

# Environment Services Training Group

LOCAL AUTHORITY CONFERENCE

2024

## Water Action Plan 2024: River Basin Management Plan in the Context of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle

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Local Government and Heritage



LOCAL AUTHORITY  
Climate Action  
Training Programme



Local Authority  
Waters  
Programme  
vibrant communities | catchment assessment | healthy waters

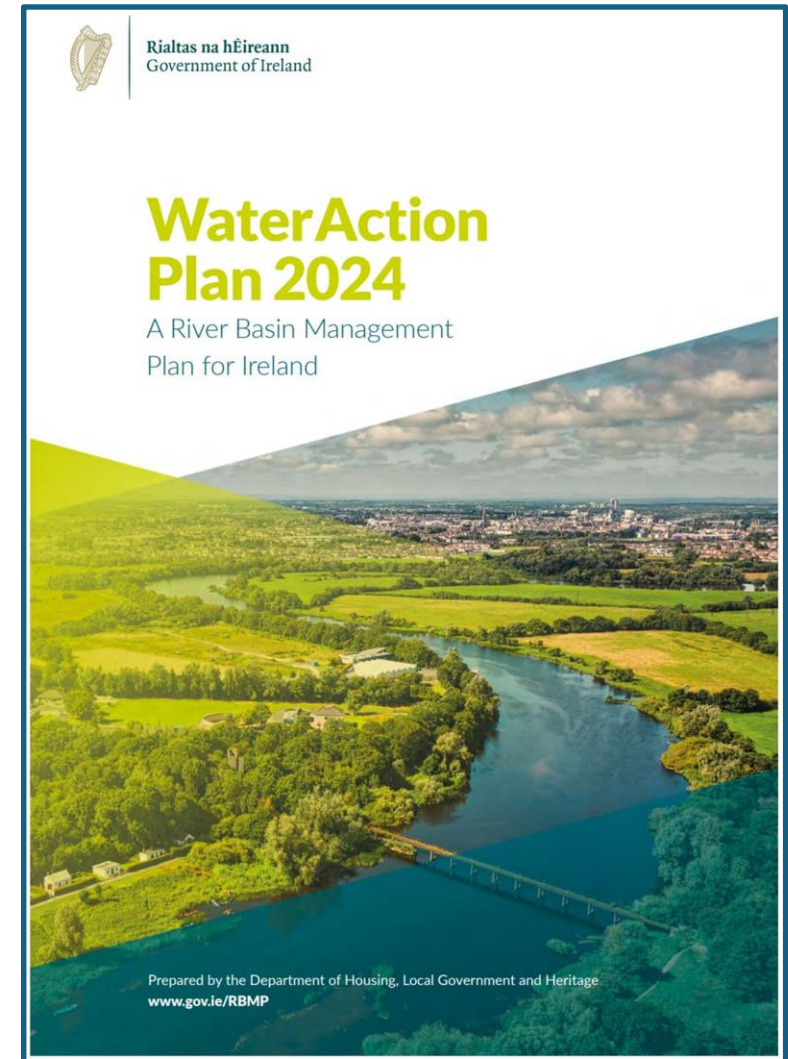
CCMA  
Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach  
County and City Management Association

epa  
Environmental Protection Agency  
An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhú Comhshaoil

# Water Action Plan 2024 - Introduction

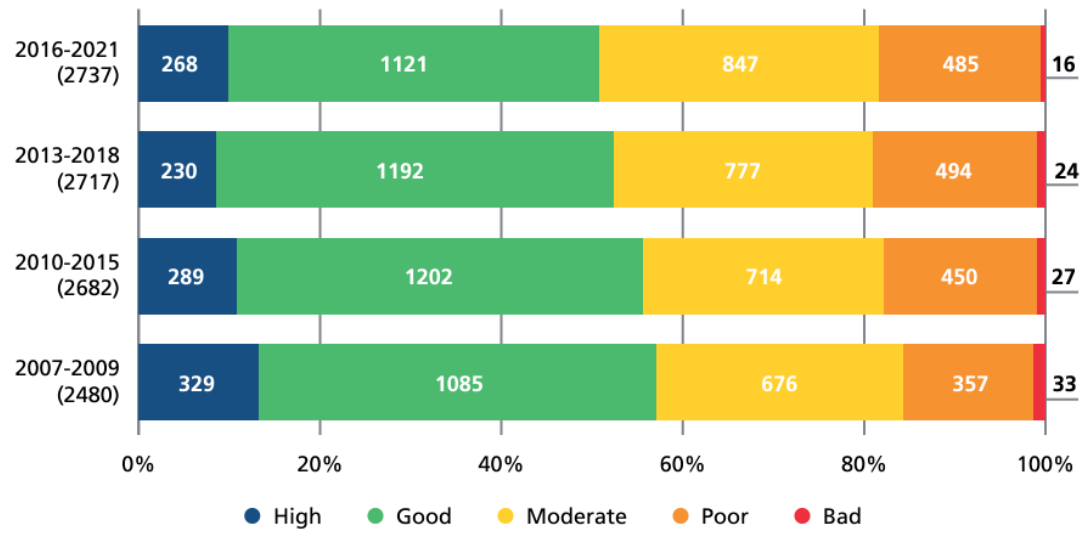
Launched September 2024

- Government commitment to protecting & restoring Ireland's natural waters by complying with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive
- Accelerate the identification and implementation of the **right measures in the right places** to both restore and protect all water bodies



