Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Gníomhaireacht Comhshaoil Thuaisceart Éireann
Norlin Airlan Environment Agency
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Significant Water Management Issues 2025

Easy Read Version

An Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Gníomhaireacht de chuid na Roinne Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

An Agency wi'in the Depairtment o Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

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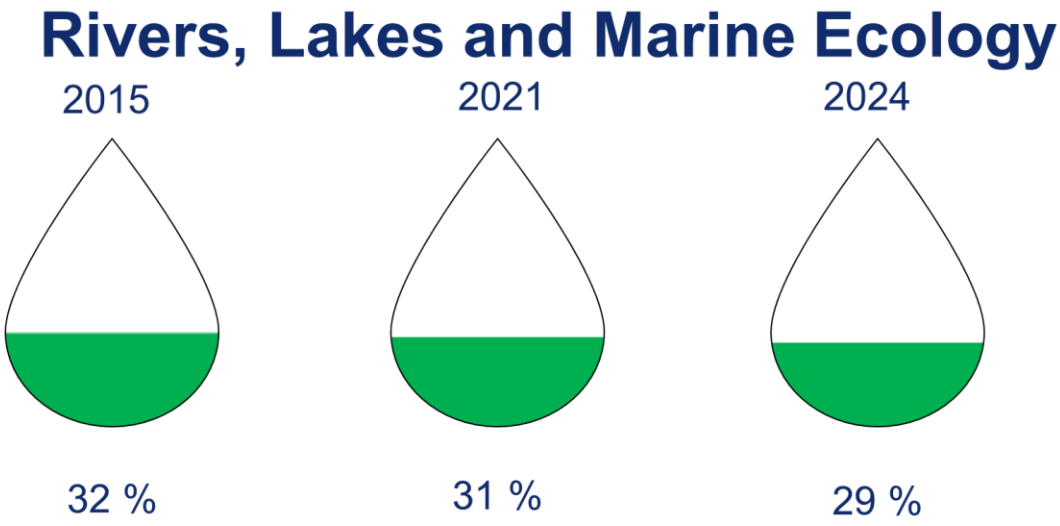
Water In Northern Ireland

- This report explains why water quality is important, what problems we found, and what needs to be done.
- The environment is very important to all of us. We are all part of nature. Clean air and good water are important for our lives and health.
- Clean water is important for farming and industry as well as tourism and leisure.
- When we talk about ‘water’ we mean all of the water underground and in rivers, lakes and the sea. All of this water is managed together. This is called a ‘catchment-based approach’.
- We look at ecology, chemistry and how much water we have. Ecology studies how living things use natural resources like air, soil and water to stay alive.
- Water is protected through the development of a catchment management plan. This is called a River Basin Management Plan.
- The law requires us to update the River Basin Management Plan every 6 years. The current Plan covers the years 2021-2027.
- We have started to prepare the River Basin Management Plan for 2028-2033.
- This Significant Water Management Issues report helps us understand what makes our water unhealthy.
- It also helps us understand what needs to be done to improve our water and keep it clean.

Is our water healthy?

- Our water quality is still getting worse, which means more action is needed to improve it.
- Currently, 29 % of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters have good ecology. ‘Good ecology’ means the water is healthy for things to live in it.
- This is a drop from 2021, when 31 % had good ecology.
- In 2015, 32 % had good ecology.

