

National Federation of Group Water Schemes

Strategic Plan 2003-2005

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FOREWORD

In presenting this strategic plan to our members and to our partners in the RWP, I am conscious that the action programme which it incorporates presents a major challenge to our Federation over the coming three years. Nonetheless, it is a necessary and, I believe, a reasonable challenge in the context of our commitment to serve the best interests of group water schemes and our wider obligation to playing a full part in the implementation of the Rural Water Programme.

Ours is a young organisation and the early years have not always been easy. A National Federation, born in a period of uncertainty and with no grand plan to guide us, we had our teething problems. But we got through the bad times and notched up significant achievements along the way. Our participation in the design and delivery of the RWP provided a welcome focus and this plan sharpens that focus, establishing objectives, targets and actions, all of which will bring us closer to fulfilling our mission statement within an agreed timeframe. That is the essence of forward planning; to decide where you want to go and, more importantly, how and at what pace you intend to get there.

Completion of the plan fulfils one of the recommendations of the ICOS Services Report endorsed by our members at the 2001 ADC. Furthermore, I am confident that it meets a condition of our funding from the Department of the Environment & Local Government. The Department's confidence in the NFGWS was evidenced early this year when they confirmed that the

Federation would receive in excess of €500,000 per annum for the life of the plan. Our members responded at the ADC by endorsing a proposal from the Board to increase the membership subscription to €5. Both the Department and the membership of the NFGWS have a right to expect an account of how we intend to use this money. This plan provides that account and, I believe, it provides good value for money.

On my own behalf, I would like to extend my thanks to the members of the Board for their attention to the drawing up of the plan, and on behalf of the Board, I extend thanks to our partners, members, management and staff for their efforts past, present and future.

Brendan O'Mahony

Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

The environmental and legislative context within which the Irish water services industry operates is rapidly changing. As a party to these changes, the NFGWS has a responsibility to its constituent members and to the wider community to ensure that the private water sector is adequately resourced for the transition that is taking place. While group schemes will continue to need an intermediary in terms of securing financial supports, the raft of legislation now covering potable water and the threats posed to sources, means that training and supports will be necessary on an ongoing basis to ensure proper management of schemes into the future.

This plan sets the parameters within which the NFGWS will fulfil its remit in the 3-year period, 2003-2005. It establishes the policy objectives that will be pursued in respect of that remit, related targets and specific actions, and outlines the criteria that will be used to evaluate progress.

SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS) is the representative organisation for private and part-private group water schemes in Ireland. Founded in 1997, in response to the ending of water charges on public water schemes, the Federation was incorporated as a co-operative society in 1998.

The primary objective of the NFGWS, at its inception, was to secure equality of treatment, ensuring that those it represented received their full entitlement with regard to the financial supports already conceded to their fellow citizens in urban areas.

The aims of the organisation have broadened in light of mounting evidence of poor water quality, most notably within the group sector where treatment facilities are either inadequate or non-existent on the overwhelming majority of schemes.

Recognising the difficulties of compliance in certain areas with the requirements of EU directives and with national policy in relation to water quality, the Federation has forged a new partnership arrangement with government and with the local authorities. The Rural Water Programme, formulated in discussions between these partners and launched in 1998, laid out the common objectives to be pursued and the particular roles of each of the partners, including the NFGWS.

On foot of a detailed consultant's report, the Federation set about putting in place the internal structures required to effectively carry out its remit.

While continuing to represent the particular interests of group water schemes, individually and collectively, and while insisting on local discussion and agreement as core requirements throughout the process of change, the NFGWS will consolidate and strengthen its partnership role throughout the life of this plan, facilitating and encouraging a more professional approach within the GWS sector.

Amongst the first tasks, clarification is required as to the actual number of active GWS in existence, their size and extent of distribution. A base report in respect of these issues will provide a necessary focus for targeted actions in the years ahead.

The achievement of a 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 will be pursued and the Federation's efforts will be directed towards encouraging and enabling group water schemes to move resolutely in this direction.

The Design, Build and Operate (DBO)¹ approach to the installation of treatment facilities on well over 500 privately-sourced GWS will be the main external priority of the Federation over the next few years. The 'bundling'² of suitable schemes to avail of a single contract is now accepted by the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee, the

¹ Design Build Operate is method of procurement of construction, installation and maintenance of water treatment plants.

DOELG and the Federation as the best way forward in terms of achieving economies of scale and of fast-tracking the provision of treatment facilities on the maximum number of schemes in the shortest possible timeframe.

