



GROUP WATER SCHEME NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF GROUP WATER SCHEMES

Good news for GWS members

For several years now, group water scheme members have looked on as the debate about the future of public water services (and who should pay for them) raged in the media and on the streets of our towns and cities.

From day one, rural dwellers paid for their drinking water service, contributing directly to its construction and to any upgrades, as well as paying towards the operation of their scheme.

While GWS members were prepared to continue such contributions had Irish Water charges remained in force, they would have been understandably outraged if they were to be disadvantaged in terms of State supports towards domestic water provision.

Equitable and fair treatment for non-Irish Water householders was recommended by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Water Services, so when water charges were abolished for domestic customers of Irish Water, there could be only one equitable outcome for GWS members.

This principle of 'equity & fairness' informed the recent negotiations between the NFGWS and the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Govt and also informed Minister Eoghan Murphy, TD's decision to sign off on the agreement that ushers in a new era for the GWS sector.

Water allocation for GWS householders under 'equity & fairness' agreement

Shortly before Christmas, an agreement was negotiated by the National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS) that provides equity & fairness for group water scheme members vis-à-vis householders on Irish Water supplies.

Up to now domestic connections on group water schemes made a financial contribution towards day-to-day running costs.

This contribution was either by way of a fixed/standing annual charge, or a charge based on metered usage, or a combination of both these charges.

Under the terms of an agreement reached between the NFGWS and the government, the rate of the domestic subsidy provided to group water

schemes towards operational costs is substantially increased from 1st January 2018, so that GWS householders will not have to make any payment towards the running of their scheme from that date.

Payments will, however, have to be made in respect of bills issued for 2017 and we would urge GWS members to ensure prompt payment of any such charges to ensure the continued financial health of their scheme.

Barring the rare instances where carelessness or leakage results in excessive usage of water, this is likely to be the final payment that members on domestic connections will make towards the operation of their scheme **unless and until** there is a political decision either to:

- reintroduce domestic water charges on Irish Water supplies, or
- substantially reduce the level of the water allocation to households.

In exceptional cases, members of a scheme may themselves decide to forego subsidy altogether or to substantially reduce the household water allocation.

Such decisions may only be taken at a Special General Meeting called specifically for this purpose and for which notice has been issued in writing to all members.

AGM

Members are strongly advised to attend their GWS Annual General Meeting and to otherwise assist in ensuring the future success of their drinking water service.

What this means for you, your family and your scheme

- There can be no standing charge (by whatever name) on GWS domestic connections. Such charges may be levied on non-domestic connections, including holiday homes and short-term rental properties (as these are not entitled to subsidy).
- There must be an annual water allocation of 160,000 litres (35,195 gallons) to households before an excessive usage charge is applied. [Average household use on group schemes is 115,000 litres].
- Members may decide at a Special General Meeting to reduce the allocation to no less than 115,000 litres (25,296 gallons), but special needs cases (including large families and households in which there is serious illness) must continue to be allowed the full 160,000 litre allocation in the event of such a decision being taken.
- An additional subsidy payment is available for schemes of less than 100 households to encourage sustainable management through rationalisation.
- Local Authority/Department audits will be carried out to ensure compliance with the conditions of subsidy and, in particular, that there are no 'hidden' charges on householders.

From time to time, your group scheme may need to build a fund towards approved capital upgrade projects, such as replacement of leaking watermains. While there may be State funding towards the cost of such projects, schemes must bear at least some of the costs involved. GWS members may be asked to make a financial contribution to meet this.

Continued commitment to water conservation is required

Huge strides have been made in recent years by group water schemes in reducing the volume of water being abstracted, treated and pumped daily.

Prior to the introduction of universal metering, water loss on GWS networks was as high as 85%. This had several consequences:

- over abstraction from raw water sources many of which struggled to cope with demand, particularly in schemes supplied by springs and boreholes.

- avoidable electricity costs, due to pumping of water that was being lost either in the distribution network or on the consumer side of a water connection.

- unnecessary pressure on filtration systems that increased the risk of contaminant breakthrough.

- reduced efficiency of disinfection systems due to inadequate filtering of raw water.

- pressure on storage capacity, as new reservoirs had to be constructed to cope with excessive demand.

- risk of back siphoning of contaminants into the distribution network through leaking pipework.

Strides

The massive strides made by the GWS sector in reducing water wastage and water loss has had clear health benefits for schemes members as well as providing measurable savings in both capital investment and operational costs.

None of this would have been possible without the support and goodwill of scheme members.



We strongly urge you to continue your personal commitment to avoiding unnecessary water use and to dealing with leaks as soon as they arise.

For the good of the environment and for the ongoing provision of quality and healthy GWS drinking water supplies, let's continue our commitment to water conservation.

Understanding the domestic water allocation

While the NFGWS steered clear of the wider political discussion on how water services are paid for, we argued strongly that there be a cap on the volume of water made available without charge to households and we unreservedly welcome the inclusion of such a cap.

While we know from experience that the vast majority of householders will not waste water, we also know that there are those who (for whatever reason) will not fix a leaking tap or toilet cistern unless there is a financial penalty for water wastage.

Allocation

GWS operators will share our concern that the 160,000 litre allocation to households is too high. After all, we know that 130,000 litres will satisfy the water demand of most households and that average household use across group water schemes is 115,000 litres.

However, the same formula had to be applied for the GWS sector as was applied to Irish Water, with average use being multiplied by a factor that allowed for large families and for water loss in the network.

Partly because of universal metering – but also because of increased water consciousness amongst GWS members – the NFGWS could demonstrate a lower average domes-

tic household use across schemes and a substantially lower rate of average water loss (23% as opposed to 47% on Irish Water supplies).

Thus, the GWS average was increased by a multiple of 1.4, while that on Irish Water supplies was increased by a multiple of 1.7.

This is why the allocation for urban households is higher than that provided for on group water schemes.

As the rate of water loss on public networks reduces and as data is gathered from water meters, the domestic allocation on public supplies is likely to reduce in the future.

READING YOUR WATER METER

Leak Detection

Use the red dial on the meter to detect leaks (one dial turn = one litre of water passing through the meter).

Leak Test (household):

- Check that the mains is not filling the attic tank (no recent toilet flushes/baths/showers),
- Turn off appliances that use a direct supply from the mains (i.e. dishwasher, washing machine).
- If the red dial continues to move, then you have a leak on your side of the meter.

Possible sources of domestic water loss include:

- leaks on the inlet pipe
- faulty ball-cocks (that may cause overflow from the attic tank or toilet cisterns).

Land connections should be turned off when not being used. Troughs may leak for long periods when land is taken up for silage, or when there is no livestock on the land in winter.



Water wastage through leaks or carelessness will result in significant extra costs being incurred by the scheme. To minimise wastage on your connections/meters, you should.

- Carry out a thorough check of your water pipes and systems and make repairs where necessary
- Replace all leaking tap washers, etc.
- Check your water meter reading regularly and take action if you notice any unusual water usage.
- Use your water supply in the knowledge that each litre or gallon used (beyond your annual domestic allowance) will incur costs.