



Significant Water Management Issues in Ireland

Public Consultation



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

Water is essential for life. Humans need it for drinking and food preparation. It is vital to our natural environment, supporting plants and animals. Water is critical to our economy, generating and sustaining wealth through activities such as agriculture, commercial fishing, power generation, industry, services, transport and tourism. However, water is a fragile resource that needs to be protected.

Many of our waters are still healthy and the first challenge is to maintain the good water quality that we have. Unfortunately, there are also many cases of polluted waters and contaminated drinking waters. The challenge for Ireland is to restore such areas to their natural healthy state.

While the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government has a lead role under the EU Water Framework Directive, tackling these challenges requires collective action.

River Basin Management Plans (Plans) are used in all EU Member States to address these challenges in an integrated and holistic manner. The Plans look at the pressures on our water resources that are causing problems and set out actions to address them. Ireland is now preparing its second round of Plans which will be in place in 2017 and it is important to know what the critical pressures are for each water sector and what actions can be best delivered in the final Plans in order to address those pressures and the problems they give rise too.

While the making of these Plans requires a considerable amount of technical expertise, it also requires the knowledge, understanding and views of people who use water in their everyday lives. Therefore, whether you drink it, fish in it, feed cattle with it, swim in it, use it for business or just admire it as an environmental resource we want to hear from you.

Public Consultation

The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly T.D., has launched the second phase of public consultation on the second cycle of River Basin Management Planning in Ireland. The Minister wants to ensure that the most important issues are identified and addressed during the preparation of plans. In this context, the Minister is now seeking views on what are considered to be the significant water management issues for Ireland. This leaflet summarises the issues contained in the Consultation Document. The full text of the document is available on the Department's website at www.environ.ie.

The key questions that you are being asked your views on are:

- Do you agree that the issues facing Ireland's waters are correctly set out in this document?
- Are you aware of other issues that should be highlighted?
- What do you think are the most important issues to be addressed between now and 2021?
- How do you think the challenges identified should be tackled and what would you do first?

On each issue we are looking for your feedback on what we should do and how we can work together to achieve healthy, resilient, productive and valued water resources that support vibrant communities.

How to submit your view?

It is easy for you to let us know your views by:

- Emailing your views to waterq@environ.ie; and
- Sending a written response to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government at "WFD SWMI consultation, Water Quality Section, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Newtown Road, Wexford".



The final date for responses in respect of this consultation is 18 December 2015.

Current Condition of our Waters

Irish water quality is good in comparison with other European countries but, as can be seen from the table below, significant improvements are still necessary as we are not achieving all the standards that we should. Improving on the current situation will require significant work across society to ensure that we have a healthy and well protected water environment.

The data for 2010-2012 show that 47% of rivers, 57% of lakes, 55% of estuaries and 7% of coastal waters (by area) are in less than good condition. While just 1% of groundwater bodies are at poor chemical status there are still significant issues with bacterial contamination of groundwater. Pollution resulting from elevated nutrient concentrations continues to be the most widespread water quality problem in Ireland.

Status of Irish waters (2010-2012)	High	Good	Moderate	Poor	Bad
Groundwater (% area) (interim status)	n/a	99	n/a	1	n/a
Rivers (% water bodies)	11.5	41	29	17.5	1
Lakes (% water bodies)	9	34	33	15	9
Transitional (% area)	3.6	41.1	43.4	11.4	0.5
Coastal (% area)	63	30	4	1.5	1.5

