

Newsletter

An Fóram Uisce – looking after Ireland's water resources



Issue 10 / Winter 2022



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Final River Basin Management Plan for 2022-2027 is still in preparation

The Water Forum made its submission to the draft RBMP 2022-2027 in March 2022, following 6 months of engagements and meetings with key agencies, academics and with Department Officials.

The Forum used the latest science and expert knowledge as a basis to inform debate and discussions and to achieve an agreed position on the priority actions and outcomes of the third RBMP cycle amongst all of the stakeholders represented in the membership.

In October, the EPA published its Water Quality Report for 2016-2021, covering the 2nd RBMP cycle. The results show a 1% decline in the number of monitored rivers in satisfactory condition; a 2.7% decline in the number of monitored lakes in satisfactory condition, 15.7%

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and 9.5% declines recorded in estuaries and coastal waters respectively, and a further 0.8% decline is recorded in groundwaters. It is therefore very clear we are failing to protect our water resources in Ireland and in just a few short years considerable damage is being done, primarily in our south and south-eastern coastal areas.

The Forum would like to recognise that considerable progress has been made in the 2nd RBMP cycle with improvements in the scientific knowledge of catchments, the availability of pollution impact potential maps, the identification of critical source areas within catchments and the available data on the pressures impacting on waterbodies. There has been improved knowledge sharing and collaborations between agencies, and the ASSAP programme is a very positive step towards engaging with farmers. However, this work has not yet recorded real outcomes being achieved for water quality.

Right measure in the right place – outcomes for every waterbody

The Forum is of the view that the 3rd RBMP should build on the knowledge developed in the second cycle to accelerate the identification and delivery of the right measures in the right places. To achieve this the Water Forum recommends that catchment plans start with the waterbody, the management unit of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), to identify targeted measures in each for protection or restoration action. This does not mean that measures are not to be

considered and implemented at higher levels of sub-catchment, catchment and nationally, but the start and end point to identify and implement measures, track and monitor progress must be at waterbody level.

Without a focus on waterbodies, there is the risk of a continuation of the trend of recent years, where hard-won improvements were off set by deteriorations elsewhere. The Forum acknowledges that many of these

Waterbody status

The EPA Catchments Unit provide information on the ecological status of waterbodies in Ireland on www.catchments.ie. The steps below are a quick guide on how to access this information.

- 1 Select Maps on catchments.ie, this brings you to EPA maps (Figure 1)
- 2 Select Status & Risk and in the dropdown menu, select Status 2016-2021, highlight the the waterbody of interest (rivers and lakes are shown below)
- 3 Use the + to zoom in (bottom right corner) and cursor to move around the map to find the catchment/waterbody you are interested in.

Blue coloured waterbodies are at high ecological status and green is good status, these waterbodies are reaching the objectives of the WFD and need to be protected. The yellow, brown and red coloured waterbodies are slightly polluted, polluted and badly polluted and these need to be restored to meet the requirements of the RBMP and the WFD. Approximately one quarter of waterbodies are in review which means more assessments are required to identify their status and these may be coloured grey.

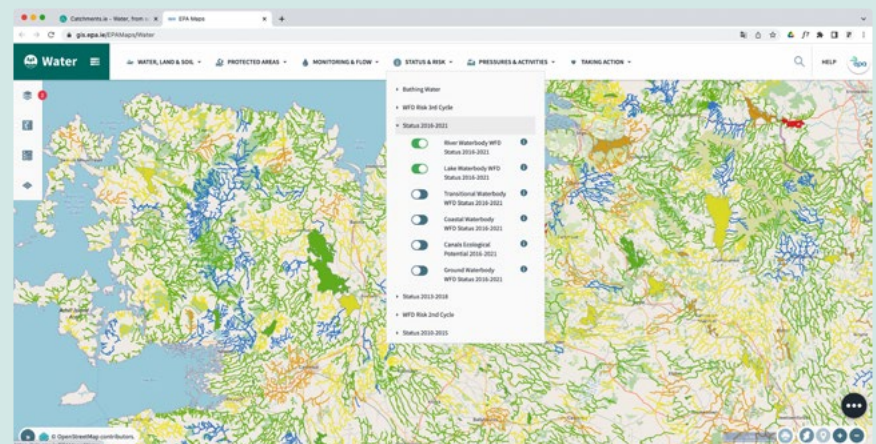
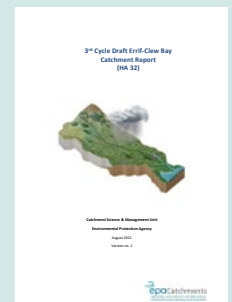


Figure 1: Information on waterbody status is available on www.catchments.ie

There is further detailed information available on all of the 46 catchment areas in the country and this can be accessed by selecting: DATA on the drop-down menu in www.catchments.ie and selecting your catchment of interest. This will give a short description of the catchment and a link to a downloadable PFD that includes information on all of the waterbodies within that catchment, their current status and the pressures acting upon them. These Catchment Assessment Reports are available for all 46 catchment areas.



landscape and targeted measures will be focused on significant issues and specific pressures and will be estimated based on EPA modelling. Nevertheless, even this potentially broad-brush approach will provide a general view of what is required to put the right measures in the right places and, in addition, it will identify gaps where they exist at waterbody level.

