



River Basin Management Plan

Introduction to the River Basin Management Plan

The EU legislation that regulates water management in Europe is the **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**. 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. **Ireland's 3rd River Basin Management Plan** will outline Ireland's plans over the next 6 years to protect the water bodies with good ecological status and to restore waterbodies that do not meet good ecological status.

Ireland's river catchments

A river catchment (also called river basin) is the area of land drained by a river. For management purposes, Ireland's waterways are broken down into 46 catchment management units. These are made up of 583 sub-catchments containing 4,842 water bodies (Table 1). A water body is an individual unit of a water feature used for monitoring and planning purposes. In groundwater that could be part of an aquifer, for surface water it could be part of a stream, river, estuary or stretch of coastline. A map of the 46 catchment units is available [here](#).

Table 1: Breakdown and number of waterbody types

Waterbody type	No. of waterbodies
River	3,192
Canal	16
Lake	812
Coastal	112
Transitional	196
Groundwater	514
Total	4,842

Water quality in Ireland

Water quality monitoring is carried out by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Water quality is assessed against the standards and environmental objectives set out by the EU Water Framework Directive. Surface waters are assessed in terms of their ecological status and groundwater is assessed in terms of chemical status. (Figure 1)

Further details are available at www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring-assessment/freshwater-marine/water-quality-in-ireland-2013-2018.php

2013-2018 WFD Surface Waters Ecological Status

- High
- Good
- Moderate
- Poor
- Bad

0 25 50 100 Km

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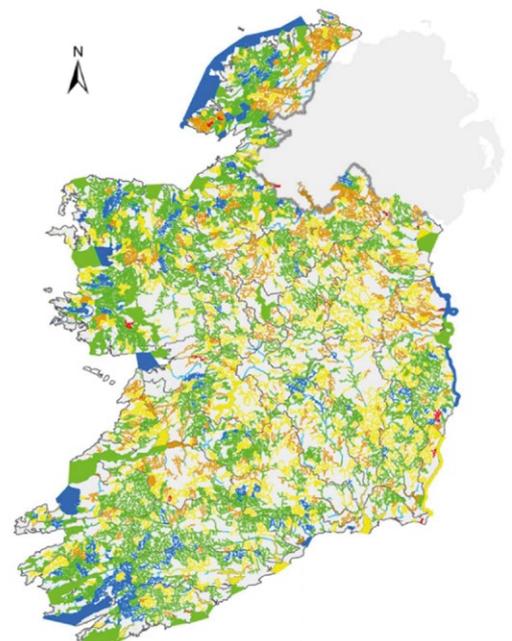


Figure 1. A map showing distribution of water quality in Ireland also available [here](#).

Characterising water quality

Ireland manages its rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal areas using an approach known as *integrated catchment management*. A catchment is the entire area of land that drains into a particular river, lake, groundwater or coastal waterbody. Using integrated catchment approaches means that catchments, sub-catchments and water bodies are examined

from the source to sea to identify the pressure on water quality along the whole course of the waterbody. All water uses are examined such as agriculture, industry, recreation, drinking water resources. It also aims to work with local communities so that local knowledge can be integrated and that communities are engaged in protecting their local waterways.



Figure 2. Water bodies not meeting WFD objectives need restoration and not at risk water bodies need protection.

The significant pressures impacting the status of water bodies and measures proposed to address these pressures

Agriculture is a major pressure on water quality. Incorrect use of fertiliser (nitrogen and phosphorous) can result in excess nutrients entering river courses, lakes and coastal areas polluting the ecosystem. Measures to reduce the use of fertilisers and provide buffers to absorb some of the excess nutrients are needed to protect water.

Hydromorphology pressures result from improper drainage or changes to the physical character of the waterway such as straightening or deepening rivers. This impacts on the habitats available to plants and animals. Measures to reduce hydro-morphological pressures include reducing land drainage and river channel disturbances and rewetting peat and organic soil.

Forestry alters habitats and can result in nutrient and sediment impacts. Measures to reduce the pressures from forestry include improved licencing for forestry

activities, more appropriate setbacks from water courses and native woodland creation.

Urban wastewater is the most significant pressure in 208 water bodies and while improvements have been noted in recent years, significant more work is needed.

To find out more about the draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 see: www.gov.ie – [Public Consultation on the draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

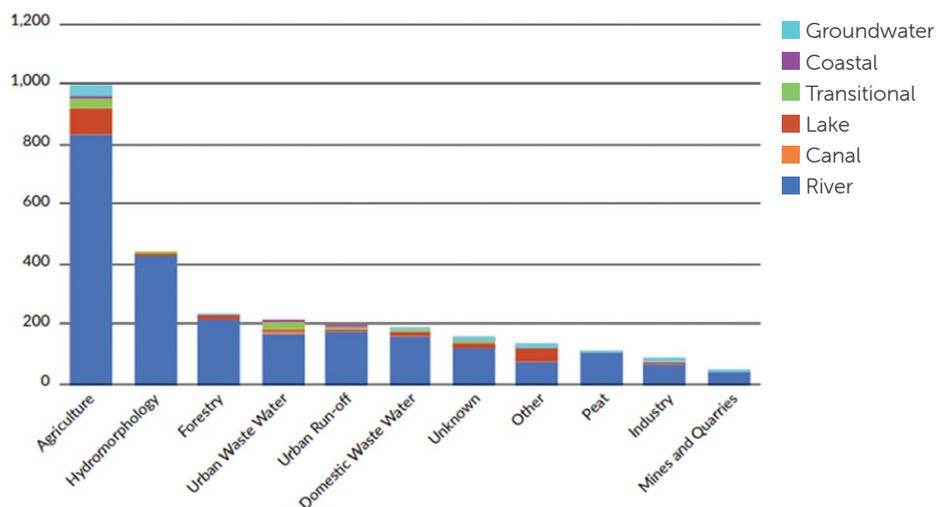


Figure 3. Pressures on water quality.