In the longer term, the maintenance of a high quality standard will be the key issue facing the sector. It is crucial that structured education programmes are delivered which will equip group schemes for the years ahead. While the NFGWS will continue to play its part in furthering the operational training programmes provided through the Water Services National Training Group, ongoing attention will also be paid to delivering (and, where necessary, updating) management training for group water schemes.

The active testing and promotion of source protection models and the creation of a wider community consciousness of the environmental issues at stake, will figure largely as a short, medium and long-term objective. NFGWS educational programmes will progressively target this area, particularly in the context of water treatment issues having been satisfactorily resolved. The Federation also envisages a role for the group water sector in framing policy/legislation with regard to source protection and in ensuring compliance with such policy/legislation, once agreed/enacted.

Promotion and implementation of the Quality Assurance Scheme will constitute a core element of the Federation's activities during the life of this plan. The formulation and delivery of effective performance management strategies is planned for the Group Water

² Bundling is the grouping together of a number of Group Water Schemes to procure DBO contracts. This allows for a more competitive and cost effective procurement process and cheaper operational costs to the

Schemes sector. The establishment (within the life of the plan) of a dedicated centre, to provide a co-ordinating, monitoring and certification centre for group water schemes will support these objectives.

Following on an objective assessment of the group water sector to be incorporated in our base report, the NFGWS will encourage and facilitate restructuring at every level of the private and part-private water services industry. Strategies agreed at county level - including those advocating amalgamation or take-over of non-viable GWS - will be actively pursued.

Progress in relation to the foregoing objectives and related actions will be measured on an ongoing basis, a full evaluation to be incorporated in annual reports throughout the life of the plan.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND

2.1 Development of the GWS sector

The lack of piped drinking water in rural areas was identified as a ‘major unresolved issue’ facing Ireland in the late 1950s. As part of a 1959 strategy aimed at addressing this shortcoming, it was envisaged that communities might establish ‘group water schemes’ in those localities where reliable sources were available. Early efforts in this direction were restricted, however, by lack of the necessary financial resources.

From the late 1960s, increasing numbers of group water schemes evolved under the grant system for the provision of water in individual houses. There were obvious advantages and economies in providing water to a number of homes from a common source, using the same reservoir, pumping equipment and pipelines, with applicants pooling their grants and providing voluntary labour. The benefits of this approach were quickly recognised by the Department of the Environment and every effort was made to encourage its widespread adoption. Group schemes flourished in the 1970s, often through the efforts of local co-operatives and farmers organisations.

Two types of structures emerged; private schemes, sourcing and distributing their own supplies of drinking water and part-private schemes, distributing publicly-sourced supplies. By the mid 1990s, the part-private sector was

providing drinking water to almost 73,000 homes (approx. 240,000 people), while private schemes catered for 50,000 homes (approx. 165,000 people). Taken together, the sector accounted for water provision to 29 per cent of all rural households.

2.2 Government policy initiatives 1996-7

In December 1996, the then Environment Minister, Brendan Howlin, TD, devolved to local authorities the responsibility for administering capital grants in respect of group water schemes. The Minister also announced the abolition of service charges for domestic water supplies on public schemes operated by local authorities.

In view of the necessity to establish a framework for the upgrading and development of rural water supplies, it was decided that each county prepare a Rural Water Strategic Plan.

2.3 Formation and early development of NFGWS

Through 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 in December 1996. Initial contacts culminated in a large and representative gathering in Knock, County Mayo. There, on Sunday, 2 February 1997, a National Federation of Group Water Schemes was established and a National Executive put in place.

In 1997, the primary objective for the leadership of the new organisation was to ensure that members of group water schemes, whether private or part-private, would be treated on a basis of equity vis-à-vis their fellow citizens on public schemes. A series of discussions with the new Minister, Noel Dempsey, TD, and his Department officials established the entitlement of group scheme members to subsidy payments. Moreover, the negotiating role of the Federation was acknowledged, as was the partnership basis that would inform any future strategy relating to the rural water sector.

2.4 Basis for the new strategy

The need for a strategy that would address the rural water sector was underlined by environmental and legislative pressures that had evolved since the 1970s when most group schemes were in their infancy.

Lifestyle changes and the alteration of farming practices, in particular the intensification of agricultural production, had a profound impact on water quality and little had been done in the intervening period to address this issue.

Investigations under the auspices of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had identified water supplied by group schemes as particularly vulnerable to contamination, by virtue of the fact that the vast majority of schemes had insufficient or non-existent facilities to treat raw water. The

consequent risks to public health provided a compelling incentive to deal with the issue of water treatment.

