



The national stakeholder body representative of stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's waters.

Water Framework Directive (WFD)

Introduction to the Water Framework Directive (WFD)

The Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) is EU legislation that regulates water management in Europe. Its main **objective is to protect water quality** in lakes, rivers, groundwaters and coastal waters and enhance freshwater resources, with the aim of achieving 'good ecological status' of all waters within the EU. Member states are required to set out how they will achieve these objectives in River Basin Management Plans.

Achieving **good ecological status** involves meeting certain standards for the ecology of water habitats, chemistry and quantity of waters. The percentage of EU waterbodies not in good ecological status or potential is shown in Figure 1.

In order to determine the ecological status of water, member states are required to establish and implement water monitoring programmes. The Environmental Quality Standards Directive (Directive 2006/105/EC) and the Groundwater Directive (Directive 2006/118/EC) set the quality standards of the WFD.

The Environmental Protection Agency has responsibility for monitoring the ecological status of rivers, lakes and coastal areas in Ireland and publish their findings annually in water quality reports, such as the **2019 Water Quality in Ireland Report**.

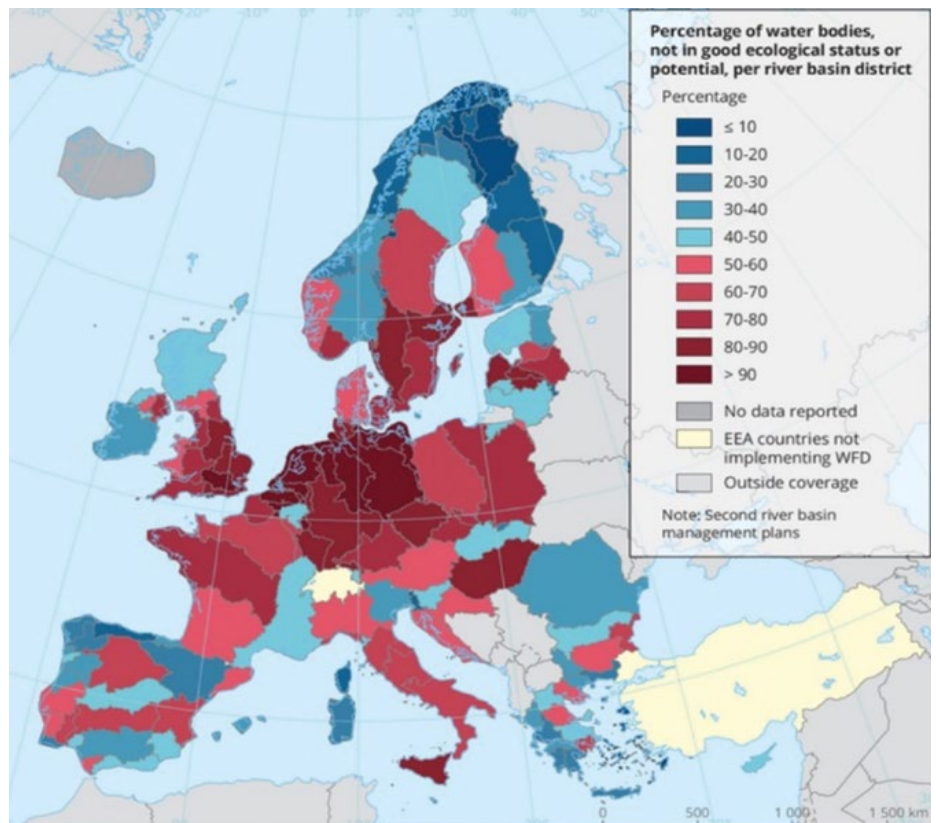


Figure 1. Percentage of EU waterbodies not in good ecological status or potential per river basin district. (Source www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/proportion-of-classified-surface-water-7/percentage-of-number-water/image)





Directives that support the Water Framework Directive

There are a number of other EU Directives that support the WFD and these are often referred to as Sister or Daughter Directives. These include:

EU Habitats Directive

EU Habitats Directive aims to contribute towards the conservation of biodiversity and requires member states to maintain or restore natural habitats and species which are considered threatened in the EU territory. The National Parks and Wildlife Service have a key role in protecting Ireland's habitats and species and the surveillance of habitat and species conservation status, which they report under Article 17 every six years ([2019 Report](#)).

