

**NFGWS Chairperson, Brendan O'Mahony's Address**  
**NFGWS Annual Delegate Conference**  
**Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018**  
**Knock, County Mayo**

The power of united action and of having a single voice was never more evident and what we have witnessed over the past 12-18 months has been a coming-of-age for this National Federation of Group Water Schemes founded here in Knock on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1997. The partnership agreement forged with the Department back then provided the solid foundations upon which many success have been built, none more so than the recent agreement regarding subsidy.

A crucial factor in ensuring a positive – and mercifully short – negotiating period was the credit built up by this Federation over previous similar engagements. We didn't have to jump up and down or bang the table to be heard. We simply had to present a case that was evidence-based and compelling. This we did.

I would encourage all schemes to now put in place the management systems that are needed to ensure a consistent water quality standard and a consistent professional service to your members. While the voluntary contribution of elected committees will continue to be essential, there has never been a better opportunity for schemes to introduce professional management into the running of their businesses.

Some may have difficulty in accepting that their domestic members won't have to pay anything at all – assuming that they stay within the generous 160 cubic metre allowance. Some may want the domestic to pay even though the Exchequer is paying for their water already. I would be very concerned if the true basis for such an attitude was, in fact, a determination to cross-subsidise the provision of water to non domestic connections. Let me state clearly, as a farmer and as someone who spent his life advocating the rights of farmers, there can be no justification for taking money out of the pockets of your domestic members to keep down the unit cost of water for any non domestic connection, including farm use.

This Federation could never attempt to stand over such a dishonest approach and we will not.

A review of capital funding under the multi-annual Rural Water Programme is to commence shortly. Based on the same criteria of equity & fairness that have been applied to the issue of subsidy, we can be confident that capital supports for GWS upgrades will continue to be made available for the foreseeable future.

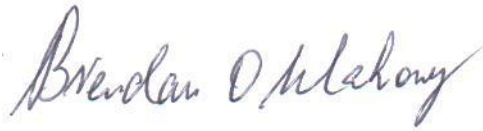
As this is the final year of the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-18, schemes should now be considering what to include in their 3-year upgrade plan that will be required before the commencement of the multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021.

We will continue to engage positively and constructively with our partners and to participate in projects that the Board believes are of benefit to the rural water sector. Our focus in the time ahead will be on the development and implementation of full source protection plans as part of the wider development of Water Safety Plans that will be required under the new Drinking Water Directive. In this regard, simple, sustainable and appropriate responses are required. Properly constructed and protected borehole supplies, with effective disinfection will not need major engineering solutions. In other words, the solution should fit the scheme's needs, avoiding overdesign. What all schemes require is sustainable management and community support. On this point, I would again commend our primary schools programme as an excellent basis for building community awareness and support.

2017 was another successful year for schemes in this Federation. We have weathered stormy times and have done so because the GWS sector is embedded in the life of rural communities. So long as we remain engaged with our members and so long as we focus on source to tap protection of water quality, we can be confident about the future.

In conclusion I want to sincerely thank my Board colleagues, our management and staff team and each and every one of you for your ongoing contribution to the rural water sector and for taking the trouble to

join us here to mark the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the founding of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes. Whatever unfolds over the next 21 years, I think that we can take pride in all that has been achieved to date.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brendan O'Mahony". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping underline.

Brendan O'Mahony  
Chairperson  
National Federation of Group Water Schemes  
8<sup>th</sup> March 2018