

# PRESS RELEASE

Department for Regional Development

11 June, 2003

## **MINISTER SEEKS VIEWS ON KEY ISSUE OF WATER METERING**

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Angela Smith, MP, said today that the merits of metered water charging has emerged as a major issue in the Water Reform consultation process.**

And she urged the public to put forward their views on metering, as well other areas of concern, before the end of the consultation period on Friday, 20 June.

The Minister said: **“We are now within the final fortnight of the public consultation period. We have already received a wide range of views and queries on a range of topics but it is the issue of metering domestic water supplies that has so far attracted the most comment.**

**“Metering was ruled out by the devolved administration in its consultation document on Rating Policy, which was published in May 2002. However, I included it in the consultation document so that people would have the opportunity to comment on it.**

**“The Executive’s concerns were that metering would have an unfair impact on those least able to pay and would be expensive to install. The cost could be as much as £200 per domestic property across Northern Ireland, although the cost of installing water meters in newer properties would be substantially lower. Estimates indicate that the installation of water meters in each of Northern Ireland’s 624,000 domestic properties would total in excess of £100 million and would either have to be met from public funds or passed to customers through charges. Operating a metering regime would also incur**

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**costs.**

**“ It is relevant that about 80 per cent of the cost of supplying water and sewerage services to a property are fixed and do not vary in relation to the level of water treated, supplied and consumed. These fixed costs relate to the very significant cost of constructing and maintaining the water and sewerage reservoirs, treatment facilities, pumping stations and the thousands of kilometers of mains and pipes.**

**“Those opposed to metering are concerned that charges calculated on the level of water consumed, might harshly affect low income families, large households and customers who require large volumes of water due to certain medical conditions. They also argue that metering can adversely influence households usage of water supplies, with public health consequences.**

**“On the other side of the coin, people living on their own argue that they should not have to pay the same water charges as a large family living next door. And those in favour of metering point to the obvious environmental benefits, notably that users may be encouraged to make more sensible and prudent use of water supplies.**

**“Household metering could also make a valuable contribution to the detection of leakage in household properties, and the targeting of leakage prevention measures. 37% of treated water supplies is lost through leakage, though we are reducing that level.**

**“This leads us on to the question as to how best to protect vulnerable groups when water charges are introduced, regardless of whether those charges are determined on the basis of metered consumption or any of the other charging options under consideration - another key area of the consultation paper. We have to ensure that careful thought is given to how we protect those who will have difficulty paying, including low income households, single parents,**

**single occupants and those on pensions.**

**“These are all significant issues and the more views we receive from the public and interest groups the better. I would urge everyone to voice their opinions before Friday 20 June.”**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Angela Smith MP launched the consultation paper, “The Reform of Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland” on 11 March 2003. The consultation period ends on 20 June 2003.
  
2. The paper seeks views on:
  - The basis on which domestic water and sewerage charges should be set.
  - Possible business models for a reformed Water Service.
  - How best to protect the consumer interest.
  
3. Three possible options are proposed for the basis on which water charges may be determined. These are:
  - A flat charge applied to all households.
  - A charge based on property value.
  - A combination of a fixed and variable charge.

Anyone wishing to obtain a copy of the Water Reform Consultation document, raise queries or put forward their views should contact:

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Further information on Water Reform can be obtained from the Water Reform website: [www.waterreformni.gov.uk](http://www.waterreformni.gov.uk)

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