



Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Gníomhaireacht Comhshaoil Thuaisceart Éireann  
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Ref: PC21 MTR

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28 June 2024

Dear Paul

## **Response to Consultation on the Draft Determination of the Mid-Term Review of NI Water's PC21 Price Control**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Utility Regulator's draft determination on the PC21 Mid-Term Review. We welcomed the opportunity to meet with you on 11 April 2024 at which you gave a briefing on the contents of the report, and also provided a chance for us to give our initial feedback.

We are supportive of the open, transparent and collaborative approach taken by the Utility Regulator in the development of the report and the messages it conveys to NI Water and stakeholders. We are encouraged by the report's key findings with only limited adjustments required to the PC21 final determination output targets which can continue to be used for the planning and performance reporting for the rest of the PC21 period.

We are encouraged by NI Water meeting and exceeding its high level drinking water quality targets as set within the final determination. We would however highlight the recent increase in non-compliance with the standard for trihalomethanes and the ongoing public health concerns regarding lead in drinking water.

We continue to monitor progress in complying with the enforcements we have taken against NI Water in PC21. Work at the Derg WTW relating to non-compliance with the standard for the

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herbicide, MCPA, was completed in 2023. Work continues at Ballinrees WTW for MCPA, and taste and odour non-compliance, and at Drumaroad WTW for aluminium non-compliance. It is acknowledged that the prioritisation of drinking water investment within the enhancement budget has assisted the delivery of these projects.

We recognise the work delivered to date in PC21 in relation to the Catchment Management Plans. With the continued high-level pesticide detections in some raw water sources, we are encouraged by NI Water's commitment to deliver all the management plan recommendations in the 20 prioritised drinking water catchments during the remainder of PC21.

We are content with the proposed deferral of work at Caugh Hill WTW on the basis that base maintenance to improve the operation of this works is scheduled in the intervening period. This deferral also has the advantage of allowing NI Water time to appropriately identify the best treatment solution for this water supply through its pilot plant studies.

Similarly, we are content with the trunk main deferrals proposed by NI Water given that most of these schemes have hydraulic rather than water quality drivers, and alternative short-term solutions are in place. However, adequate resilience within a water supply system is important, particularly during periods of hot weather and high demand, in order to minimise the stress on WTW outputs and reduce the risk of water quality failures.

We support the Utility Regulator's decision not to amend the PC21 targets for trunk mains, service reservoir/clear water tanks and water treatment works, other than accounting for change controls and PC15 carry over. Performance against the updated PC21 MTR nominated output targets will be monitored by us over the next 3 years.

We note the updates to PC21 consumer measures following review by the Consumer Measure Satisfaction (CM/SAT) stakeholder group. We would fully support the planned work on new measures for PC27 and welcome further updates on these measures in the future.

We are encouraged by your assessment that serviceability has remained stable in all areas and that no changes have been identified. We will continue to monitor the drinking water quality serviceability targets for PC21 going forward through our regular meetings with NI Water.

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We support the development of innovative solutions in relation to maintaining and improving drinking water quality. Consequently we will continue to engage with NI Water on the use of pilot plant trails to identify new and optimal treatment solutions.

Although there has been no decision to date regarding implementation of the recast Drinking Water Directive, it should be noted that there may be a requirement for NI Water to monitor and comply with a number of additional drinking water quality standards going forward. This will undoubtedly lead to improvements and investment being required in relation to catchment management, operational monitoring at WTW, and management of disinfection by-products as we move towards PC27.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss further any aspect of this response.

Yours sincerely



**Bernadette Corr**

**Interim Chief Inspector of Drinking Water**

**Drinking Water Inspectorate**

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