Governance

The Forum believes it is **absolutely critical** for the success of the 3rd cycle, that there is transparency in roles and responsibilities in the final Plan, along with accountability and realistic expectations. In line with recommendations made by the Institute of Public Administration¹, the Forum

recommends establishing a full-time project management secretariat, to ensure successful implementation and monitoring of the Plan and support the required engagement and cooperation between the different tiers of governance. It would also ensure there is continuous engagement within and between government departments to support policy coherence and alignment with national and EU policies.

The Forum recommends that the RBMP provides a clear outline for the role and responsibilities of local authority staff, outlining the number of waterbodies they will have responsibility for either protecting or restoring. This is essential to ensure that Local Authorities, including

LAWPRO, have sufficient staff to develop the objectives of the 46 catchment plans, to carry out the required catchment assessments and relevant environmental inspections to deliver outcomes.

The Forum recommends that every Local Authority is given the resources to appoint a Water Framework Directive Officer who can co-ordinate the implementation of the RBMP and strengthen alignment between Local Authority work programmes and the WFD objectives, while also considering multiple benefits for biodiversity and climate mitigation, and identifying trade-offs where necessary.

Public participation

The Forum has recommended the development of a new national approach for meaningful public engagement in the 46 catchment areas during the 3rd RBMP cycle. The proposal to pilot public participation approaches in five catchments will inform future action to deliver meaningful engagement but these need to be adequately evaluated to ensure learnings are achieved. The proposed catchment fora should include membership from a wide spectrum, reflecting society as this will provide a wider reach and greater community connections.

The initial actions should focus on raising awareness within communities of the value of, and threats to, water resources in the catchment. Building capacity and working towards collaborative action for water quality outcomes should be the ultimate objective of these fora. To achieve significant water quality outcomes at waterbody level, there needs to be a commitment in the RBMP to put structures in place that will support catchment action planning and project co-creation with communities and landowners for a combined (top down and bottom up) approach to catchment management.



1 Water Governance in Ireland: Towards the Third-Cycle River Basin Management Plan, 2022-2027 (www.ipa.ie)

Policy

Irish Water becomes Uisce Éireann

On the 20th December 2022, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien and Irish Water signed the orders to commence the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2022. The commencement of the orders means that Irish Water will become Uisce Éireann from the 31st December and a standalone regulated public water utility on 1 January 2023.

At the signing, the Minister stated *'The enactment and commencement of the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2022 gives effect to the Programme for Government commitment to retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility'*.

In becoming the standalone national authority for water services, Uisce Éireann is separated from its parent, Ervia. New shared ownership arrangements mean that shares in Uisce Éireann are solely held by both the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. These changes along with the recent publication of the 'Framework for the Future Delivery of Water Services', will provide for the full integration of water services on a national basis and aims to ensure that the benefits of the ongoing investment of over €1 billion a year in public water systems are maximised.

Niall Gleeson, the CEO of Uisce Éireann, stated that *'we will deliver public water and wastewater infrastructure and service to a high standard across the country. This will ensure that every citizen has consistent access to clean drinking water and that wastewater is treated and discharged safely. Irish Water's vision is the delivery of a world class public water utility focussed on customer needs, efficient water services,*



and supporting housing, economic development, and job creation across the country'.

Uisce Éireann will be governed by a new non-executive Board appointed by the Minister, with 10 directors, chaired by Tony Keohane, to take effect on 1 January 2023, subject to the commencement of the relevant provisions of the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2022.

New accountability and auditing arrangements are being put in place for Uisce Éireann, whereby the utility will be subject to a dual audit by both the Comptroller and Auditor General and its commercial statutory auditor under the Companies Acts, Uisce Éireann will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee.

The Water Forum has a statutory role in advising on the performance of Uisce Éireann in its functions and would like to take this opportunity to wish Uisce Éireann every success with the new structures.

Water Advisory Body

The change in status of Uisce Éireann has resulted in the disbandment of the Water Advisory Body (WAB). The WAB's role was primarily to:

1. to advise the Minister on the measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water for the purpose of increasing the confidence of members of the public in Irish Water;
2. to furnish, on a quarterly basis, a report on the performance by Irish Water in the implementation of its business plan with particular regard to the following:
 - (i) infrastructure delivery and leakage reductions
 - (ii) cost reduction and efficiency improvements
 - (iii) improvements in water quality, including the elimination of boil water notices
 - (iv) procurement, remuneration and staffing policies
 - (v) responsiveness to the needs of communities and enterprise.

