

26 September 2007

Professor Paddy Hillyard
Independent Water Review Panel
Calvert House
23 Castle Place
Belfast
BT1 1FY



**Friends of
the Earth**
Northern Ireland

Dear Prof. Hillyard,

RE: Review of water and sewerage services

Friends of the Earth welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the review of water and sewerage services.

Water charging is a very contentious issue. There is considerable opposition to the proposed charging scheme based on the capital value of property. Friends of the Earth supports the principle that water should be paid for, while protecting those least able to pay and the vulnerable.

Water, like other resources, is finite and there are considerable environmental problems associated with the collection and treatment of potable water, and the disposal of waste water. The proposed scheme does nothing to encourage the conservation of water and it is in this area that Friends of the Earth's submission will focus.

There are three areas where significant cuts can be made in use of mains water: technical and lifestyle changes to the way water is used; greywater reuse; and rainwater harvesting.

The first is perhaps the best understood. This includes simple measures such as fixing leaking taps; the use of spray taps; water saver shower heads; low-flush toilets; and water efficient appliances. These are generally easy to install, are readily available and are cost effective.

Greywater reuse is the collection and use of water from, baths, wash-hand basins, and washing machines. Such water is suitable for use in toilet cisterns, for watering the garden (assuming harsh detergents and bleaches aren't used), and for washing cars and windows. It can be as simple as redirecting grey water to a butt but the most effective systems require replumbing, installation of a suitable tank and, if required, some treatment. According to the Environment Agency trials of greywater reuse have resulted in water savings ranging from 5 per cent up to 36 per cent.

Rainwater harvesting has the potential to save up to 50 per cent of household water consumption. Like greywater reuse, it can be as simple as a water butt placed under a down-pipe, or a complex system of pumps, and plumbing and tanks. Harvested rainwater should require no treatment and can be used in toilet cisterns, washing machines and on the garden. More complex systems can treat water to a potable standard if required, though this is probably beyond the means of the average household.

For individual households, the most cost effective method of conserving water is the first: small scale technical and lifestyle changes to the way water is used. The other two will require considerable expenditure to be most effective and maybe best installed in new build developments and multiple occupancy dwellings. It is possible to retrofit existing single dwellings, but the expense is likely to put most people off. Grants for the installation of water efficiency measures would make them more attractive, but currently no grants are available.

To overcome this negative influence, Friends of the Earth recommends a water rate rebate be applied to households with installed water efficiency measures. This rebate would work in a similar way to the rebate being considered by the Finance Minister, Peter Robinson, for households with high levels of energy efficiency.

It is possible to install meters to greywater and rainwater harvesting systems. Such meters would enable any rebate to be accurately calculated. This is particularly important if the systems are communal, such as might be installed in a new development or in an apartment building.

A rates rebate would be a positive incentive for householders to install water saving systems.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission. I hope the points we have made will be given due consideration.

If you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Declan Allison,
Campaigner.