A secondary incentive was provided by EU directives and by various Statutory Instruments introduced at a national level, laying down specific parameters in relation to the quality of drinking water. Even as the NFGWS was meeting with government in 1997 to discuss the future of the sector, the EU Commission was in the process of refining its own position. Difficulties in relation to the previous Directive 80/778/EEC were addressed in a new Directive 98/83/EU. This sought ‘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 as ‘wholesome and clean’ water that,

- 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.

Beyond legislation addressing water quality, the legal framework covering the water services industry was, at best, disjointed. A raft of legislative enactments, amongst these the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1878-1965, covered the wider water services industry, while various pieces of legislation directly affecting the private water sector had been introduced via primary legislation in other areas: the basis for group water schemes, for example, being legislated for in the Housing Act, 1958.

Given the determination on the part of government to meet its obligations under the EU Directive and the improving state of the economy, the political will and the resources necessary to pursue a new strategy were available. Moreover, the devolution of responsibility in the water sector to local authorities and the emergence of the NFGWS as the representative organisation for the private water sector, meant that structures were in place which had the potential, given goodwill on all sides, to facilitate agreement on a radical new approach that would address both the environmental and legislative issues that had arisen.

2.5 Rural Water Programme

In February 1998, Minister Noel Dempsey announced the launch of a Rural Water Programme (RWP), an initiative that arose directly out of discussions over several months between his Department and representatives of the NFGWS. The plan included a package of measures aimed at establishing a new framework for the upgrading and development of rural water supplies. Furthermore, it included the promise of substantially increased capital provision for the improvement of rural water supply systems, with resources being focused on the areas of greatest need. Several key objectives were included:

- To protect public health by ensuring compliance with the Drinking Water Directive.
- To pursue a planned approach to investment and ensure best practice in all aspects of the management and operation of rural water schemes.

- To give practical effect to the principal of partnership with the voluntary group scheme sector in the determination and implementation of policy on rural water supply through the local monitoring committees.
- To assist in the effective administration of the devolved rural water programme.
- To sustain the rural environment and promote economic development.

2.6 Partnership approach to implementation

In introducing the Rural Water Programme, the Minister stated that the task of improving the quality, reliability and efficiency of rural water supplies would have to 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 by creating new and inclusive structures.

The lynchpin of the partnership arrangements outlined by the minister was the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee (NRWMC) established in May 1998. Acting under an independent chairperson, and with representation from the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Department of Arts, Culture, Heritage and the Islands, the NFGWS, local authorities, farming and rural organisations, the key functions of the new committee were twofold:

- To advise the Minister on matters relating to rural water supply policy
- To monitor the implementation by local authorities of the devolved capital grant measures

Partnership was introduced at a local level also, with rural water monitoring committees being established in each county to formulate, agree and implement strategies, based on guidelines provided by the NRWMC. Newly-appointed County Council liaison officers were tasked with ensuring that these partnership arrangements worked effectively.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN 1998-2002

3.1 Preparing for change

Throughout their history, group water schemes have represented the best in community endeavour, relying on the voluntary commitment of members to ensure the smooth running of water to local homes and businesses. There is, however, a general acceptance that there are limits to what untrained voluntary effort can achieve. In an era of increasingly stringent legislation and with the advent of highly technological treatment procedures, the Federation readily acknowledged in its discussions with the Department the need for a professional approach to the delivery of water services. It acknowledged also that the implementation of such an approach would necessitate major internal restructuring of the group water sector and a substantial programme of capacity-building for the members and boards of group schemes. In addressing the requirements for radical change, the NFGWS (with the agreement of its partners) was equally determined to foster and enhance the co-operative community spirit at the heart of the private water sector in Ireland by equipping communities to retain control of their schemes in the changing context of the Rural Water Programme.

As part of the package negotiated by the Federation in late 1997 and early 1998, the Minister agreed to provide substantial funding, on an annual basis, for the NFGWS to help with its educational and developmental objectives. Two Joint

National Co-ordinators were employed in 1998, while several developmental and administrative staff members were added to the team over a twelve-month period. Public offices were taken in Counties Galway, Mayo and Monaghan in 1998 and 1999, while a further office was opened in Tullamore, County Offaly in 2001.

In 1999, ICOS Services were retained in a consultancy capacity to examine and make recommendations in relation to the internal structures and the objectives of the Federation. A total of 65 recommendations were contained in the final report, agreed at the Federation ADC in March 2001. Throughout 2001 and 2002, most of the recommendations were either implemented or were in the process of being implemented (see Annual Report 2001).

3.2 Legislative developments

On 18 December 2000, Directive 98/83/EU was transposed into Irish law by means of a Statutory Instrument (S.I. No.439 of 2000). A transition period was provided for, however, and the legislation will not come into force until 1 January 2004. The implications for group water schemes are clear; by 31 December 2003 groups serving more than 50 people will have to provide water that meets the required standard.