Summary of Water Framework Directive Status 2010-2012¹

THE ISSUES: Pressures on our Water Environment

Urban Waste Water Discharges

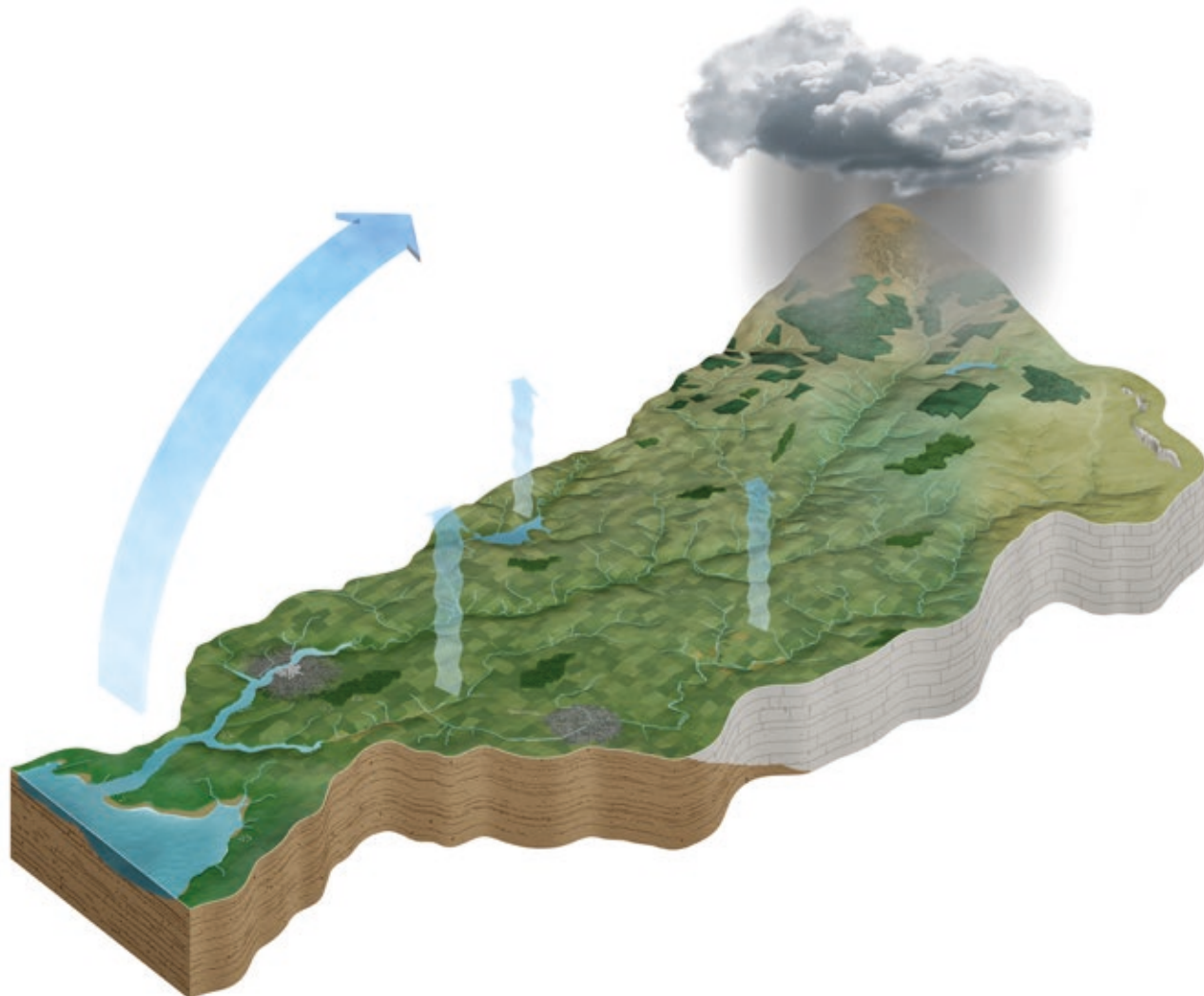
Inadequate collection and treatment of urban wastewater discharges places a significant pressure on the natural water environment. The urban waste water sector is a key potential source of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) and pathogens (disease causing organisms). Municipal discharges were the suspected cause of pollution at 34% of 840 impacted river sites assessed between 2010 and 2012.