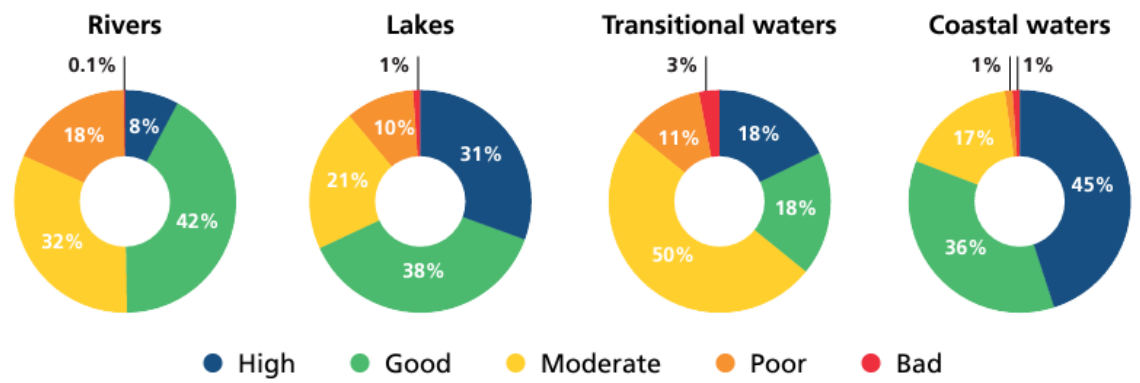
# Water Framework Directive: Status

**Figure 8.6** Ecological status of monitored surface water bodies (including rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters) in each of the main assessment periods, from the first assessment in 2007–2009 to the most recent assessment period (2016–2021)



