



## September 2014 | Water Charges

Every month we invite a response to our short, 3 question survey. Our survey for September 2014 was in relation to the proposed water charges due to commence in January of next year. The aim of the survey was to find out how those parenting alone or sharing parenting feel about the charges and how they have been implemented to date.

### The Questions

1. What is your opinion on the proposed water charges for domestic households?
2. Do you feel that you have been properly informed by the government and/or Irish Water about how you will be charged for water?
3. What impact, financial or otherwise, will the introduction of water charges have on you and your family?

### The Results

There was a very strong reaction from respondents with regard to the proposed water charges. Many felt that the introduction of the charges was unfair and unjust. Others resented having to pay what they felt was an additional tax on their income.

*“Privatisation of water is wrong. It is a resource that should be paid for through taxation. I will not engage with Irish Water and will not pay any bills.”*

*“I think it is an unjust and unfair tax on the people. Water is a basic human right and if successive governments had invested correctly in the infrastructure over the years, instead of paying off the fat cats, then we would not have to foot this enormous cost today. It's just wrong!!!”*

*“Very concerned about Irish Water. I think charges are too high plus would be worried about price increases in the future. There does not seem to be any control over the organisation.”*

Despite an overwhelmingly negative response to the water charges, a number of those surveyed felt that water charges were necessary but the manner in which they have been introduced needs to be reviewed.

*“I agree we should pay for the water we use (so as to deter the wasters of water) but I believe it has been dealt with in the wrong way - rushed implementation without consultation.”*



*“In theory do not object to a water charge - to encourage less wastage, but other ways of achieving this. However - think cost of consultancy fees of €85 million for Irish Water consultants not justifiable - how many 'consultants' were involved?”*

*“I think it is good people pay for water as it may stop waste and bring awareness to overuse. However the fee should be at least half and less of the intended charge, how can someone on social welfare pay this, and I know there are allowances, but not enough. Single parents especially are already on toast and beans.”*

*“Charging for water is good, what is not is the water service we have in Ireland and the speed in which charges are being started.”*

The majority of those surveyed felt that they have not been appropriately informed by Irish Water or the government about how water charges will be implemented. Many were confused about how the charges would affect them.

*“Absolutely not. The fact that the documentation from Irish Water only arrived less than a month before charges begin is disgraceful.”*

*“No. Absolutely not. I live in an apartment and I still do not know how much I'll have to pay. I can't even budget or anticipate. My daughter spends 2 nights with her dad so don't know if this will be taken into account or not. What if he was first with sending the pack to Irish Water and he claimed the allowance first?”*

*“No! I haven't a clue. So scary.”*

*“Absolutely not! They seem to be withholding information!”*

However, a small number of respondents were happy with the information they have received to date from Irish Water, despite having reservations about how the government and media have influenced public opinion.

*“Yes charges are listed on Irish Water website. €2.44 per 1 cubic meter in and same for waste out = €4.88 minus household allowance.”*

*“Yes - although I don't agree with how little the allowance is.”*

*“Informed; yes. However the political and media pronouncements regarding Irish Water are confusing and causing fear in me, these also cause doubt and suspicion regarding Irish Water and their billing methods.”*



The negative impact of introducing water charges was outlined by the majority of those surveyed. Many people are fearful and worried about how they will pay for their water bill next year.

*“I am a lone parent to 5 year old twin boys, stuck on rent allowance. I have a disability and I've recently had my heating cut off because I couldn't afford the bill and now they want €220 to switch it back on which I can't afford :( Water charges will cripple this household altogether.”*

*“I have absolutely no idea how I am going to pay. I have been under severe financial pressure throughout austerity and have not been able to keep on top of bills I already have. I am constantly trying to catch up on payments by 'taking from Peter to pay Paul'. My situation is stressful enough but this money making racket is definitely going to be the straw that breaks the camel's back.”*

*“It's an extra bill that I simply have not got the money to pay & will have to put myself in debt to do so. It is causing arguments in my household as I am telling my daughter to make her showers quick; not to waste water & she is feeling the stress that I am and she is only 15!”*

*“I often skip dinner to ensure my son will have a dinner the next day. I am sick of counting slices of bread or watching in envy when someone gets to buy a newspaper. No idea where I am meant to find the money for another bill.”*

One respondent is a father who shares parenting and feels that the allocation of water allowances for children is unfair and discriminatory.

*“I am a single father with two young kids living with me nearly 50% of the time. I pay maintenance on top of this. I support them fully for 50% of the time and get no child benefit. The government have already taken a tax credit from me. This is an extra insult to single fathers like me. It is almost as if Fine Gael is deliberately making it too financially difficult for single fathers to co-parent.”*

Another respondent who is parenting alone said that they will have to consider leaving work as the water charges will mean that work is no longer financially beneficial to their family.

*“I will have to reconsider working. I am a lone parent, I earn €450 per week. €110 a week rent, €120 a week childcare, other bills including electricity, broadband, mobile, heating, car expenses etc total €150. I have nothing left over and the water charges are the last straw for me. My job, which I love, may need to take a back seat.”*



In conclusion, the introduction of water charges has caused a lot of anger and confusion for those parenting alone and sharing parenting who are already struggling to meet basic living costs. More needs to be done to make the process as transparent and informative as possible. No parent should be forced to choose between paying water charges and feeding their children. Unfortunately, this choice is one which many lone parents may have to face in the near future.

It is particularly worrying that some lone parents who are currently working may be forced out of the workforce as a result of increasing costs. Work must pay for those parenting alone and the proposed water charges will put further strain on those currently in the labour market.