

Does a Citizen's Assembly on Water Make Sense?

We recently received the following question (shortened for brevity):

The XR advocacy of Citizens' Assemblies baffles me. There was one on Climate Change in 2019 and others on Adult Social Care, Future of Scotland, National Assembly for Wales, Congestion & Air Quality, and Town Centres. They produced some interesting ideas but had fairly low impact as they are not near the centres of power and money. Ireland had an interesting CA on Abortion and voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment. The Dail took this up in the 36th amendment bill of 2018. This CA was fairly influential, on a topic which is ethically divisive.

Dirty Water is very topical but money is the big issue. We need more plant and rainwater cisterns, The water companies want big price increases, OFWAT is allowing smaller ones, but it's still "price increase". Nationalisation has been suggested by the Greens, but full compensation for shareholders would add to the national debt – a mere £2.7 trillion. The creation of a Climate Civil Defence Force with water engineering as its main skill is another possibility. [...]

Here are our thoughts on this:

The advocacy of a Citizens' Assembly has always been one of the three demands of XR. It is recognised that achieving this with everything lined up is a difficult set of conditions to bring about, in terms of achieving:

- mass public support,
- mainstream media attention,
- government sponsorship (but not interference),
- government commitment to respond/act on the citizens' conclusions.

The UK Assemblies have never had all of these aspects addressed in advance. Their running into the sand was inevitable.

Several people in government (this and the previous one), as well as senior civil servants, understand how Citizens' Assemblies work and are exploring democratised decision making in some departments. However, there isn't a widespread public appreciation of their power sharing capacity. Hence, XR has expanded its advocacy of deliberative democratic processes to include Community and Peoples' Assemblies.

Dirty Water is proposing that we don't wait for government action, but take the other elements of a successful Assembly head on. We want to create a **campaigning alliance** to collectively deliver:

- **mass public attention,**
- **sustained media interest,**
- **funding** and
- **popular leverage on a powerful governing party.**

This government still needs wider public endorsement. It can win a significant part of that by committing to act on the public's request on the issue that attracts almost unanimous concern, i.e. healthy, clean waters. If a Citizens' Assembly on Water works, the **precedent will have been set** for the Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice - to say nothing of potentially wider and complementary democratic campaigns.

Can We Afford To Continue To Ignore the Power of Upgrading Decision Making Systems?

Money is allegedly the stalling issue, or at least a procrastinating government can say so. (A Welsh minister has cited this as the obstacle to a Citizen's Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice in Wales). However, we know that really is a question of **political choices**. There is money if there is an appetite for **taxing land, other assets**, even **share transactions**, in proportion to the existing taxes on income.

If **water conservation, supply and treatment** are not fixed, our national infrastructure fails, people get sick and we lose even more of our biodiversity. **Without healthy water systems, economic growth or any other aspirations of government will not be possible.**

It is important that the participants in the Citizens' Assembly on Water are not constrained in their thinking by having to anticipate limits on spending and thus constrain options from the outset.

It's not a question of saying we can't afford to fix our water provision. **We can't afford not to any longer.**

Dirty Water Campaign for Saving Our Waters

The actions proposed by the Dirty Water team are steps towards engagement with the public in local communities, beginning early in 2025. These actions and events can escalate from simpler initial claims on people's attention, through to bringing them into participation in co-created ceremony around local water bodies and ultimately invite passionate protectors to press on, to gather in a local or regional Community Assembly on Water.

Those who participate will be left in no doubt that our ultimate demand is the Citizens' Assembly on Water. Participants will be asked to develop recommendations and demands from that process to take to water companies, authorities and other relevant actors. So our approach is no random scattergun, hoping on happenstance. Building on Wave 6, we aspire to a **coherent progression** towards a complete statement, with **maximum public support**, of what we want from water provision, our legislators and community partners.

Oh... A last reflection in the scying pool... The Citizens' Assembly on Water needs to make their recommendations **officially**.

There really should be no compensation for the bosses of water companies or their shareholders, should there be a transition away from privatised companies operating for profit. Water company boards and their lick-spittles have squeezed every drop from us, the bill-payers, for 35 years. Thieves deserve nothing. If anything, fat cats of the industry should be prosecuted for their failure to meet their contractual obligations (defined or implicit) and be made to **return undeserved dividends, bonuses, and inflated loan repayments.**

Do you have a question or want to talk about any of these ideas? [Drop Us a Line](#)