The Water Forum would like to take this opportunity to commend the WAB on their contribution to water services over the past 4 years, and while the Water Forum does not have the capacity to carry out the functions of the WAB it is committed to continuing their good work by encouraging transparency and accountability of Uisce Éireann for the purpose of increasing the confidence of members of the public in the utility.

Research

Two research projects are currently under way exploring the Future Potential Impact of Climate Change on Water Quality and the Future Potential Impact of Climate Change on Water Quantity. We will have further information on these in our next Newsletter.



Education and Awareness

Science Week 2022

For Science Week 2022 13th – 20th November the Water Forum prepared a podcast on the Impact of climate change on water quality and quantity in Ireland. The Forum's research lead Dr Triona McGrath spoke with Dr Fiachra

O'Loughlin from University College Dublin and Dr Michelle McLoughlin from University College Cork about how prepared Ireland is to address the issues we are likely to face with future climate change impacts on water resources. The podcast lasts about 20 minutes

and contains an introduction from Professor Conor Murphy of the ICARUS in Maynooth University.

[Link to podcast](#)

World Wetlands Day

World Wetlands Day is 2nd February. 2023's theme highlights the urgent need to prioritize wetland restoration and calls on an entire generation to take steps to revive and restore degraded wetlands. Wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests, and more than 35% of wetlands have been degraded or lost since 1970. Reversing this trend is critical. Wexford County Council and Coastwatch are hosting an exhibition and workshop on 2nd February in Wexford County Hall. Register for free at [Eventbrite](#).



Water Conservation Education and Awareness Workshop

The Water Forum is currently planning a workshop to consider what is required to deliver education and awareness to improve domestic water conservation in Ireland. The workshop aims to contribute to the development of a National Framework for Domestic Water Conservation and will consider how to support the bottom-up understanding of water and link this to the National Curriculum. Dr Sarah Cotterill's research recommendations for improving domestic water conservation identified a need for more widespread understanding of the processes that underpin water treatment and supply, the energy and resources required to produce drinking water and how much we, as individuals, use. We also aim to explore increasing awareness of the multiple benefits of water conservation in contributing to Net Zero carbon targets, Housing for All/Project Ireland 2040 and reducing wastewater flows. More information will be available on this workshop on our website in the coming weeks.

Water Forum Award won by students from Coláiste Treasa, Kanturk at the BT Young Scientist Competition

The Water Forum would like to congratulate students Eve O'Driscoll and Susannah Guerin and their teacher Brid Ann O'Donoghue from Coláiste Treasa, Kanturk, Co. Cork on winning the Water Forum sponsored award at the BT Young Scientist Competition. Their project investigated *"The Effectiveness of Constructed Farmlands Sediment Ponds in Promoting Biodiversity as Indicated by the Presence of Water Beetles as Bioindicators"*. The students monitored 13 constructed farmland ponds (sediment and biodiversity ponds) for beetle populations and diversity, and plant diversity. Nationally beetle populations are in decline with a third of water beetle species, *Coleoptera*, listed on the Red List for protection. While the ponds were placed on farms to capture nutrients and sediment and thus protect the local river, this research shows that

the ponds are also very suitable habitats for beetles with different species populations being recorded. Plant species diversity of the ponds was also monitored.

The project showed the benefits of schools engaging with local communities as the student's research was supported by the local Development Company, IRD Duhallow and the Blue Dot Catchment programme which is a government-led initiative to protect high status water bodies and bring waterbodies with that potential to high status.

In total, over 1,700 projects were submitted for assessment to participate in the competition, 550 made it through to the RDS and while there was only a small number of winners the standard

of research and presentations was very high. Dr Matt Crowe, Chair of the Water Forum, presented the award to Eve and Susannah.

The Water Forum aims to continue to support a Water Award at the competition, and hope to see many more water-related projects in the future as students have welcome capacity to contribute to innovative solutions to support action to protect and restore our water resources and nature.

At the event the Water Forum shared a [Learn about water](#) resource with teachers, 5 easy lessons that covers topics such as the water cycle, river catchments, ecological status and water services.



Dr Matt Crowe, Chair of the Water Forum, presents the BT Young Scientist Special Water Award to students Eve O'Driscoll and Susannah Guerin from Coláiste Treasa, Kanturk.



"The Water Forum aims to continue to support a Water Award at the competition, and hope to see many more water-related projects in the future as students have welcome capacity to contribute to innovative solutions to support action to protect and restore our water resources and nature."