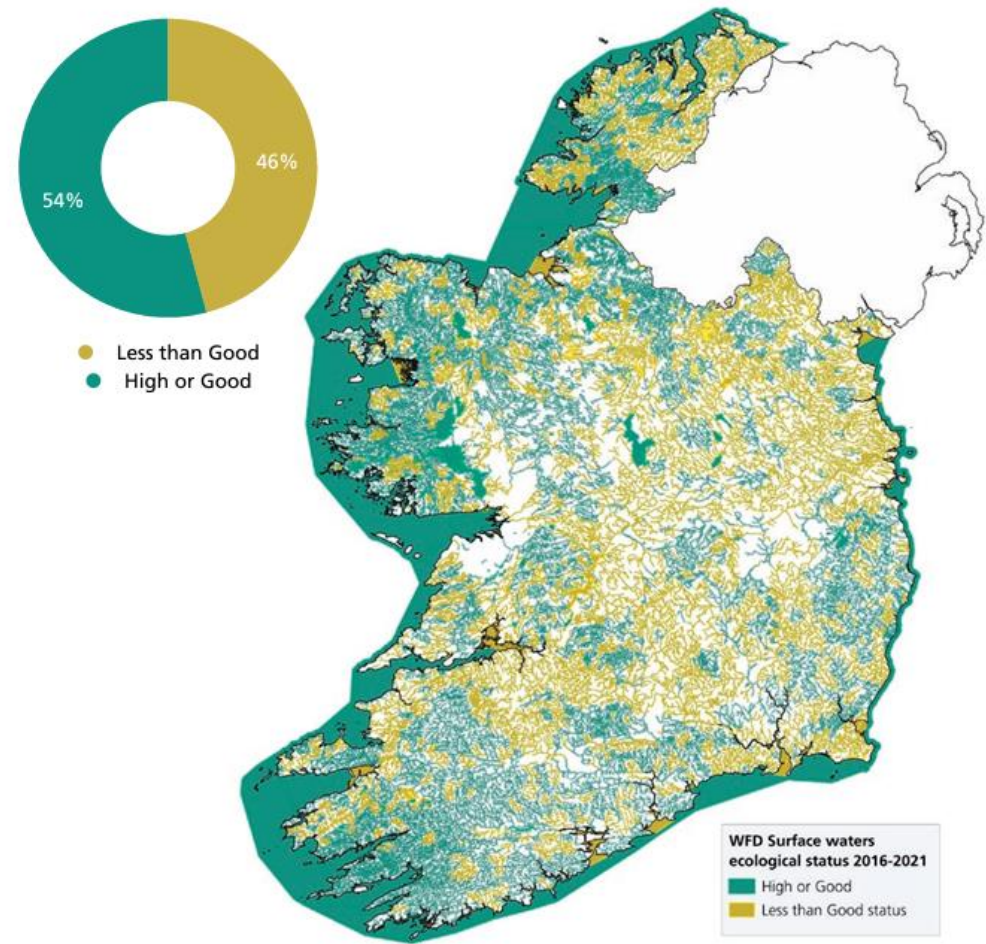
Source: EPA, 2022

**Figure 8.3** Percentage of waters in each ecological status by surface water body category, 2016–2021



Source: EPA, 2022

**Figure 8.2** Surface water ecological status, 2016–2021



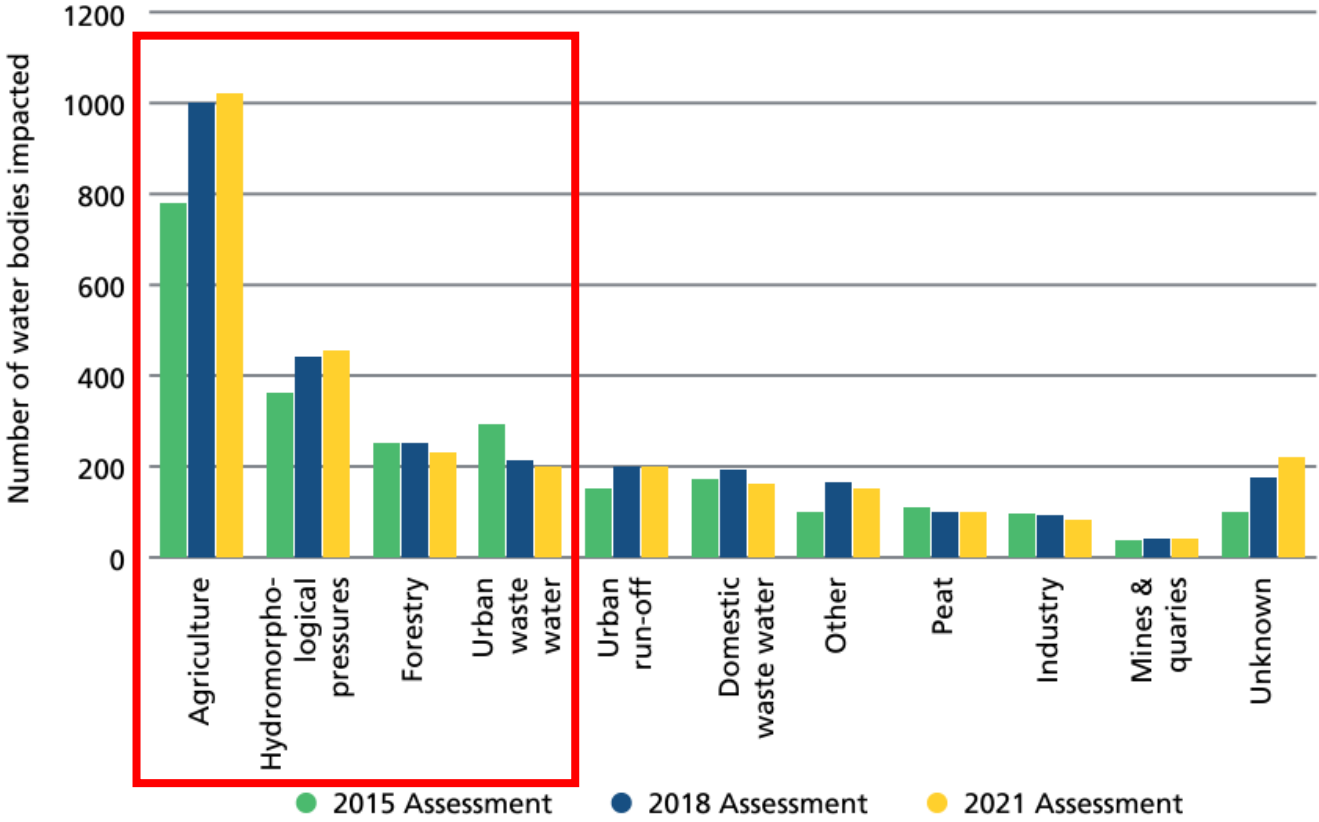
Source: EPA, 2022

**EPA State of the Environment Report 2024:** <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/state-of-environment-report/>



