

Subject: Contribution from the European Water Movement to the Irish Independent Water Commission

Dear Mr. Kevin Duffy,

The European Water movement is an open, inclusive and pluralistic network of movements, social organizations, committees and trade unions at the European level that aims to reinforce the recognition of water as a commons and access to water and sanitation as a fundamental universal right, an essential element for all living beings. In that sense, the members of the European Water Movement have followed quite closely the debate about water charges in Ireland. We are deeply worried about how the Troika has imposed rules that threaten the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and that lead to privatise water management across Europe. Therefore, we would like to share with you some reflexions:

- We welcome the creation of the independent Commission in Ireland and we wish more similar efforts will be made at the European level.
- We reject any attempt by international institutions like the IMF to push countries to privatise basic public services. Any time citizens are consulted they have shown that they support a system of democratic, public and participatory water management, as shown in Uruguay, Italy, Berlin, Thessaloniki and many other referendums and public consultations such as the first ever European Citizens Initiative
- We do not believe that there is an universal system for water management that can fulfil all the local needs, as solutions should be local and community-based. However the criteria that all systems need to apply are internationally set according to the [UN Convention on the Human Right to water](#) .
- In that regard we believe that the “full cost recovery” marked as a guiding principle of financing integrated water services, that has been prevalent in Europe, needs to be changed, instead, securing access to water and securing funds for investment in extraordinary infrastructures should be achieved through general taxation.
- We believe that the recognition and implementation of the human right to drinking water and sanitation is necessary for life. Access to water as a universal human right should be included in all constitutions of member states, and in the basic principles and acts of the European Union. This objective was supported by nearly two million European citizens through the first ever successful European Citizen’s Initiative for the implementation of the right to water. Any new public utility created such have the same guidelines, as has happened across Europe in Paris, Medina Sidonia or Naples.

- We believe that water should not be considered as a commodity but as a [commons](#). Like other natural elements, water is fundamental for the balance of ecosystems and for the survival of the planet. Its management must preserve water bodies and therefore it has to be excluded from the market rules [to be precise at the European level to the internal market rules]. Keeping the entire water cycle outside of the market rules will ensure a human rights based approach taking into account the needs of citizens and the environment.
- We have experienced all around Europe how pricing water leads to water commodification, opening the door to privatisation of water services. Imposing domestic water charges is a risk even if the government and civil society oppose privatization, as we have seen in Portugal or Greece, where the Troika is trying to force the privatization of perfectly viable public water utilities.
- Water commodification and privatisation have failed to give fair access to water all around the world. More than 200 cities took back public control over water management over the last two decades, including Paris, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Kuala Lumpur or Maputo. In many of those cities privatisation followed conditions imposed by international financial institutions and foreign investors. The trend in Europe is to recover public control of water.
- Any serious attempt of doing so will immediately exclude making profit for shareholders of this essential part of life.
- The European Water Movement believes that the most progressive system of taxation has to be considered as the one that helps avoiding water poverty. It is essential that individual households do not subsidize indirectly the wholesale of water, a very common phenomenon nowadays.
- We believe that the focus for water saving should be put on the main water users, that is, industry and big agricultural businesses, not in households.
- Any utility dealing with water and/or the water cycle [waste water and depuration] should strive to an ownership and management system in public hands, but with a participative mechanism and under social control. The participation of citizens and workers in the management of services is a necessary condition for having a new governance model of the commons.

We hope that these contributions can be taken into account in the consultation process. Ireland has the right to define its own model of water management and to defend it at European level in the coming review of the Water Framework Directive.