



Joining the Federation

What the NFGWS
does for
group water schemes

Background to the GWS Sector

Until the 1950s piped water supplies were virtually unheard of outside of Ireland's towns and cities. Rural communities relied on buckets and barrels for their daily water needs, drawing supplies from wells, rivers or lakes - a painstaking and laborious chore.

In 1955 a committee comprising representatives of the Department of Local Government and the Local Sanitary Authorities carried out a comprehensive assessment of water provision and sewerage services throughout the State. This Committee identified the non-availability of piped water in rural areas as a major unresolved issue and their conclusions formed the basis of a three-pronged strategy launched in 1959:-

- the provision of regional schemes by the sanitary authorities.
- the provision of group schemes by local communities where reliable local sources were available.
- the provision of piped water by individual householders where neither of the other approaches were feasible.

The benefits of the group approach were quickly recognised by the Department and every effort was made to encourage its widespread adoption. Under the group scheme approach a number of applicants pooled their grants and provided voluntary labour. Local authorities encouraged group development by:

- providing supplies for groups from their own sources.
- taking potential group development into consideration when developing public schemes.
- encouraging the infill of regional schemes by private groups.

Group schemes flourished in the 1960s/1970s, often through the efforts of local co-operatives and farm organisations and, in time, the sector was providing drinking water to some 25% of the population.

Water Quality

On most group water schemes, raw water was pumped from the source to reservoirs or directly to homes in the scheme catchment

area. The deterioration in raw water quality since the 1970s has had a major impact on the quality of these piped water supplies reaching rural homes. Successive EPA Reports have highlighted poor water quality in many rural water supply schemes, in particular those of privately-sourced GWS.

A new E.U. directive, (2000/60/EC), came into force in the Republic of Ireland on 1 January 2004. The objective of the new directive is to protect human health from the adverse effect of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring that it is 'wholesome and clean'. The directive defines 'wholesome and clean' water as water which,

- is free from micro-organisms, parasites and other substances which, in numbers or concentrations, constitute a potential danger to human health.
- meets with requirements set out in the directive for microbiological and chemical parameters.

Even on schemes where chlorination/disinfection was put in place, this has not been a guarantee of quality water. The EU and the Department are insisting that full treatment is necessary where there is any danger of trihalomethanes being produced. Trihalomethanes are potentially cancerous and are a by-product of disinfecting water that contains colour or turbidity.

Today, drinking water supplies are regularly monitored for quality and schemes which fail to meet the required standard face closure. Under new legislation, all schemes supplying more than 50 persons and all schemes supplying the public (whether a B&B, a school, or community hall) will have to have a licence to operate.

The primary role of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS) is to assist schemes in meeting the challenges of water quality legislation and preparing for the future.

What is the NFGWS?

In December 1996, the then Environment Minister, Brendan Howlin, TD, announced the abolition of service charges in respect of domestic

water supplies on public water schemes operated by local authorities around the country. The private group scheme sector, serving in the region of 150,000 homes and rural businesses was excluded from the announcement.

Throughout January 1997, group water schemes began a series of meetings and consultations to determine how the sector should respond to their exclusion from the measure announced by Minister Howlin. A meeting in Barnaderg, County Galway, on 30 January 1997 was followed three days later by a very large and representative gathering in Knock, County Mayo. At this meeting, on Sunday, 2 February 1997, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes was established and a National Executive put in place.

The NFGWS was quickly recognised as the representative organisation for private and part-private group water schemes in Ireland. The Federation was incorporated as a co-operative society in 1998.

The NFGWS is currently structured as follows:

Board of Directors

National Co-Ordinator

Senior Development Co-Ordinators

Development Staff and Trainer Network

Administrative Staff

The Federation has a network of County Federations in place throughout the country.

From the outset the objective of the NFGWS has been to secure equality of treatment, ensuring that those it represents receive their full entitlement with regard to the financial supports already conceded to their fellow citizens in urban areas.

Rural Water Strategic Plan

In late 1997, the NFGWS negotiated a special partnership arrangement and programme, known as the Rural Water Programme (RWP), with the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government and his officials. The Programme was officially launched by Minister Noel Dempsey, TD, on 20 February 1998.

The programme included a package of measures aimed at establishing a new framework for the upgrading and development of rural water supplies, backed up by an increased capital provision. The Minister emphasised that this investment must be used to best effect and both he and his successors have insisted that priority be given to achieving quality water on group water schemes.

The key objectives of the Rural Water Programme are to

- protect public health by ensuring compliance with the Drinking Water Directive.
- pursue a planned approach to investment and ensure best practice in all aspects of the management and operation of rural water schemes.
- give practical effect to the principle of partnership with the voluntary group scheme sector – through local monitoring committees – in agreeing and implementing policy on rural water supply
- assist in the effective administration of the devolved rural water programme.
- sustain the rural environment and promote economic development.