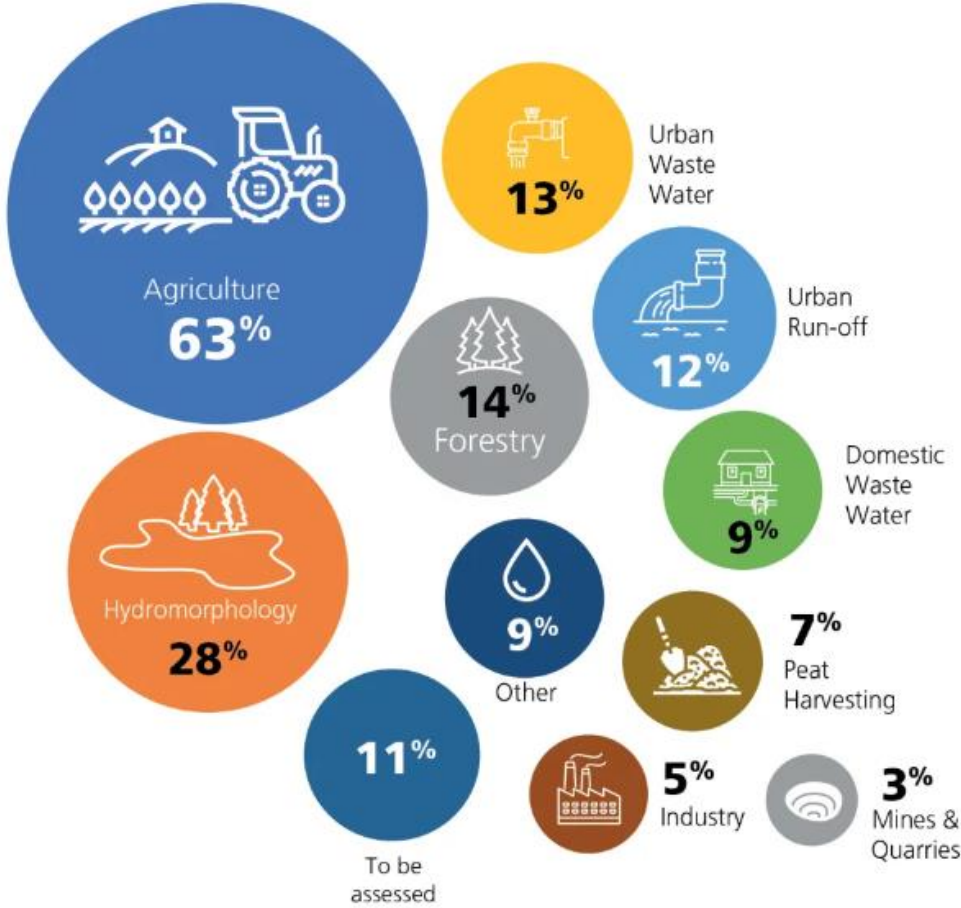
# Water Quality: Significant Pressures

**Figure 8.7** Number of at-risk water bodies impacted by pressures affecting their ecological status in 2015, 2018 and 2021



Source: EPA, 2022

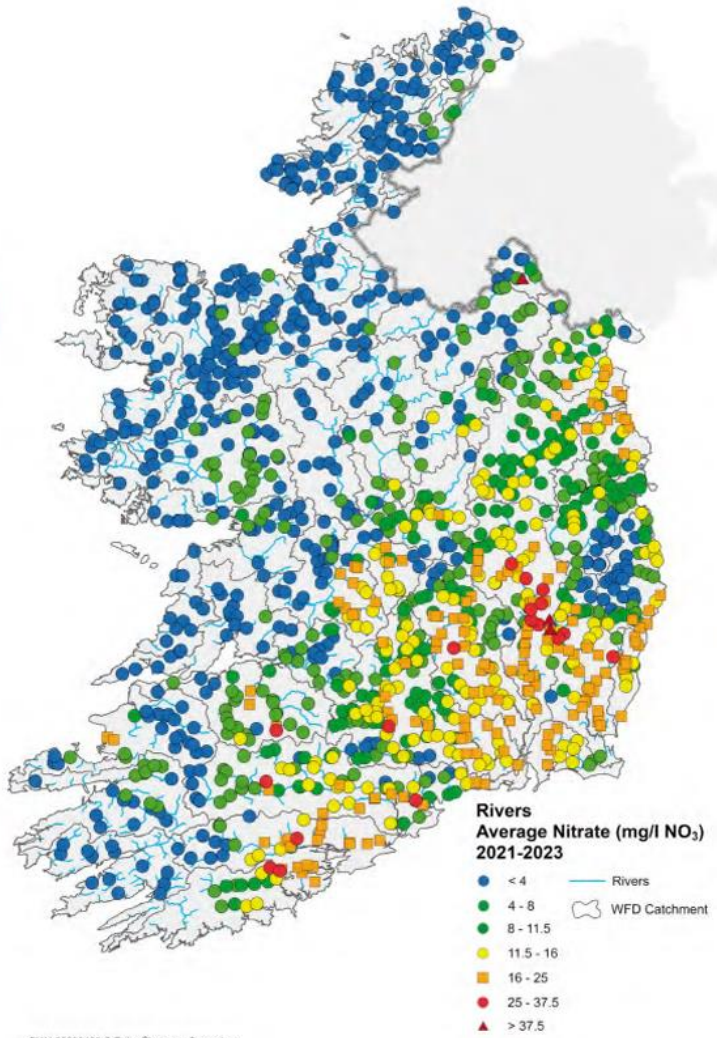
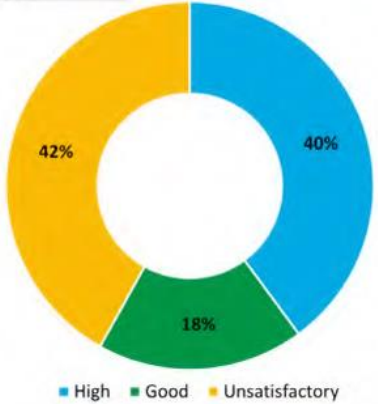
EPA State of the Environment Report 2024: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/state-of-environment-report/>



