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Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OUR Calls for better Coordination and Long-Term Planning for Water Sector

(Kingston, Jamaica; 2026 October 2): The Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) is calling for stronger coordination, long-term planning and accountable investment across Jamaica's water sector, saying these measures are critical to improving service delivery and strengthening resilience in the face of increasing climate and operational challenges.

The call came from the OUR's public education webinar, *Jamaica's Water Sector at a Crossroads: Regulation, Resilience and the Road Ahead*, on 2026 September 30. This discussion saw representatives from the OUR, the National Water Commission (NWC) and the Water Resources Authority (WRA) examining key issues affecting the sector, including infrastructure investment, drought response, non-revenue water reduction, water security, climate variability and regulatory reform.

OUR Director of Regulation, Policy, Monitoring and Enforcement, Duane Rowe, said Jamaica must strengthen the links between planning, financing and customer outcomes to achieve meaningful improvements in water service delivery. He said while adjustment measures are in place to address the current situation in the short-term, there is also a need to establish the long-term arrangements required for effective operation of the sector.

"Jamaica has established sector governance framework, institutions and instruments, but service remains uneven. We need to connect planning and financing more closely to what customers experience at the tap and on their bills," he said.

He also underscored the need for greater coordination across the sector through a strengthened legislative framework. "Stronger water sector coordination would benefit from an umbrella legislation. Such legislation could clarify stakeholders' responsibility, address gaps in the current framework and require coordination, including information sharing and joint planning."

While Jamaica's national non-revenue water (NRW) level declined from 75.1 per cent in 2021 to 73.4 per cent in 2025, he noted that significant losses continue to affect operational efficiency, financial sustainability and service reliability. NRW is water produced and supplied by the NWC that does not generate income because it is lost to leaks, illegal connections, theft, or other unbilled uses. According to Mr Rowe, addressing these challenges will require a sustained focus on long-term water planning, reducing non-revenue water, improving service reliability and tackling the energy and financing constraints that continue to affect the sector.

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The webinar also highlighted efforts by the National Water Commission to improve reliability and build resilience through infrastructure investment and drought-response measures.

Dr. Phillipa Campbell-Francis, NWC's Acting Vice President of Operations, said the utility continues to advance major projects, including the Rio Cobre Water Treatment Plant, the Western Water Resilience Improvement Project and the Greater Mandeville Water Supply Project.

"The NWC is serious about ensuring that our customers are served during this time and also to ensure that we are building resilience for the future, as demonstrated in the projects that we are now doing to improve reliability."

She also outlined the NWC's islandwide NRW programme, which aims to reduce losses from approximately 70 per cent to 30 per cent through auditing, infrastructure upgrades and sustained maintenance.

Meanwhile, Hydrogeologist at the Water Resources Authority, Maurice Wallace, who presented worrying data on reduced water levels in some of the major freshwater systems, said Jamaica's water sector should build on greater investment in science, research and monitoring, while strengthening collaboration among key agencies to support evidence-based policymaking and sustainable water resource management.

The webinar formed part of the OUR's ongoing public education efforts to increase awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing Jamaica's water sector and to encourage dialogue on the policies and investments needed to secure the country's water future.

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