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for 68% of land use in Ireland. The most significant impacts from agriculture are the release of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) and pathogens into waters. Agriculture can also give rise to sediments entering waters due to damage to river banks and lake shores. Agriculture is believed to be the cause of pollution in 53% of impacted river sites assessed between 2010 and 2012. Achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive in the context of increasing agricultural output under Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 will be a major challenge.

Agricultural activities are also the source of certain microbes causing human illnesses including those caused by cryptosporidium and e-coli bacteria.

¹ Water quality in Ireland (2010-2012), EPA



Forestry

Ireland currently has 10.7% forest cover and over 50% of this is conifer plantation forests. Conifer plantation forests are recognised as a potential source of diffuse pollution to water courses and represent a risk to the ecological integrity of running waters. Forestry pollution sources account for 4% and 3% respectively of the suspected cases of slight and moderate pollution in river monitoring sites based on monitoring between 2010 and 2012.

Homes and Gardens

Homes and gardens are sources of pressure on the water environment beyond those considered in urban wastewater discharges. According to the Central Statistics Office, on-site domestic waste water treatment systems collect, treat and discharge waste water from about one-third of all houses (500,000 households). If not managed and treated appropriately, domestic waste water may contaminate private and public water supplies, groundwater, and surface water, causing harm to human health and the environment. Ireland has an estimated 160,000 drinking water wells and springs, and protecting these from contamination is of high importance.

Industrial discharges

Significant industrial discharges are licenced by the EPA and local authorities. Data from monitoring between 2010 and 2012 indicates that industrial pollution is causing an issue at 5% of impacted river monitoring stations.

Activities spreading alien invasive species

Alien invasive species can cause impacts in the water environment, including destabilisation of river banks. They compete with local species and can displace them, thereby damaging natural aquatic ecosystems. Zebra mussel was recorded in 70 of the monitored lakes and 1 heavily modified lake waterbody between 2010-2012 compared to 50 known populations in the 2007-2009 period suggesting that the zebra mussel continues to spread despite public awareness and biosecurity campaigns. The movement of boats and their trailers, and of fishing gear from one water body to another, increases the risk of the spread of these species.

The Challenges

The challenges outlined in detail in the main consultation document can be summarised as follows:

River Basin Management Plans 2017-2021: Key challenges/issues	
Societal Factors	Environmental Factors
Affordability and Prioritisation	Pollution from Nutrient Enrichment
Public Engagement	Water and Health
Organisational Co-ordination	Fine Sediment
Co-ordination of Plan Implementation	Physical Changes
Land Use Planning and Water	Abstractions and Flows
Floods and Water	Hazardous Chemicals
Biodiversity Management and Water	Climate Change
	Invasive Alien Species
	Loss of High Status Waters

Managing our Water Resource

By the end of 2015 a national Local Authority Water Framework Office will be in place. This Office will have 3 regional co-ordinators, 3 regional support officers and 12 community water officers. The role of this office is to promote community engagement, awareness and actions to enhance water quality at local level. It will work with local groups and industry to raise awareness of water quality issues in an area. The office will also assist the EPA in the monitoring of the implementation of River Basin Management Plans and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in the development of the Plans and policy in relation to water quality.

What happens next?

Work on the preparation of river basin management plans is currently underway by the relevant authorities. Submissions received in response to this consultation will be taken into account in the preparation of these plans. In addition:

- Draft river basin management plans will be published towards the end of 2016, and you will have a further opportunity to input and comment on these.
- After further consultation and consideration of all submissions received, final river basin management plans will be adopted by the Minister and published in 2017; those plans will run to 2021.

The plans will set out the environmental objectives (or goals) to be achieved to the end of 2021 together with actions (known as a programme of measures) that will ensure the environmental objectives are delivered in practice. The programme will include both basic and supplementary measures. For more information please see the full consultation document available on the Department's website.

Remember to Respond: We need your input

So just to recap, the Minister wants you to have your say. We would like you to consider the following:

- Do you agree that the issues facing Ireland's waters are correctly set out in this document?
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Your submissions are subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

The final date for responses in respect of this consultation is 18 December 2015.