The implications for groups failing to take steps to address water quality issues will become clear with the publication of upcoming legislation. A new Water

Services Bill, introduced in September 2001, will, when enacted, supersede all previous legislation in this area. In addition to establishing a Water Services Authority to co-ordinate and supervise the sector and the placing of the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee on a statutory footing, the new legislation envisages the licensing of all water services agencies, including group water schemes. The legal criteria for securing a licence will be based on compliance with Directive 98/83/EU and other criteria to be specified in detail in the legislation.

3.3 Outworking of partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements have worked particularly well at a national level and the NRWMC has successfully fulfilled its remit to date. Piloting projects sanctioned by the NRWMC and implemented via the Federation through the kind co-operation of individual GWS have provided an invaluable source of information in determining strategy. Moreover, the initiative taken by the NRWMC in completing a study trip to Brittany formed the basis of the DBO approach now being actively pursued in fast-tracking the upgrading of treatment plants.

The Water Services National Training Group (WSNTG) has also played a major role in ensuring the success of partnership arrangements. Their agreement to extend training (via regional centres) to the group water sector, effectively relieved the Federation of the burden (financial and personnel) of providing

operational training to members. It is generally accepted that performance management will become increasingly relevant in the context of the upgrading of schemes and, as further evidence of the spirit of partnership, the WSNTG generously accommodated group schemes in hosting a conference around this issue.

The development of a management training course has similarly been due to a successful partnership approach. Indeed, the agreement by Fás to fund this initiative provided a welcome extension of co-operation between statutory, voluntary and private agencies.

At county level, the partnerships have been somewhat uneven. While they have worked well in some areas, in others the transition has been problematic, resulting in longer-than-expected delays in agreeing strategies and beginning implementation of the rural water programme. Teething problems have been addressed in most areas and it is expected that the pace of implementing the RWP will accelerate.

3.4 Investing in the future

The Department's commitment to seeing through implementation of the RWP has been confirmed by sustained and substantially increased spending over several years. Annual expenditure increased from €13.3 million (IR£10.5 million) in 1996 to €46 million (IR£36.23 million) in the current financial year,

with a further €17.78 million (IR£14 million) allocated to small public schemes. Capital works on group schemes have attracted the lion's share of this funding, standing at €40 million (IR£31.50 million) in 2002. Emphasising the focus on water quality, capital investments in treatment works now enjoy one hundred per cent funding with respect to essential elements of treatment and the adoption of DBO method of procurement, while ancillary works receive eighty-five per cent support.

Financial incentives have also been extended to the operation and training of the group schemes themselves. Operational subsidies introduced under the RWP have been significantly increased, from €95.23 (Ir£75) per dwelling in 2000 to €101.58 (IR£80) a year later, but a significantly higher rate of increase - €196.81 (IR£155) - has been granted to schemes which have installed treatment works. Expenses incurred by group schemes in terms of affiliation to the NFGWS, training, meetings and other activities may also be claimed from the relevant local authority.

3.5 Policy initiatives

The primary external objective of the NFGWS is to pro-actively address the issue of non-compliance with the required water quality standard, by encouraging groups to introduce effective treatment systems for their schemes. The Design, Build and Operate (DBO) route has been adopted by the Federation as the optimum means of implementing this objective, as it guarantees an ongoing management agreement as part of the original contract. Moreover, the

Federation shares the view that the ‘bundling’ of schemes for the purpose of securing tenders, offers the most cost-effective means of achieving the quality objective and we regard this approach as having an added benefit in ‘fast-tracking’ the process by which schemes upgrade their treatment facilities.

Maintaining quality, once achieved, has also been a focus of the Federation’s efforts. A Quality Assurance Scheme, based on HACCP, has been finalised and pilot-tested on several group schemes in County Galway. Based on the findings of this pilot, a revised scheme will be ready for roll-out to schemes in the near future. As the Department has now included adoption of the Quality Assurance Scheme as a basis for determining subsidy payments, the Federation is ensuring that groups are familiar with what is required. A module within the management training course, being finalised by ICOS services on the Federation’s behalf, focuses exclusively on the quality assurance issue.

As further preparation for the changes that are taking place and in recognition of the obligation of public service industries to openness and accountability, the Federation fully endorses and supports the Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for consumers on Group Water Schemes, as issued by the National Rural Water Monitoring Committee. This Charter safeguards the rights of consumers and provides the management of schemes with clear guidelines in determining best practice. Again, the endorsement of the Charter by our partners

in the Rural Water Programme, including the Department, has given added weight to its adoption by all group schemes.

