

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-002280/25
to the Commission
Michael McNamara (Renew)
(5 June 2025)**

Subject: Ireland's compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) and EU standards to protect the environment

The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) ⁽¹⁾ requires the Member States to ensure the adequate collection and treatment of wastewater in all agglomerations. Despite this, 16 towns and villages in Ireland were discharging raw sewage in 2024 and 10 Irish towns and cities had wastewater treatment facilities that breached the standards required by the directive. Furthermore, 547 settlements in Ireland are unsewered, many of which are coastal summer holiday destinations whose average weekly loading exceeds 2 000 population equivalent (PE) during the summer months.

1. Has the Commission received any compliance data from Ireland in respect of any of the 547 unsewered settlements, some of which have an average weekly loading in excess of 2 000 PE during the summer months?
2. Given that the statutory body responsible for wastewater networks and treatment in Ireland, Uisce Éireann, does not assess locations that do not have existing sewerage networks or treatment facilities, and is instead focused on upgrading existing sewerage networks and treatment facilities, who does the Commission consider responsible for the assessment of sub-threshold agglomerations where the PE varies greatly during the summer season?
3. What measures are under consideration by the Commission to address the ongoing environmental and public health risk from unsewered settlements in Ireland which have an average weekly loading in excess of 2 000 PE during the summer months?

Submitted: 5.6.2025

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(28 July 2025)**

The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) ⁽¹⁾ requires that the seasonal variations of the load should be considered at the treatment plants built to ensure sufficient performance under normal local climatic conditions. However, under this directive, Member States do not report for agglomerations below 2 000 population equivalent (p.e.).

According to the latest available report ⁽²⁾, in 2020, Ireland had a population of 5 million and reported 195 agglomerations generating more than 2 000 p.e. of which 179 complied with the requirements of the directive and 16 were found non-compliant ⁽³⁾.

The wastewater load was connected to a collecting system or to an individual and appropriate system which corresponded to 3.9% of the wastewater load. The 2022 data reported by Ireland is currently undergoing a compliance assessment. The results are expected in Autumn 2025.

As indicated above, the agglomerations below 2 000 p.e. do not fall within the scope of the directive. However, the recast Directive ⁽⁴⁾ will, from 1 August 2027, cover agglomerations above 1 000 p.e.

In line with Article 18 of the recast Directive, some more limited obligations identified in a risk assessment will apply for agglomerations below 1 000 p.e. This should allow for ensuring an appropriate assessment of agglomerations currently not covered by the directive.

¹ Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment (OJ L 135, 30.5.1991, p. 40, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/1991/271/oj>).

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment, OJ L 135, 30.5.1991, p. 40-52, Article 10.

⁽²⁾ UWWTD National Summary Chapter 2020 Ireland: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/65764c73-4a57-45dc-8199-473014cf65bf/library/87af8cf1-e679-49ba-ba34-265d19b4547d/details>.

⁽³⁾ Non-compliance areas under the UWWTD in Ireland are followed by the Commission in two infringement cases: INFR(2013)2056 ([https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?langCode=EN&version=v1&typeOfSearch=byCase&refId=INFR\(2013\)2056&activeCase=true&page=1&size=10&order=desc&sortColumns=refId](https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?langCode=EN&version=v1&typeOfSearch=byCase&refId=INFR(2013)2056&activeCase=true&page=1&size=10&order=desc&sortColumns=refId)) and INFR(2023)2178 ([https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?langCode=EN&version=v1&typeOfSearch=byCase&activeCase=true&page=1&size=10&order=desc&sortColumns=refId&refId=INFR\(2023\)2178](https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/search-infringement-decisions/?langCode=EN&version=v1&typeOfSearch=byCase&activeCase=true&page=1&size=10&order=desc&sortColumns=refId&refId=INFR(2023)2178)).

⁽⁴⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/3019 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast), OJ L, 2024/3019, 12.12.2024.