



**Northern
Ireland
Anti Poverty
Network**

Press Release

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The Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network has condemned plans announced this week by Minister John Spellar to make water and sewerage services self-financing by 2008/09. The Anti-Poverty Network says “this move will deepen poverty levels in Northern Ireland. People living on low incomes already have difficulties making ends meet. This double tax on water will make matters much worse”.

The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network is particularly critical of plans announced by the Minister to investigate the role that the private sector can play in the new water company which, he says, will help to ‘reduce the level of charges borne by customers’. NIAPN spokesperson Goretti Horgan said “all the evidence from England is that the involvement of the private sector pushes up the level of charges in order to increase profit. The Minister must know this since the issue was investigated at the end of last year by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of the House of Commons.”

Evidence to the Select Committee showed widespread levels of water poverty. The accepted proportion of household income which should be spent on water is 3 percent. Anything above that means households are suffering water poverty. Yet, in England where the private sector runs the water services, an average water and sewerage bill for South West Water in 2003-04 was £342.00 which represents 12 percent of the income of a single person on Jobseekers Allowance, and 6 percent of the income of a single pensioner receiving Minimum Income Guarantee.

£342.00 is considerably less than what water charges bills are expected to be here. Even with the proposed 25 percent disregard for those on low incomes, there will still be widespread water poverty.

The Dept. of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimated that in 1997-98, 18 percent of households in England, some 4.3million, spent more than the 3 percent threshold. These figures exemplify the substantial numbers of water customers