Monitoring of raw water sources has represented one of the single largest projects undertaken by the NRWMC to date. Over a period of twelve months, tests were conducted on the drinking water sources to all private group water schemes supplying more than fifty people (with the exception of County Roscommon³). A total of 664 schemes, utilising 723 sources were studied to establish seasonal variability of raw water quality. The information recorded in this monitoring project provides invaluable information for future planning, particularly in the context of formulating strategies around source protection and delivery of DBO solutions for Group Water Schemes with poor drinking water quality.

³ The Roscommon Group Water Schemes were tested as part of a pilot study of water quality in Group Water Schemes conducted in 1999/2000. The national study was a follow on to the Roscommon Rural Water Monitoring Project.

SECTION 4: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

4.1 Mission Statement

“To service, protect, revitalise and advance the rural group water scheme movement in all relevant EU, national and local forums through the provision of representational, advisory, training, developmental and other services that will facilitate the sourcing, management and delivery of environmentally-sustainable water supplies of the highest quality at the lowest cost, to the members of group water schemes, while also ensuring the equitable treatment of rural group water schemes by government and the EU.”

4.2 Objectives for life of plan

Two broad and interdependent objectives address the goals of the Federation as enunciated in its mission statement. In framing them, both the internal and external remit of the Federation have been considered, with particular reference to:

- ◆ the key role of the Federation as an umbrella organisation, acting on behalf of group schemes,
- ◆ the critical part being played by the NFGWS as part of a partnership for radical change in the water services industry.

In formulating our objectives, targets and actions, care has also been taken to reflect policy positions agreed at ADC, including recommendations contained within the ICOS Services’ Report (adopted at the 2001 ADC). Agreements forged between the Federation, the Department of the Environment & Local Government and other partners involved in

the delivery of the Rural Water Programme have been incorporated, as have the views of the Board members and staff of the NFGWS.

Objective I: To provide responsive, effective and representative leadership to the membership of the NFGWS.

Objective II To ensure that the Federation successfully fulfils its remit under the Rural Water Programme and consolidates the partnerships that have been established.

Under each of these objectives, several related targets emerge:

4.2.1 Responsive, effective and representative leadership

- To further improve the professionalism of internal management structures and the capacity of staff to deal with the day-to-day concerns and needs of members.
- To enhance the means by which the membership is kept informed of developments on an ongoing and regular basis.
- To expand services and organisation, based on a comprehensive assessment of the group water sector.
- To provide, in each development office, the resources necessary for effective information, advisory and management training services.
- To articulate NFGWS policy positions and to highlight the work of individual group schemes and of the Federation.
- To build on existing partnership arrangements, acting as an intermediary between the membership and statutory agencies in relation to subsidies,

licensing and such other issues as may be decided upon at ADC and Board meetings and to represent and influence the drafting of future national and EU legislation as it pertains to drinking water and, thereafter, to assist group schemes in the interpretation and implementation of such legislation.

4.2.2 Fulfilling remit under RWP

- To pro-actively, inform, encourage and assist groups in implementing strategies agreed at county level, in particular promoting the adoption of the DBO and ‘bundling’ routes as the best means of achieving and maintaining water quality on group schemes.
- To generate awareness within the sector and amongst the wider public in relation to water quality issues and what is required of water providers in terms of current and upcoming legislation.
- To deliver comprehensive management training to members and to further develop, through the Water Services National Training Group, operational courses suited to the GWS sector.
- To continue the search for best practice, with particular reference to source-protection strategies that may be generally adopted.

4.3 Evaluation criteria

To facilitate ongoing evaluation, specific actions aimed at furthering the above objectives and targets have been identified for each year of the plan (see sections 5, 6 & 7). In evaluating progress, actual performance will be measured against anticipated outcomes.

Progress reports in respect of agreed actions will be discussed by the Board on a quarterly basis, with revised targets and actions for the balance of the year being adopted should the Board or the ADC deem it appropriate. A full and detailed review in respect of implementation of the business plan will be incorporated in each Annual Report.

SECTION 5: OBJECTIVES, TARGETS & ACTIONS (2003)

Objective I: To provide responsive, effective and representative leadership to the membership of the NFGWS.

Target: To further improve the professionalism of internal management structures and the capacity of staff to deal with the day-to-day concerns and needs of members.

Action 1: Implement the remaining internal restructuring recommendations of the ICOS Report, with particular reference to staff reporting procedures.

Action 2: Provide (as part of a website) a dedicated online noticeboard for staff members, including all relevant information and references.