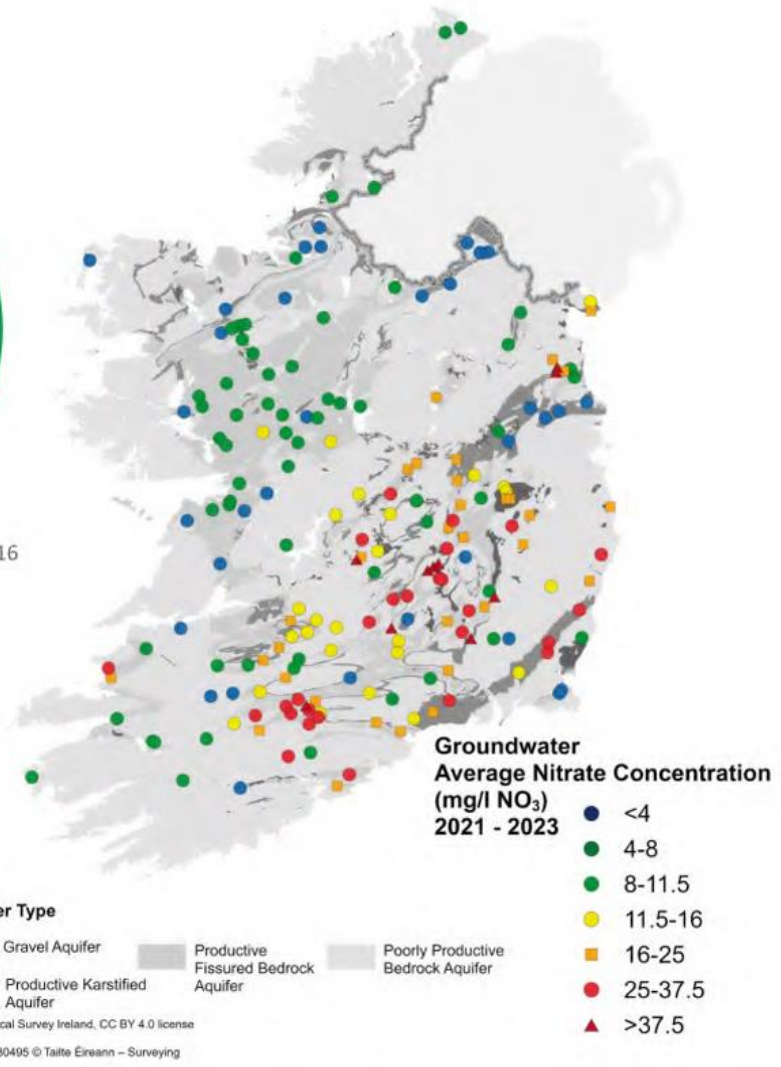
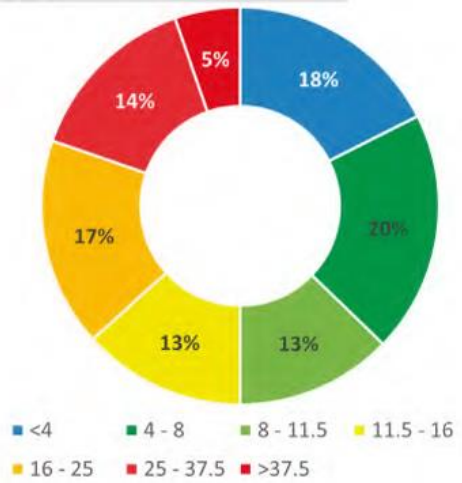
EPA Water Quality in Ireland Report 2016-2021  
[https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/freshwater--marine/WaterQuality\\_SummaryReport.pdf](https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/freshwater--marine/WaterQuality_SummaryReport.pdf)