EU Drinking Water Directive

EU Drinking Water Directive sets the standards for drinking water quality across Europe. The EPA is the drinking water quality regulator responsible for enforcing the regulations in public water supplies. Drinking water sources can get contaminated by pollution or poor land management practice. Drinking water source areas are 'protected' areas under the WFD and assessment and monitoring of drinking water is carried out by Local Authorities and Irish Water, with reports sent to the EPA who produce an annual report on [Drinking Water Quality in Public supplies](#) and [Drinking Water Quality in private supplies](#). Irish Water's [National Water Resources Plan](#) sets out a framework for public water supply over the next 25 years in Ireland, while Group Water Schemes prepare Source Protection Plans for drinking water sources in rural areas.

EU Bathing Water Directive

EU Bathing Water Directive sets the standards to protect bathing areas under the WFD, where member states are required to monitor and assess the bathing water quality under two parameters of (faecal) bacteria. They must also inform the public about bathing water quality and beach management. The EPA is the bathing water quality regulator and annual reports are published on Bathing Water Status in Ireland, while the EU provide a summary report for all member states (Figure 2).

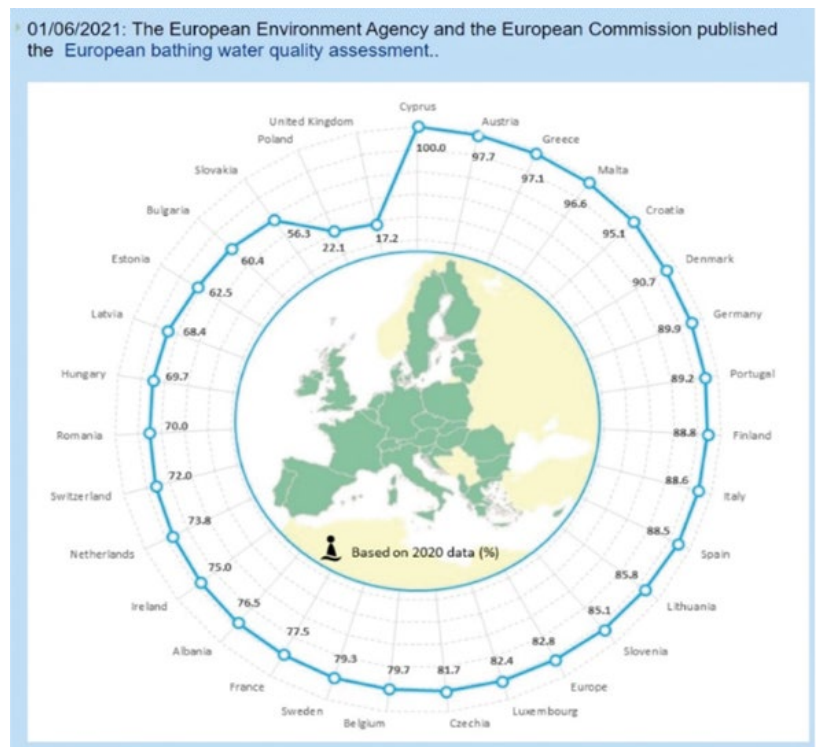


Figure 2. 75% of Ireland's bathing waters are at good status: Source [EEA State of bathing water 2020](#) and further information is available at www.beaches.ie

EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive

EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) requires member states to ensure that their towns, villages and cities properly collect and treat waste water. Untreated wastewater can be contaminated with harmful chemicals, bacteria and viruses and thus presents a risk to human health. It also contains nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous which can damage freshwaters and the marine environment

promoting excessive growth of algae that reduce levels of oxygen available to other life (eutrophication). Irish Water collects approximately 1 billion litres of wastewater to be treated in 1,100 wastewater treatment plants every day. The treated effluent is then released back into lakes, rivers and coastal areas (Figure 3). Monitoring of the performance of treatment plants and receiving water required under the UWWTD is currently

carried out by LAs, operating under a service level agreement with Irish Water. The EPA are the regulatory authority for the UWWTD and produce an annual report on **Urban Wastewater Treatment**. There are also 476,000 registered domestic wastewater treatment systems in rural Ireland that are not under the remit of the UWWTD and are instead the responsibility of the home owners.