Target: To enhance the means by which the membership is kept informed of developments on an ongoing and regular basis.

Action 1: Produce and distribute *GWS News* on a quarterly basis.

Action 2: Launch a dedicated website.

Target: To expand services and organisation, based on a comprehensive assessment of the group water sector

Action 1: Complete (within the year) a base report of the GWS sector.

Target: To provide, in each development office, the resources necessary for effective information, advisory and management training services.

Action 1: Install adequate computer technology in all regional offices, building a network and providing staff training in database systems and website.

Target: To voice privately and publicly NFGWS policy positions and to highlight the work of individual group schemes and of the Federation.

Action 1: Provide *GWS News* to all media outlets, with accompanying press release highlighting the major story in the GWS sector.

Action 2: *GWS News* to be posted on website in PDF format (i.e. it will be downloadable).

Action 3: Build up a comprehensive list of contacts in national and local media, identifying within the broadcasting sector, presenters and programmes other than news departments, which would be receptive to news/events from the group water sector.

Action 4: Inform media of ongoing capital works programmes on individual schemes or on groups of schemes.

Target: To build on existing partnership arrangements, acting as an intermediary between the membership and statutory agencies in relation to subsidies, licensing and such other issues as may be decided upon at ADC and Board meetings and to represent and influence the drafting of future national and EU legislation as it pertains to drinking water and, thereafter, to assist group schemes in the interpretation and implementation of such legislation.

Action 1: Lobby the DoELG in relation to the Water Services Bill and the wider aims, objectives and work of the group sector.

Action 2: Establish structured contacts (outside of committee work or informal meetings) with all county liaison officers on a monthly basis.

Action 3: Sustain and, where possible, increase NFGWS participation on County Monitoring Committees, ensuring speedy agreement and implementation of Final Stage Strategic Plans.

Objective II To ensure that the Federation successfully fulfils its remit under the Rural Water Programme and consolidates the partnerships that have been established.

Target: To pro-actively encourage and assist groups in implementing strategies agreed at county level, in particular promoting the adoption of the DBO and 'bundling' routes as the best means of achieving and maintaining water quality on group schemes.

Action 1: Push for monthly meetings (at least) of Monitoring Committees in those counties awaiting adoption and ratification of Final Stage Strategic Plans, consulting with county liaison officers in formulating the agenda for such meetings.

Action 2: Focus Federation resources (and in particular staff time) in working on a priority basis with those schemes most in need of NFGWS support, by;

- (a) Pro-actively approaching schemes identified as falling short of the quality standard and convincing them of the urgent need to become part of DBO 'bundles'.
- (b) Identifying and pro-actively approaching private schemes suitable for amalgamation and/or takeover, addressing the concerns that such groups may have in adapting to structural and legislative change.

Action 3: Develop, with a view to piloting, a centralised monitoring system for those group schemes which have completed upgrading.

Target: To generate awareness within the sector and amongst the wider public in relation to water quality issues and what is required of water providers in terms of current and upcoming legislation.

Action 1: Launch website, including within it a dedicated environmental-awareness section, with links to related sites.

Action 2: Urge adoption by all NFGWS-affiliated groups of the Quality Assurance Scheme

Action 3: Ensure that all affiliated Group Water Schemes adopt and implement the Charter of Rights.

Action 4: Implement a pro-active media campaign in relation to water-quality issues and respond to negative media commentary.

Action 5: Encourage adoption of best practice, highlighting within *GWS News* and the wider media, as well as at information meetings/seminars, those schemes which might be considered as models.

Target: To deliver comprehensive management training to members and to further develop, through the Water Services National Training Group, operational courses suited to the GWS sector.

Action 1: Prioritising schemes which have completed upgrading (including treatment works, reasonable distribution systems and individual metering), provide the

management training course (devised by ICOS Services) to at least fifty group schemes across all regions.

Action 2: Launch a co-ordinated and focused publicity campaign directed at group schemes, stressing the absolute necessity of operational *and* management training for their schemes, both in terms of their own immediate interest in providing quality water for their communities, their prospects of receiving financial supports and, indeed, the long-term viability of their schemes as *licenced* providers of drinking water.

Target: To continue the search for best practice, with particular reference to source-protection strategies that may be generally adopted.

Action 1: Collate (and, where necessary, commission) reports on all ongoing pilot schemes, addressing both the strengths and weaknesses that have been identified. In advance of wider circulation to relevant agencies, including group schemes, each report will be sent to the relevant contractors and statutory agencies, requesting their input to the final document.

