that supply required an increase of between 35,000 and 53,000 units per annum, while Housing Commission that an even wider range is needed to meet our housing needs from 33,400-81,400 a year. ESRI report: <https://www.esri.ie/news/between-35000-and-53000-dwellings-needed-per-year-based-on-various-projected-population-growth>; Housing Commission report: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.gov.ie%2F294018%2F1aae1ed-07c4-473d-811e-3426756321ee.pdf&psig=AOvVaw0YJrtEFiKD7K2F0tUjQyRL&ust=1737648726951000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CAQQn5wMahcKEwio9OGK3lmLAXUAAAAHQAAAAQBA>

⁵ Draft Programme for Government 2025 Securing Ireland’s Future. (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.fine Gael.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/Programme-for-Government-2025.pdf>

Capacity and security of supply

The lack of capacity in Uisce Éireann's Network has been a limiting factor on development across wide tracts of the State. Our view is hence that this constitutes a real constraint upon the efficaciousness of the National Development Plan. Similarly, the economic problems businesses are experiencing today are increasingly raised as problems of capacity.

The draft Programme for Government states that security of water supply is critical to ensuring Ireland can meet its housing and national economic priorities⁶. Uisce Éireann provides infrastructure which is essential to economic growth, and this is especially true in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), as the GDA will experience even greater strain on utilities due to its greater density of population and its high rate of population increase. Delays to projects of national importance will ensure the State continuously plays catch-up in these areas while capacity becomes an ever-increasing problem. In addition, as a major pillar of the National Planning Framework is the concentration of growth in areas that can support denser populations, the substantial population increase that the GDA will experience is a further reason why the scheme should be implemented at the earliest opportunity. Failure to do so for this reason alone will create significant capacity constraints on an already under-resourced system.

Finally, from the perspective of businesses, all are dependent on the continuous supply and treatment of water to keep their operations open. Where this is limited, their operations are severely negatively impacted and, in many cases, this threatens the viability of their business. Hence while every business in the country is aware of the importance of efficiency, essential services like water treatment also require sufficient capacity to provide for all scenarios. This is highly relevant to our point elsewhere in our submission regarding climate change; businesses need to have a water network that is resilient to all possible shocks.

⁶ Draft Programme for Government 2025 Securing Ireland's Future. (n.d.). Available at:
<https://7358484.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf>.

Competitiveness and Investment

Investing in water and wastewater treatment infrastructure has a direct effect on the competitiveness of businesses, foreign direct investment and empowering our indigenous businesses to grow.

The legacy of significant historical underinvestment and the lack of advancement in water projects nationwide have impacted the national water network and caused the problems it faces. Linked to underinvestment are the litany of successive planning appeals and a congested planning system which has frequently stalled projects of national importance⁷. We have frequently raised the point that adequate infrastructure requires adequate investment, and water and wastewater infrastructure is no exception. In our opinion, significant capital investment is required to ensure that adequate water services are available in every community if the national network is to become robust. This in turn will have a direct impact on our competitiveness.

We recognise the importance of investment in our utility networks, not just for ensuring that businesses may operate, but also for aiding foreign direct investment and the wider economy. In the context of water infrastructure, Covid, Brexit, and inflation have all delayed the closing of a gap which is the result of the post-crash decade of under-investment.

Furthermore, as the commencement of the project becomes prolonged, the appropriate necessary investment required to deliver it increases further. The delays in funding and project delivery have hindered progress, underscoring the necessity for immediate and sustained investment to ensure a reliable water supply that supports both population growth and economic development across the country. It is therefore critical that investment is facilitated to help develop an efficient national network.

⁷ Chambers Ireland submission regarding the Greater Dublin Drainage Project. (2024). Available at: <https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Submission-by-Chambers-Ireland-regarding-the-Greater-Dublin-Drainage-Project-June-2024.pdf>

Environmental Sustainability

The Water Supply Project enables resilience through climate adaptation with more sustainable water supplies. However, we would caution against the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project—by diverting water from another source—being viewed as an alternative to leakage reduction.

A history of consistent underinvestment in our water and wastewater treatment infrastructure is evident in the fact that, at present, the State loses around 37% of its treated water through leaks before it even reaches our taps. While the National Leakage Reduction Programme carries out more than 2,000 leak repairs every month,⁸ these repairs are generally reactive rather than proactive.

While the addition of a new supply for the Dublin and Midlands region is necessary and builds resilience, it should not be seen as a fundamental solution to the challenges of water supply. Nor should it impose a limit on the steps we may need to take to ensure a robust and environmentally sustainable water supply network in the future.

Addressing leakage at its core is not just a matter of efficiency but also one of environmental sustainability. Extracting, treating, and distributing water requires significant energy and resources, meaning that high levels of water loss contribute to unnecessary carbon emissions and increased strain on natural water sources. By prioritising long-term infrastructure investment and proactive leak prevention, we can reduce the environmental footprint of our water supply, minimise disruption to ecosystems, and safeguard precious water resources.

Furthermore this project is critical to our sustainability as it strengthens our resilience to climate change by ensuring a secure and reliable water supply for growing populations and industries. As weather patterns become more unpredictable we must have a system capable of adapting to

⁸ <https://www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/leakage-reduction-programme>

these challenges. A well-planned and sustainable water infrastructure not only supports economic growth but also protects vital ecosystems by reducing the pressure on over-extracted water sources. By integrating this project with continued investment in leakage reduction and water conservation measures, we can create a future-proof system that balances the needs of people, businesses, and the environment.