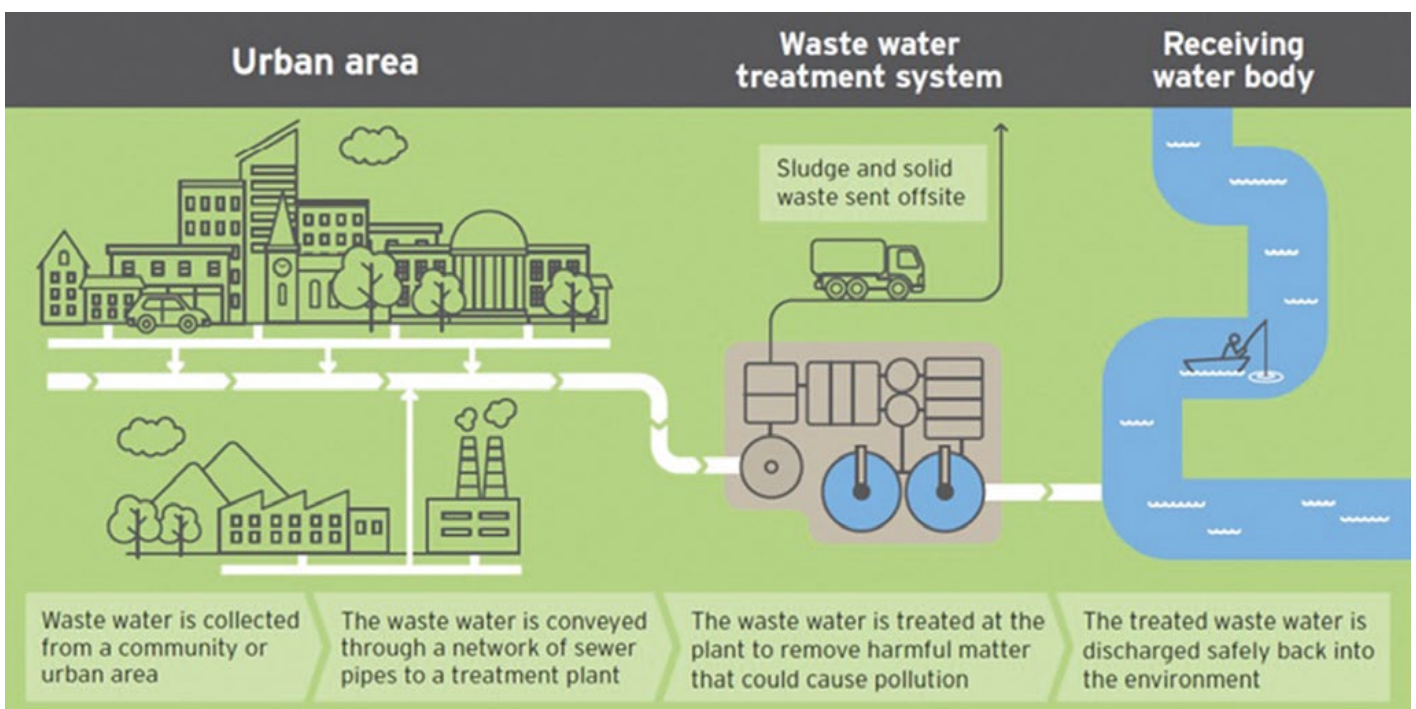


Figure 3. Urban Wastewater treatment, Source: [EPA Urban Wastewater Treatment in 2018 Report](#).



Further EU Directives

The Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC) requires member states to adopt a risk-management approach when dealing with the threat of significant floods; it aims to reduce the risk and impact of flood damage.