Action 2: Prioritise implementation of the Churchill/Oram source protection pilot and the identification of at least three other locations, of varying soil/bedrock types, in which source protection pilots may be initiated in 2004.

Action 3: Devise, in consultation with group schemes and farmer organisations, a set of principles in relation to such legislative/statutory instruments as may be introduced/invoked to protect drinking water sources, with particular reference to issues affecting the existing rights of land owners/occupiers.

SECTION 6: OBJECTIVES, TARGETS AND ACTIONS (2004)

Objective I: To provide responsive, effective and representative leadership to the membership of the NFGWS.

Target: To further improve the professionalism of internal management structures and the capacity of staff to deal with the day-to-day concerns and needs of members.

Action 1: Introduce quarterly review days for staff and management, including discussion and evaluation of progress across each region in relation to the Directive coming into force on 1 January 2004.

Action 2: Organise a specific training course for staff and management, focusing on source protection and waste management, designed to equip staff in providing informed advice about the options available to group schemes.

Target: To enhance the means by which the membership is kept informed of developments on an ongoing and regular basis.

Action 1: Provide or commission a weekly column 'On the Water Front' for publication in the *Farmers' Journal*.

Target: To expand services and organisation, based on a comprehensive assessment of the group water sector.

Action 1: Implement, in collaboration with existing rural businesses and voluntary organisations, an information campaign designed to inform people of their entitlements in

relation to drinking water and, where they belong to unaffiliated group schemes, the benefits of NFGWS membership.

Action 2: Selecting four counties across each region, identify unaffiliated group schemes serving >50 persons. Where no active committee exists, initiate a leaflet/media campaign informing water consumers of the need for proper organisation and the benefits of belonging to the Federation.

Target: To provide, in each development office, the resources necessary for effective information, advisory and management training services.

Action 1: With the agreement of the National Water Services Training Group, operational courses provided in the regional centres will be made available to group water schemes at locations outside the training centre, where the management committees of those schemes are unable, for whatever reason, to attend the designated colleges, but wish to participate in operational training.

Target: To articulate NFGWS policy positions and to highlight the work of individual group schemes and of the Federation.

Action 1: Provide or commission a weekly column 'On the Water Front' for publication in the *Farmer's Journal*.

Action 2: Establish and publicise an annual awards scheme for the group sector.

Target: To build on existing partnership arrangements, acting as an intermediary between the membership and statutory agencies in relation to subsidies, licensing and

such other issues as may be decided upon at ADC and Board meetings and to represent and influence the drafting of future national and EU legislation as it pertains to drinking water and, thereafter, to assist group schemes in the interpretation and implementation of such legislation.

Action 1: In association with partners, design a public information campaign re implications for providers and consumers of the Water Services legislation, focusing on the unified and positive attitude of the partners to the measures contained within it and highlighting the part being played by constituent members of the partnership in delivering on the Rural Water Programme.

Action 2: Supply groups and county Federations with clear information leaflets outlining the role of proposed local and national water services authorities and of how they should use the NFGWS as their conduit to the new structures

Objective II To ensure that the Federation successfully fulfils its remit under the Rural Water Programme and consolidates the partnerships that have been established.

Target: Pro-actively encourage and assist groups in implementing strategies agreed at county level, in particular promoting the adoption of the DBO and ‘bundling’ routes as the best means of achieving and maintaining water quality on group schemes.

Action 1: Develop, in consultation with partners, an information pack aimed at ‘priority’ group schemes (i.e. those still falling short of the required standard), outlining the steps they need to take in order to achieve and maintain clean water.

Action 2: Adopt as a theme for year, ‘There’s no excuse for bad drinking water’, encouraging media outlets to focus on the state of Irish water, the opportunity provided by DBO and ‘bundling’ to address difficulties and the success of those schemes which have adopted this route.

Action 3: Establish a pilot centralised monitoring and reporting system for group schemes which have upgraded.

Target: To generate awareness within the sector and amongst the wider public in relation to water quality issues and what is required of water providers in terms of current and upcoming legislation.

Action 1: Design or commission (in association with the Department of Education and in consultation with the teachers’ union and parents’ organisations) a short programme for primary schools, focusing on drinking water as a precious, vulnerable (and expensive) resource – this programme to be included as part of the wider environmental curriculum.

Action 2: Design or commission a suitable ‘water awareness’ presentation for delivery to the wider public, this programme to be condensed into a 40-minute talk, supported by graphics and provided by staff to regional structures of selected rural organisations (such as the ICA) on a pilot basis. Depending on the response to the ‘water awareness’ talk at a regional level and with the addition of such amendments as may be necessary, the ‘talk’ to be provided either directly or indirectly for delivery at branches of rural organisations.