In introducing the Rural Water Programme, the Minister stated that the task of improving the quality, reliability and efficiency of rural water supplies must be undertaken in a structured way with local authorities, group schemes and other rural interests, working together to achieve shared objectives and making best use of available resources. He proposed underpinning the partnership approach in the development of rural water strategies by:

- increasing capital resources for the Rural Water Programme.
- establishment of a National Rural Water Monitoring Committee.
- establishment of Local Monitoring Committees.
- appointment of Rural Water Liaison Officers in each county.
- providing training facilities for the group scheme sector.

Rural Water Strategic Plans

As part of this strategy, it was proposed that each county prepare a Rural Water Strategic Plan. In May 1998 a National Rural Water

Monitoring Committee was established to advise the Minister on national policy on rural water services and to monitor the implementation, by Local Authorities, of the developed rural water programme. The Committee would oversee the development of a Model Strategic Rural Water Plan to be used by local authorities in drawing up, in partnership with the private group schemes sector and other rural organisations, a rural water plan for each county.

The Committee, chaired by Dr. Tom Collins of Dundalk Institute of Technology, is comprised of representatives of the Department, Local Authorities (both elected members and representatives of County Managers and County Engineers), the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and other rural organisations.

Grant Aid Assistance to GWS

Early in 2000 the government accepted the NFGWS argument for increased capital and operational supports and announced revised grant aid to help group water schemes address their water quality problems. These are summarised below:

Capital Costs:

- where a group water scheme is dependent on a quality deficient supply, essential water filtration and disinfection is grant aided at up to 100% of cost subject to certain conditions.
- all other works, e.g. site excavation, construction, pipeline rehabilitation, reservoirs etc, are grant aided at 85% of cost
- water conservation/demand management – as part of a recently-negotiated package of measures to reduce unaccounted-for-water in schemes entering DBO projects, support at 100% is allowed for bulk/district meters with full telemetry, while up to 85% is provided towards universal metering.

Operational Costs:

- under subsidy arrangements agreed with the department, all schemes are entitled to an annual support of €101 per household
- because of the higher operational costs involved in DBO contracts, schemes which have entered into such contracts are entitled to a higher subsidy rate of €197 per household.

The Work of the Federation Today

ACHIEVING WATER QUALITY

The achievement of the water quality standard constitutes the paramount short to medium-term objective for the NFGWS. Of necessity, the most efficient and cost-effective means of realising this objective is being pursued and the Federation's efforts are directed towards encouraging and enabling group water schemes to move resolutely in this direction.

Group water schemes are currently facing into a new and changed operating environment. They must ensure that consumers are provided with a wholesome and safe drinking water which meets with all EU and National Drinking Water Regulations. There is at present an opportunity for your scheme to participate in a Design Build and Operate bundle that will provide a solution to any water quality problems that you may have at present.

The Design Build Operate process in conjunction with the 'bundling' of GWS under a single contract offers the most effective procurement method for full treatment solutions to drinking water quality problems. Recent pilot projects in Ireland have shown that this is the most appropriate method of tendering for such treatment systems.

Up to the present, bundled DBO projects throughout the country are at various stages of development in respect of schemes serving approximately 36,000 households; some at the planning stages, others at pre-tender, several at tender and a number under actual construction or completed. The Federation provides federated schemes with an analysis of the costs which their members can expect to face during the operational (O&M) phase of their DBO contract.

Where the DBO option is not practical, schemes which are not compliant with the quality standards may link into a public supply or may prefer to be taken over. These options need to be agreed with your respective local authority and membership.

MAINTAINING QUALITY WATER AND A QUALITY SERVICE

Having achieved quality water, the Federation assists schemes in implementing their specially-designed Quality Assurance Scheme. Implementation of this scheme provides a guarantee that treated water is delivered safely to consumers' taps. See Information Booklet No.2.

A structured management education programme designed and provided by the Federation is available to federated group schemes. In consultation with ICOS and with the help of funding from FÁS the NFGWS has designed a comprehensive training programme which is being delivered to group water schemes Boards of Directors.

This training programme aims to:

- identify and communicate the key essentials for running a successful group water scheme.
- enhance customer services skills in the GWS sector.
- clarify and have participants understand the role of boards, officers, management and staff.
- familiarise participants with basic financial and business planning.
- review and improve participant's understanding of the key business functions.
- make participants aware of their legal responsibilities, including recent legislative changes.
- ensure compliance with the legal requirements pertaining to the GWS sector.
- identify and highlight issues in the business environment that will impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of group schemes.
- highlight the possibilities and mechanisms for joint action with other schemes.
- improve the level of awareness of quality water.
- establish an understanding of Quality Assurance generally.
- develop the skills necessary to implement the QA scheme.

