

## Governance and Management of Small Rural Water Supplies: A Comparative Study

### KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do other countries manage the problems associated with the delivery of small rural water supplies?

Are there governance frameworks, management tools or regulatory approaches that could help Scotland deliver a better service to small rural communities?

### MAIN FINDINGS

This research clearly demonstrated that there are similar problems with small supplies all over the world; and that governance frameworks are relevant regardless of the form of ownership or type of management. It also showed that there are still many issues around definitions and terminology which can confuse the debate, as well as difficulties with consistency of data.

Risk assessment, for example through Water Safety Plans, is a focus for service delivery at every scale, but for small and very

small supplies, it is especially important to provide clear, user-friendly information and support, which is easily accessible to users. It is also important that obligations for suppliers and users, who may be the same people, are clear and understandable. 'Education for empowerment' was a key theme.

The report concluded with a series of governance and regulatory policy recommendations (Section 6, Conclusions) which are reproduced in full in this summary.

### BACKGROUND

This research was necessary because small water supplies suffer from the 'three lows' – low revenue; lack of investment; and low quality of service. Small supplies are much more likely to deliver a service that does not meet drinking water standards, presenting risks to public health; this is demonstrably the case in Scotland.

Small supplies are also much more likely to be the responsibility of communities or individuals who may need support and assistance in the management of their supply.

### RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN

This project began with an extensive literature review, which formed the basis of our analysis of definitions and terminology; good governance of water services; approaches to risk assessment; and our comparative study across a large number of EU and non-EU states.

A set of countries were then selected for more detailed analysis as case studies, and in-depth interviews carried out with practitioners, regulators, and NGOs. The results of the interviews fed back into those case studies and the main report. A workshop was held to which key actors in Scotland as well as the interviewees were invited, and the findings of the workshop enhanced the overall project recommendations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall:

1. A stronger focus on household-centred management and treatment options available to individual householders could be helpful, both for Type B supplies (whether serving just one, or a number of households) and for domestic users on a Type A supply.
2. Continued work on catchment protection, and on rural wastewater management, within the wider legal regimes for managing land-and-water. Although the former is currently focused on sources of public supply, and the latter on environmental compliance, both are likely to also benefit the quality of private supplies.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Governance initiatives:

3. Better, 'consumer-friendly', advice and training for both relevant persons and users of supplies. The current guidance is more appropriate for regulatory authorities.
4. In particular, advice regarding risk assessment / water safety planning, and / or point of entry (POE) / point of use (POU) technologies; there is extensive material available on making these appropriate to very small systems.
5. Advice and assistance currently offered through public authorities could be delivered via Health Boards, Local Authority Environmental Health Departments, or by giving a greater role to the Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR). Staff in these organisations might also benefit from increased training and support, e.g. from DWRQ or perhaps Scottish Water. In many countries a trade association for water suppliers provides this training.
6. Better guidance support and advice to communities who wish to join together in some formal legal arrangement (such as a cooperative or a company limited by guarantee) to upgrade and / or better manage an existing private supply. Lessons learned in relation to community energy supplies may be useful here.
7. Potentially, some sort of umbrella organisation such as the Irish NFGWS could play a useful role, as a non-governmental 'trusted intermediary'.
8. Increased use of health data (e.g. from reports by local authorities and the DWQR, as well as by Health Boards and the outputs of research work), to provide evidence to communities as to the desirability of either connection to a public supply, or, improved maintenance and operational activity for private supplies. Means to achieve this (and provision of other guidance and advice) might include web pages, leaflets, presentations at community council meetings or other local forums; as well as direct contact with occupiers of properties registered as having private supply.
9. Consider the possibility of using something like the self-assessment action plans under the Water and Health Protocol, tailored for Scotland to measure the current situation against international criteria, but also to ensure that country-specific problems are being assessed against country-specific criteria and targets.

### Regulatory measures:

10. The benefits of stable and consistent law enforcement was a theme of the comparative study. Several of these regulatory measures would work with the corresponding governance initiatives below.
11. One option would be to resource the DWQR to play a greater role, to ensure greater consistency, rather than the separate local authorities.
12. Further clarity in the regulations (and accompanying guidance and advice) as to the need for all private supply to be on a register; and, on the identification and responsibilities of relevant persons, responsible persons, and users of private supplies.
13. A specific duty on an appropriate public authority to provide advice to users of private systems of different types and scales.
14. Making some form of risk assessment / Water Safety Planning mandatory – at least for Type A systems, and for all new private supplies.
15. Ensuring that incidents of disease linked to water quality, are noted on a register and publicly available.
16. Scottish Water could be enabled and required to provide more assistance to private schemes, perhaps through Scottish Water Horizons to avoid blurring the distinction between public and private supply.
17. Strengthening compulsory powers (or encouraging their use), e.g. in relation to declaring dwellings uninhabitable, or otherwise using the powers of local authorities to prevent unsafe or non-compliant supplies being used for consumption; mandatory powers might be seen as negative, but are an essential back-stop.
18. Alterations to the grant scheme, e.g. to allow 'pooling' to move to improved community schemes and / or public connections; and ideally, increased levels of grant support. The grant aid provided in Ireland for example, although discretionary, is significantly greater than that in Scotland.
19. Regulations to provide for increased monitoring to address known risks, e.g. at times when pesticides are being applied.
20. Bringing in some mandatory requirements for private supply (e.g. testing, certification) on sale of a property, as is done, e.g., in New Zealand. Whilst it would be possible to work with the Law Society of Scotland (and lenders) towards greater uniformity on a voluntary basis, a mandatory provision would be more effective.

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