Target: To deliver comprehensive management training to members and to further develop, through the Water Services National Training Group, operational courses suited to the GWS sector.

Action 1: While expanding provision of the management training course (devised by ICOS Services) to a further 100 group schemes across all regions, commission a presentation of key course modules to be made available through NFGWS regional offices to recently upgraded group schemes, pending delivery of the full course at a later date.

Action 2: Launch a series of on-site operational training visits, giving schemes the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss problems.

Target: To continue the search for best practice, with particular reference to source-protection strategies that may be generally adopted.

Action 1: Organise in conjunction with the EPA, county environmental officers, rural organisations and the wider community, public meetings in each electoral district focusing on drinking water as a precious and vulnerable resource.

Action 2: Discuss with the relevant agencies the potential for group schemes wishing to implement environmentally-sustainable source protection strategies, particularly in relation to strategies that address the problem of agricultural waste, of acting as agents for dealing with disposal of same.

SECTION 7: OBJECTIVES, TARGETS AND ACTIONS (2005)

Objective I: To provide responsive, effective and representative leadership to the membership of the NFGWS.

Target: To further improve the professionalism of internal management structures and the capacity of staff to deal with the day-to-day concerns and needs of members.

Action 1: Establish direct contacts between staff and water supply companies throughout the European Union, with on-site visits that focus on source protection strategies, providing an assessment of the benefits and limitations of community involvement in water delivery and performance management systems.

Target: To enhance the means by which the membership is kept informed of developments on an ongoing and regular basis.

Action 1: Provide or commission weekly items on local radio community diaries/farm news, informing listeners of regional developments in the water services industry, interruptions to supply, branch or Federation AGMs. Similar items (in text format) to be provided to all local press.

Target: To expand services and organisation, based on a comprehensive assessment of the group water sector.

Action 1: In selected counties and coinciding with major festivals (e.g. the National Ploughing Championship), organise information days, with staff on hand to answer questions about the work of the Federation.

Target: To provide, in each development office, the resources necessary for effective information, advisory and management training services.

Action 1: Commission/produce a comprehensive manual/guide illustrating best practice in the management/operation of group water schemes.

Target: To articulate NFGWS policy positions and to highlight the work of individual group schemes and of the Federation.

Action 1: Introduce publicity training at County Federation and branch level, focusing on the requirements of local newspapers and radio and on the need to have competent spokespersons at a local level.

Target: To build on existing partnership arrangements, acting as an intermediary between the membership and statutory agencies in relation to subsidies, licensing and such other issues as may be decided upon at ADC and Board meetings and to represent and influence the drafting of future national and EU legislation as it pertains to drinking water and, thereafter, to assist group schemes in the interpretation and implementation of such legislation.

Action 1: In co-operation with local authorities and the Department, identify localities/groups in which subsidy drawdown is low relative to the strength of the private group sector and focus information on entitlements in these areas.

Action 2: Begin the process of identifying at county level areas of weakest distribution networks and relatively high water loss, making representations on behalf of ‘priority’ schemes for investment in upgraded distribution networks and metering.

Objective II To ensure that the Federation successfully fulfils its remit under the Rural Water Programme and consolidates the partnerships that have been established.

Target: To generate awareness within the sector and amongst the wider public in relation to water quality issues and what is required of water providers in terms of current and upcoming legislation.

Action 1: In association with the Department and with ENFO, design and deliver a billboard advertising campaign focusing of water as a precious and vulnerable resource.

Action 2: Target national and local radio current affairs programmes to address positive developments in the water services industry.

Target: To pro-actively encourage and assist groups in implementing strategies agreed at county level, in particular promoting the adoption of the DBO and ‘bundling’ routes as the best means of achieving and maintaining water quality on group schemes.

Action 1: Carry out a review of capital works upgrades in each region, including an assessment of those groups which may have failed to avail of the supports available to upgrade, prioritising those which have failed even to begin the process of change.

Target: To deliver comprehensive management training to members and to further develop, through the Water Services National Training Group, operational courses suited to the GWS sector.

Action 1: Based on the level of uptake on management training courses to date and on an assessment of regional weakness, accelerate the pace of delivery by recruiting (on a contract basis) three to five new trainers targeted towards the weak localities.

Target: To continue the search for best practice, with particular reference to source-protection strategies that may be generally adopted.

Action 1: Complete assessment and reports on source protection pilots.

Action 2: Produce, in association with partners, a 'source protection' pack for landowners, providing a straightforward introduction to the requirements of the new legislation in this area, the penalties for non-compliance and the incentives for those who embrace the required changes.