# Agriculture: Nitrate

River Nitrate Quality National 2021 - 2023



Nitrate Concentration in Groundwater National 2021 - 2023



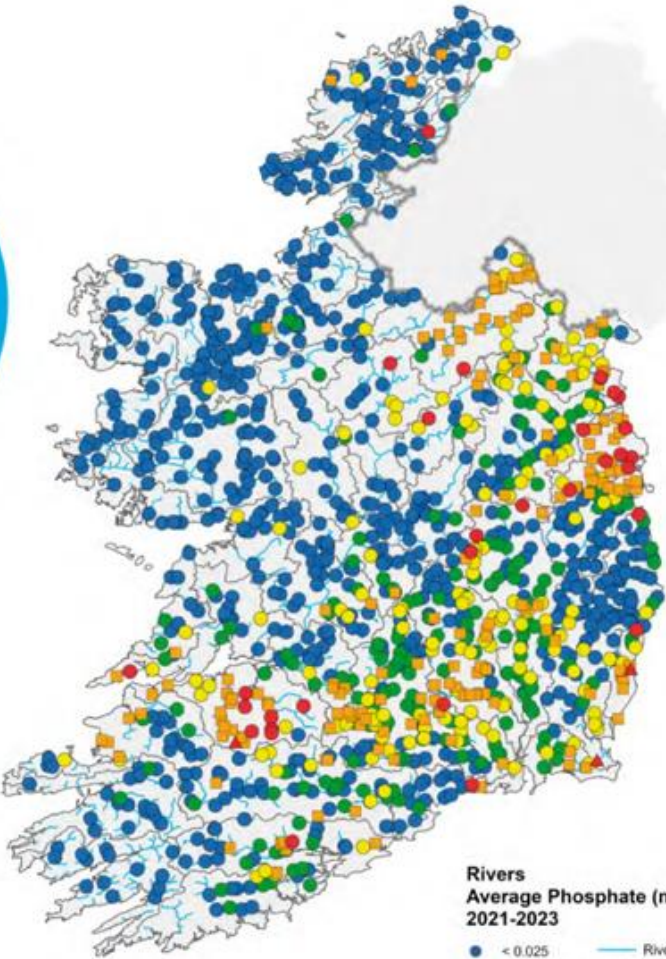
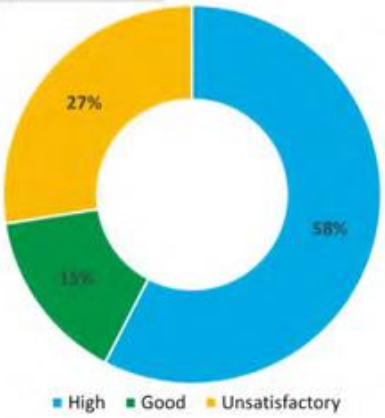
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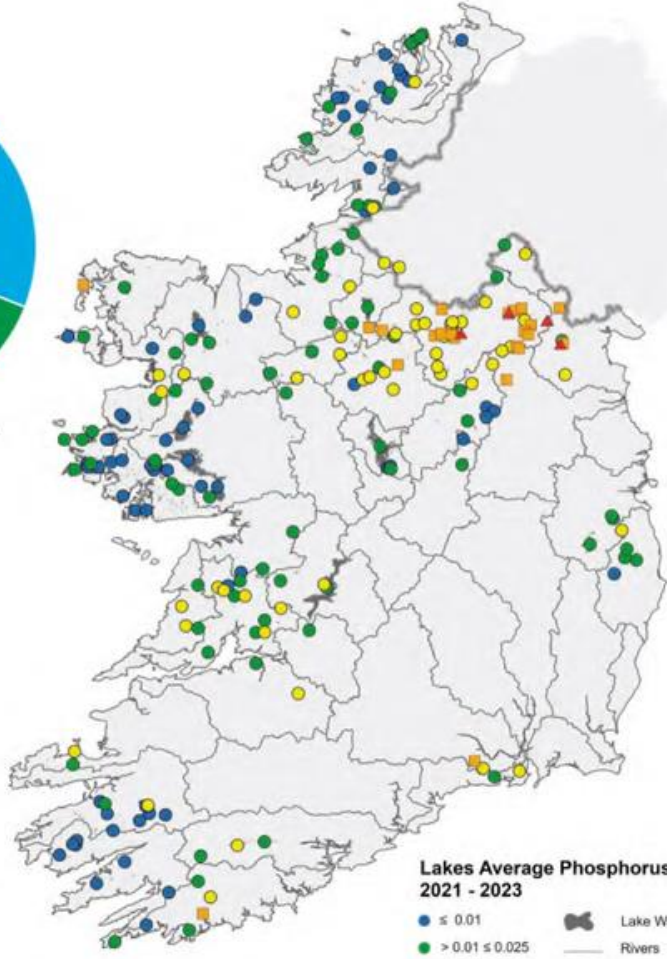
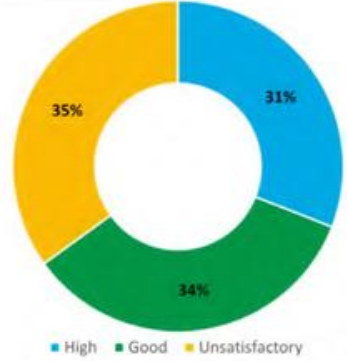
# Agriculture: Phosphate

River Phosphate Quality National 2021 - 2023



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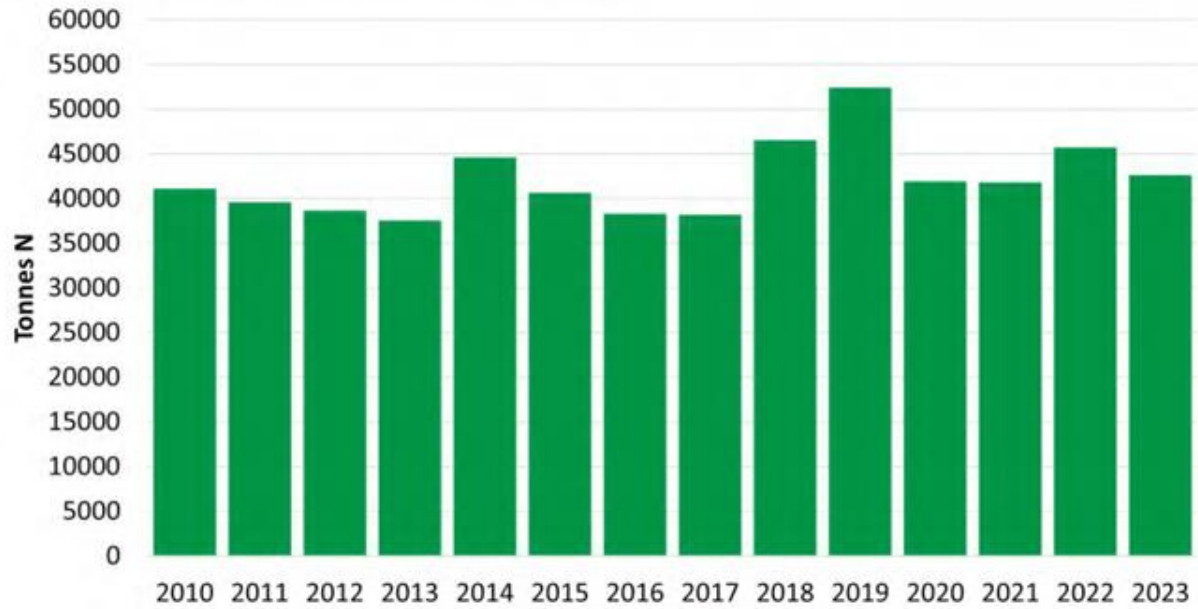
Lake Total Phosphorus Quality National 2021 - 2023



