

PRESS RELEASE

Department for Regional Development

3 July 2003

MINISTER WELCOMES WIDE RANGING RESPONSE TO WATER REFORM PLANS

Nearly 90 organisations representing a wide range of interests and almost 700 members of the public have submitted responses so far as part of the Water Reform consultation process, Minister of State, John Spellar, MP said today.

The feedback on the first phase of public consultation for the reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland, which closed on 20 June, has been one of the largest ever responses to any local consultation process.

The Minister said: **“Responses have come from a wide variety of organisations representing political, business, community, commercial and agricultural interests and members of the public.**

“I will give very careful consideration to all the representations made and report on the outcome of the consultation and my detailed plans for the reform of Northern Ireland’s water and sewerage services after the summer.

“The substantial and wide-ranging response will greatly assist myself and the Water Reform Unit in drawing up firm proposals for the introduction of water charges. There will be another opportunity for public consultation at that stage.”

The Minister also responded to those who were opposed to the reform agenda.

He said: **I fully acknowledge the concerns and challenges raised by Water Reform. However, the status quo is not an option. We need reform to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland enjoy the benefits of a water and sewerage**

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system that meets the highest standards without having to divert resources from other public services such as health and education. I think these are objectives on which all can unite.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The public consultation on the *Reform of Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland* ended on 20 June 2003.
2. The consultation paper sought views on:
 - The basis on which water charges should be set;
 - How best to protect the consumer within a charging regime; and,
 - The most effective business model for the delivery of water and sewerage services.
3. The Water Reform Unit of the Department for Regional Development has received just over 7,000 signatures calling for the consultation paper to be withdrawn, and opposing the introduction of water charges and future job losses in Water Service.
4. The report on the outcome of the public consultation on the options for reform will be published in the autumn. This will be followed by consultation on the detailed reform proposals.
5. Domestic water and sewerage charges will be introduced from 1 April 2006.