

## **Opening Ceremony of INBO – Europe Conference**

### **Welcoming Address – Maria Graham**

On behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, I would like to thank the organisers for allowing me to address you this morning and welcome you to Ireland. Cead Míle Failte, a hundred thousand welcomes.

Occasions like this are very important in sharing knowledge and experiences and assisting us all in protecting our water resources.

Water has no boundaries, and so we place no boundary on our quest for further knowledge on this important resource.

#### **The importance of water**

We are fortunate in Ireland to have considerable natural resources in terms of water. However, perhaps we haven't sufficiently valued it. Benjamin Franklin said that *"When the well is dry, we know the worth of water"*. Our well may not run dry, but in Ireland we do face issues around future security of supply, quality of supply and the impact of climate change.

Where water is reliably available, economic opportunities are enhanced. Where water is unreliable or of inadequate quality or where water-related hazards are present there will be drags on growth. Against a backdrop, when the UN states that by 2050, one in four people is likely to live in a country affected by chronic or recurring shortages of fresh water, we understand that harnessing our resource and managing well is a key component of our social and economic progress.

#### **Integrated catchment management – WFD & River basin management plans**

Understanding the nature of water and water related investment is essential to guiding our water services policy. Overall water resource management must comprehend actions from *"source to sea"*. This integrated catchment management approach has to be a foundation to our model for the delivery of sustainable provision of water services. This necessarily involves a number of

actors, both public and private, in a range of actions which reduce pressures and improve the overall quality of our water environment.

The EU Water Framework Directive provides us with the legislative framework for more coherent and integrated water management, setting out environmental objectives for the water environment, and the broad means of achieving those objectives. An important centre-piece of which, is of course the River Basin Management Plans which set out the programme of measures through which the objectives will be achieved.

Essentially this involves bringing together science and other evidence, including practical experience, to define the characteristics of water bodies and identify the risks, develop a programme of measures to address the issues and then monitor the outcomes to inform the on-going characterization and evaluation of measures for the next cycle.

My colleague, Mr. Pat Duggan will present to you in detail during the day on our national policy in Ireland. I hope you will find our experiences interesting – as we certainly have. We have since 2012, embarked on a programme of reform in the sector, which has not been without controversy. Great strides have been made in establishing a new water services utility, Irish Water, which has taken over responsibility from a more fragmented form of delivery by 31 individual local authorities. This has given us the platform for a more strategic approach to investment in the sector.

This institutional reform is one aspect of building capacity in the sector, but has to be set in the context of appropriate governance at national, regional and local level. This has been a particular focus of our work in Ireland during this river basin management plan cycle, as we need all stakeholders to be working in collaboration and with common purpose if we are to achieve sustained increases in water quality.

Fundamentally, an integrated catchment management approach requires public buy in. Small measures in conserving water, good farm practices, helping keep beaches and rivers clean in community clean ups are all important in managing our water resource. Local knowledge can be very important in adding to science in monitoring the improvement/deterioration of rivers, lakes and estuaries.

### **Source to sea.**

Charles Fishman in his book *The Big Thirst* wrote *'Water is one of those resources, one of those issues, that can only be managed for the long-term. But it is a mistake to imagine that small things don't matter or that big water issues aren't manageable.'*

The reform programme underway in Ireland is seeking to address both the big issues and the small things, so that progressively we improve water services in Ireland. Ultimately, the context for the provision of sustainable water services, is integrated catchment management and a focus on provision which examines issues from "source to sea".

### **Conclusion**

This conference provides an excellent opportunity to share views and experiences on these important issues. I note that you have a programme with a diverse range of topics, from climate change, to drinking water source protection, water governance and the Water Framework Directive. I hope that you will derive great benefit from these discussions, meet interesting people and get a chance to experience a little of Ireland, our culture, people and perhaps a little more than our water!

So again, I thank you for choosing to bring your conference to Ireland and hope that it is a valuable experience for you all.