For further details on the Management Training Programme, see Information Booklet No.1. This is available through our offices at Monaghan, Tuam, Kiltimagh and Tullamore.

The NFGWS also plays a part in furthering the operational training programmes provided through the Water Services National Training Group at centres in Roscrea (Tipperary), Castlebar (Mayo), Stranorlar (Donegal), Ballincollig (Cork) and Ballinacoolin (Dublin).

MANAGING FOR THE FUTURE

The Federation is actively involved in testing and promoting source protection models and in the creation of a wider community consciousness of the environmental issues at stake in water protection. The NFGWS envisages a role for the group water sector in framing policy/legislation with regard to source protection in and ensuring compliance with such policy/legislation once agreed/enacted.

As part of its work in this area, the Federation is a key player in a National Source Protection Pilot Project being conducted at Churchill & Oram GWS, County Monaghan. This pilot is testing community-based and sustainable approaches to preventing contamination of water sources. The lessons of this pilot are expected to be applied throughout the GWS sector.

Water conservation initiatives are another area of work. The NFGWS has successfully negotiated generous supports for schemes wishing to tackle wastage of water. These supports apply to both bulk and universal metering. A rainwater collection pilot project currently underway is also supported by the NFGWS. In all of this, the Federation is helping groups to lower operating costs, while protecting the environment.

AWARENESS

The NFGWS keeps group water schemes informed of developments in the rural water sector. Having played a key role in discussions leading to the formulation of the water services legislation the Federation is now being consulted in relation to the detailed implementation of its provisions on licensing. Through representation on the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee and the Water Services National Training Group, it is helping shape the future of rural water services, while always defending the interests of the group scheme sector. Members are appraised of developments and can

participate in the process of policy formulation through an annual rural water services conference and the Federation's Annual Delegate Conference. Quarterly issues of our newsletter *GWS News* keep members up-to-date on what is happening, while a copy of the Federation's annual report is circulated to all affiliated schemes.

If your scheme is not already affiliated, we urge you to consider becoming part of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes. And don't forget, the affiliation fee of €5 per household is recoupable at 100% under the subsidy payments scheme.

NFGWS Successes in Brief

- Established as a key player in the evolution of national and county water strategies.
- Recognition as the negotiating body for the GWS sector.
- Negotiation of the Rural Water Programme and vastly increased grants and subsidies for GWS.
- Direct input into the determination and implementation of policy for the rural water programme through
 - National Rural Water Monitoring Committee
 - County Rural Water Monitoring Committees
 - National Water Services Training Group
- Huge increases in Capital Grants and Subsidies.
- Successful facilitation of GWS amalgamations
 - Cavan:* Butlersbridge and Redhills - Annagh Vale and Knockbride - Drumkeery
 - Turfad, Tullyinshin & Tunnyduff/Seeoran - Mountain Lodge*
 - Roscommon:* Three schemes amalgamated to form Pollacat Springs
 - Galway:* Four schemes amalgamated to form Milltown GWSMany more amalgamations are planned and are in progress.
- Successful pilot projects undertaken in the search for best practice:
 - Roscommon:* Water Quality Monitoring in GWS
 - Pollacat Springs and Cavetown Lake - DBO Concept
 - Disinfection by O&M contract for 21 GWS
 - Under Sink Units for single houses/smaller groups
 - Castlestrange GWS (11) and Ballinameen GWS (5)

Monaghan: Pilot Treatment Plant at Lough Emy (DB project)
(Glaslough/Tyholland GWS)

DBO Bundle treatment project. (National Pilot)

Cavan: Pilot Treatment plant for Clifferna GWS (DB Project)

Mayo: Membrane Filtration Plants for Bohola & Belderrig

- Source Protection: Churchill & Oram GWS, Co. Monaghan.
- Charter of Rights & Responsibilities for consumers on GWS.
- Quality Assurance Scheme.
- Demand Management/Water Conservation through universal metering on group water schemes. Pilot conducted at Clifferna GWS and Annagh GWS, County Cavan.
- Management Development Training Programme.
- Developed a platform/forum for discussion and sharing of information for the GWS sector.
- Provided ongoing information and support to group schemes through *GWS News*, County Federation meetings etc.
- Putting in place a network of development staff available to assist schemes nationwide.

Conclusion

The National Federation of Group Water Schemes is committed, through its regional Development Staff, to providing all the help and assistance required by GWS. For a copy of our affiliation form, please contact any of our staff or offices listed opposite.