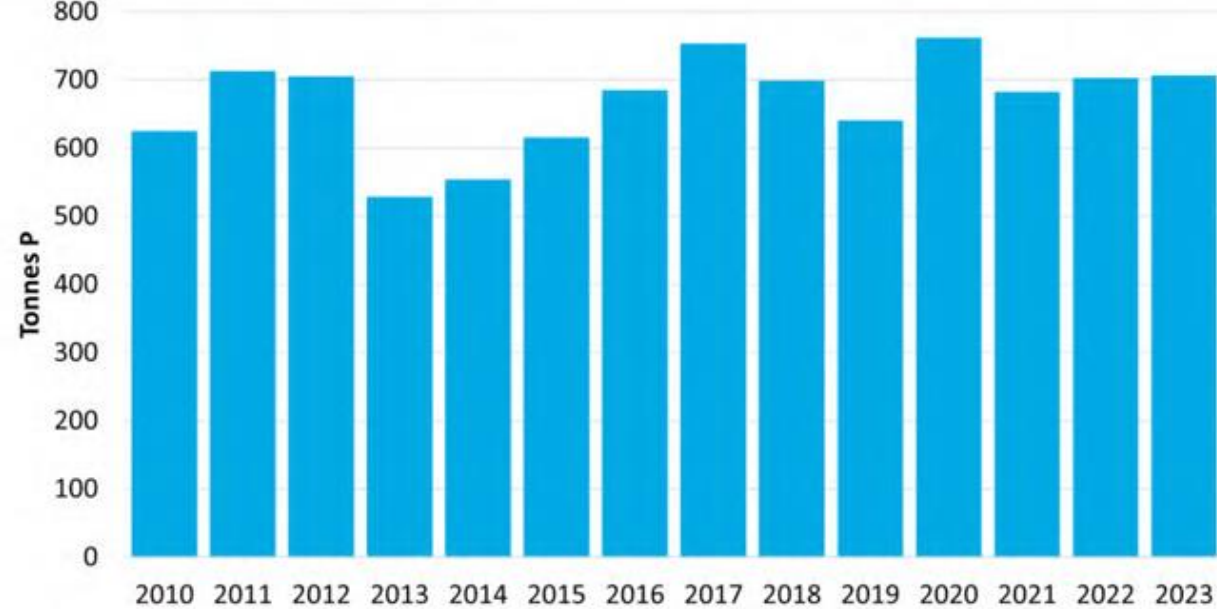
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# Agriculture: Coastal Water Bodies – Nitrate & Phosphate

**Normalised Total Oxidised Nitrogen (TON) Loads National**



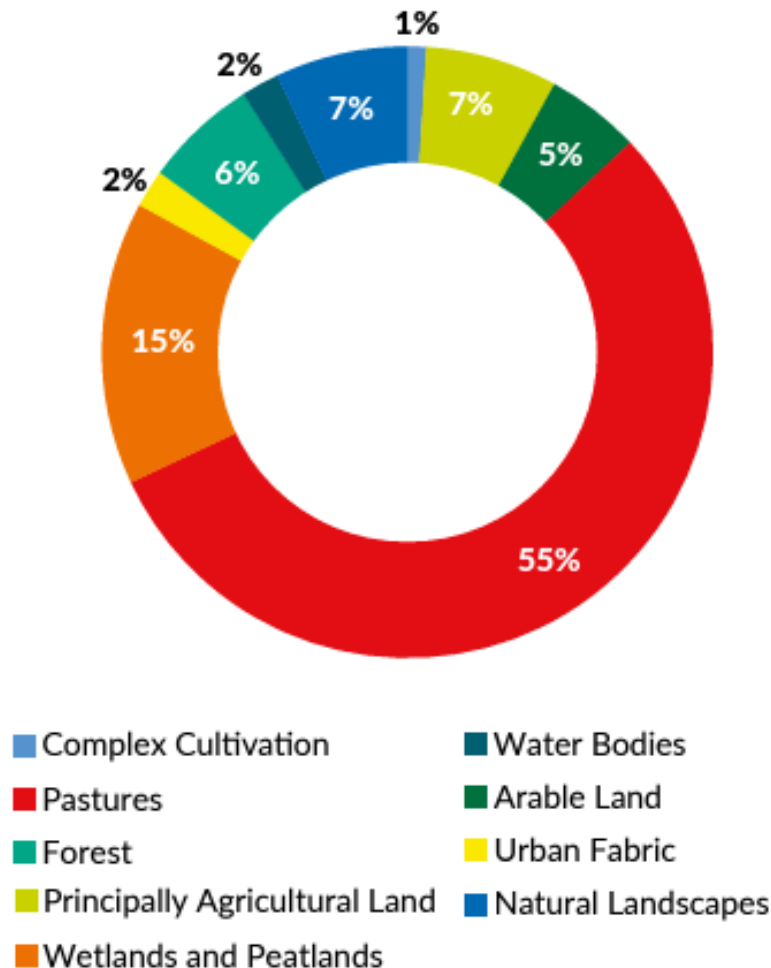
**Normalised Phosphate (PO<sub>4</sub>) Loads National**



