

March 6, 2017



Dear Ms. O'Sullivan:

Access to clean, safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are fundamental human rights that are essential for human health, dignity and well-being. As many countries fall short of their obligations to ensure that this right is enjoyed by all segments of the population, Ireland has successfully maintained universal coverage through central taxation and non-domestic usage fees. I am writing to urge you not to jeopardize this successful model that serves as an example to the rest of the world by introducing metered user fees.

There is very little evidence that the introduction of metered water charges will serve any benefit to the environment, yet the potential social and public health costs of restricting access to more marginalized segments of the population are very high.

First, as previously noted by the Blue Planet Project in its submission to the Expert Independent Water Commission, domestic water consumption represents approximately 10% of all water consumption worldwide. The main culprits when it comes to excessive water consumption and abuse are the large agricultural and industrial users including energy and extractive industries. It is therefore futile for governments to restrict domestic access without regulating larger users.

Secondly, a Canadian study found that domestic water consumption primarily serves essential needs[1]. Therefore when policies restricting access to domestic water result in lower consumption rates, this is generally because they force lower income households to limit water consumption for essential use. Higher income households, more inclined to use water for non-essential purposes (such as swimming pools), are less likely to adjust behaviour and more likely to pay higher rates to maintain their lifestyles.

Unlike metered user fees, which disproportionately affect the poor, non-market strategies that better target and regulate non-essential use are far more effective in conserving water than market mechanisms that allow those who can afford to waste to keep wasting while depriving low-income users of basic consumption. In Ireland, simply fixing leaky pipes can halve water consumption[2].

Thirdly, metering brings with it an administrative burden and costs related to maintenance, monitoring and collection. This would take away public funds that could otherwise be invested in maintaining and improving the system.

Finally, the people of Ireland have a right to have a say in the kind of water and sanitation system they desire. The large demonstrations against metering and public polling so far have shown strong public opposition to the proposal.

I support the Right2Water Campaign in its call for the abolition of water meters and I urge you to acknowledge the overwhelming evidence against metering as well as the will of the people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Maude Barlow'.

Maude Barlow
National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians
Founder of the Blue Planet Project

[1] http://eausecours.org/esdossiers/compteurs_ang.pdf

[2] <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/half-of-water-lost-through-leaky-pipes-despite-500m-upgrades-26709944.html>