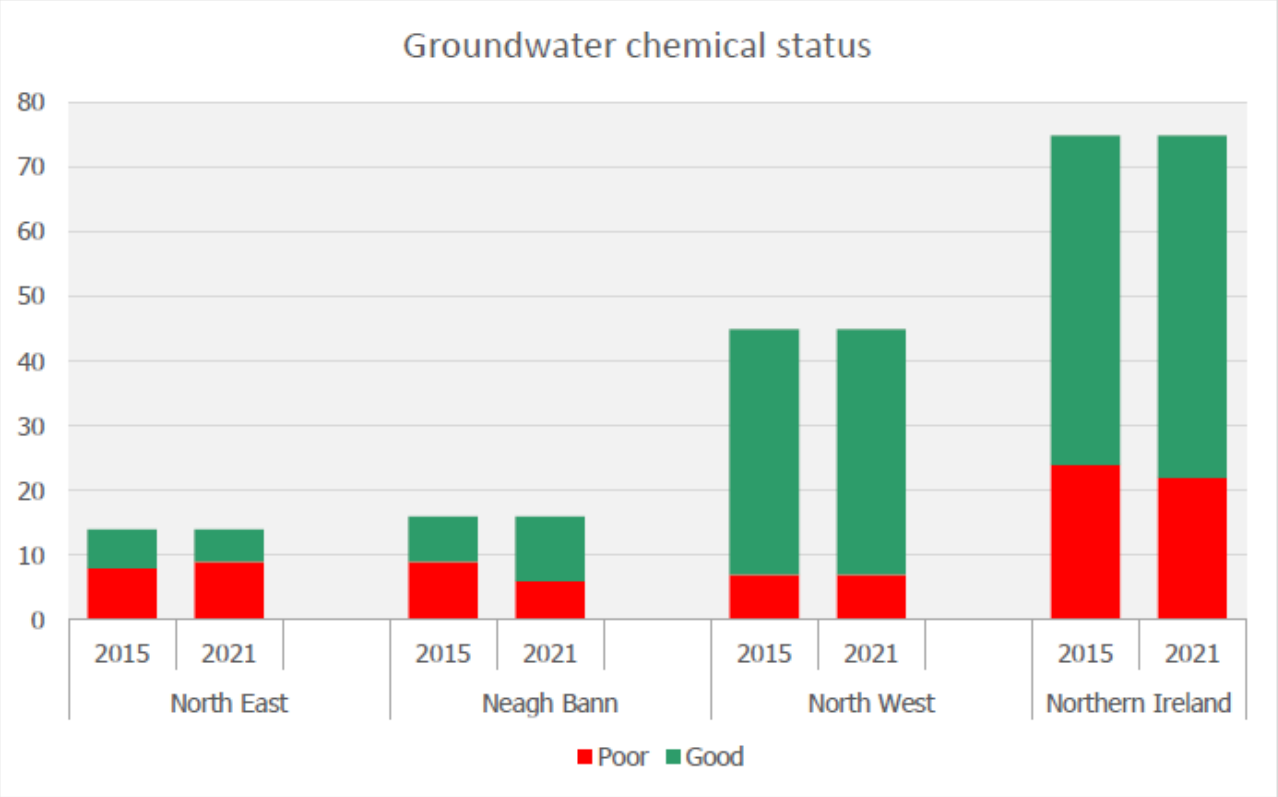
Figure 1 Percentage of good (healthy) waterbodies in Northern Ireland



Groundwater looks like it is getting better but this is due to changes in the monitoring sites (where the samples are collected).

The number of groundwater bodies at good chemical status improved slightly from 51 (68 %) in 2015 to 53 (71 %) 2021.

Figure 2 Number of good (healthy) groundwater bodies in Northern Ireland



How did we study the problems?

To understand why water quality is getting worse, we studied the problems using a process called DPSIR to understand how human activities affect the environment. It breaks down environmental problems in 5 steps:

- **Driving forces or Drivers** (human activities)
- **Pressures** (pollution, land use)
- **State** (current water quality)
- **Impacts** (harm to nature and people)
- **Responses** (what actions are needed)

Figure 3 Illustration of DPSIR process

What are the main pressures impacting our water?

- Agriculture
- Septic tanks
- Urban wastewater
- Hydromorphology
- Other pressures

- Agriculture is very important in Northern Ireland and provides food and jobs.
- A lot of water is used in agriculture and to produce food and drinks. Agricultural and factory waste can cause problems for the health of our rivers and lakes.
- New houses and businesses require clean water, and dirty water needs to be taken away. This means more water is needed and more wastewater (dirty water) is produced as more houses are built.
- An invasive species is a living thing that spreads through an ecosystem where it did not exist before. Invasive species can threaten the plants and animals that originally made up the ecosystem.

What happens next?

We want everyone to take part in helping us to improve our water bodies.

You can get involved by answering our questions and giving us your views.

- You can see the questions here https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-12/Significant%20Water%20Management%20Issues%20%28SWMI%29%20report%202025%20-%20Consultation%20Document.PDF#page=25

- You can reply online https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/significant-water-management-issues
- Or you can send your replies by email catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk
- Or you can write to

  Integrated Catchment Planning

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  17 Antrim Road

  Tonagh

  Lisburn

  BT28 3AL

We will use the answers to these questions to help us to develop a plan of action. More information on this will be available in 2026.

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For further information:

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