



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Water and Sewerage Services Bill. Return to committee.regionaldevelopment@niassembly.gov.uk

Name: Richard Kirk, Regional Director

Organisation (if applicable): Institution of Civil Engineers

Date: 1 October 2015

About ICE

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a global membership organisation of over 83,000 members that promotes and advances civil engineering around the world.

ICE Northern Ireland (ICE NI) is a leading source of professional expertise in transport, water supply and treatment, flood management, waste and energy in Northern Ireland. ICE NI's vision is to place civil engineering at the heart of society, delivering sustainable development through knowledge, skills and professional expertise.

ICE NI published State of the Nation: Infrastructure in June 2014. This review of the condition of Northern Ireland's main infrastructure sectors, namely, Transport, Water and Waste Water, Flooding, Waste and Energy, was shaped by government, industry leaders and pre-eminent engineers.

ICE Representatives

Richard Kirk CEng MICE, ICE Regional Director

David McCune CEng FICE, Director, AECOM¹

¹ AECOM is a multinational engineering consultancy

Commentary on proposed clauses

ICE is grateful for the opportunity to present evidence at the committee stage of the Water & Sewerage Services Bill. Below are our comments on the proposed clauses.

Clause 1: Extension of period for which grants to water and sewerage undertakers can be paid

ICE agrees that the Department should extend the power to pay subsidy to NI Water on behalf of domestic customers to 2017. We also agree that the Department should take an enabling power in the proposed Water Bill to make subordinate legislation to extend the subsidy-paying power, however this should not inhibit the next NI Executive from introducing domestic water charging.

We were encouraged to see the Committee commission a research paper into the business models of water and sewerage providers around the rest of the UK. In that report the Minister for Regional Development is quoted as saying:

“The best model for Northern Ireland Water (NIW) governance is one that supports and ensures the provision of high quality water services to the people of Northern Ireland. It should be sustainable, affordable and efficient. It should meet our EU obligations, support economic growth and protect the environment”²

We agree with this, but do not consider that the current governance arrangements allow NI Water to deliver for customers. We would strongly recommend that the Committee consider replication of the Scottish model in NI, potentially funding at least 51% of NI Water’s revenue through councils (thereby relieving it of NDPB status).

Clause 2: Combining water resources management plans and drought plans

We commend the introduction of this amendment.

Clause 3: Cessation or relaxation of duty to install water meters when making domestic connections

We agreed with this, but are content to see that the Department has the ability to reinstate or amend this requirement, should the governance arrangements change.

Clause 4: Sustainable drainage systems

We are pleased to see the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems and their adoption in this Order. However, the language suggests that only hard engineered solutions are to be mandated. Whilst these are more readily maintained by NI Water they are not the only solution to sustainable drainage. We would compel the Committee to ensure that soft engineered solutions (detention ponds etc.) are also recognised. Such assets are not just important for the drainage network, they also improve the natural environment and add

² AQO 4472/11-15 [online] available from: <http://nia1.me/1t4>

value to the community. There are many examples of soft SuDS across GB which show that it can be done.

The aim of moving to a more sustainable approach to drainage is welcomed and is reflective of government's general direction of travel. However, SuDS are not a panacea and need appropriate design, construction and maintenance to ensure they continue to remain effective. As such, having clarity around their design, maintenance, ownership and liability is important and that their intervention is proportionate.

SuDS can help to manage flood risk, however, they will be overwhelmed in medium to extreme events so therefore it is important that any design considers what happens when capacity is exceeded.

Clause 5: Refusal of surface water connection

We welcome this amendment as it will encourage more sustainable management of surface water. However, there should be a mechanism by which NI Water could accept such a connection where it is deemed in the public interest e.g. if TransportNI is developing a new road, it may cost DRD less (even in whole life costs) to discharge into an NI Water combined sewer. Another example is if the NI Water sewer would benefit from infrequent cleansing from a surface water connection.

Clause 6: Connection of drains and private sewers to public sewers: adoption agreements

We welcome this clause as it will uphold standards and quality assurance levels. However, as per Clause 4 we would encourage NI Water to develop standards which they would expect soft engineered SuDS to be developed to.

For official use only

Date received: _____

Ref Number: _____