# Water Action Plan 2024: Main Goals for Agriculture

- Reduce excessive agri nutrient (nitrate, phosphate, ammonia) & sedimentation losses.
- Preventing instream habitat damage from land drainage/river channel drainage.
- Reduction/elimination of point source pollution from farms.
- Eliminating exceedances of pesticide standards in drinking water supplies.
- Protecting & restoring valuable & sensitive high-status water catchments.

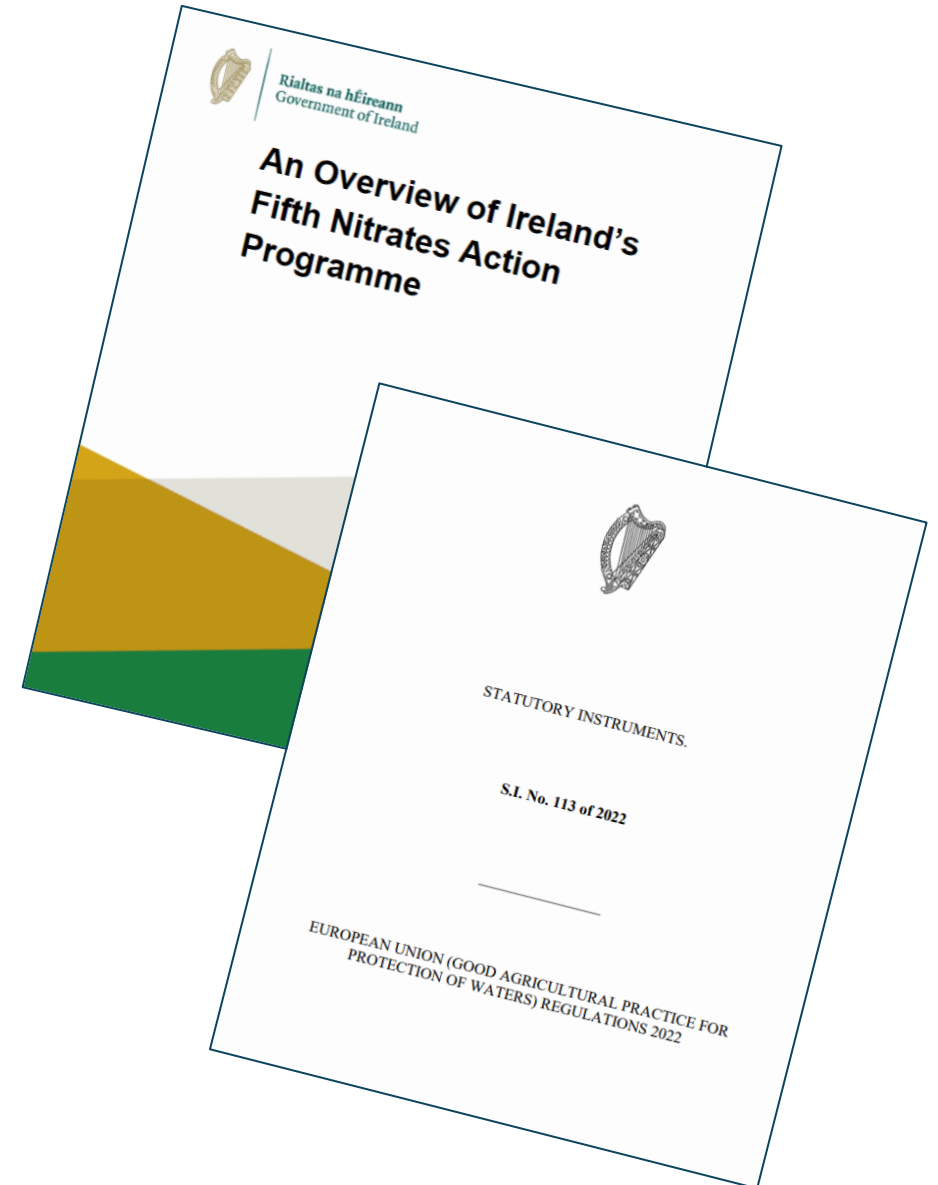
Figure 8: Land Use in Ireland [Socio-Economic Dimensions of Land Use 2023, Land Use Review, CORINE dataset of land cover Ireland 2018.]





# Fifth Nitrates Action Programme

- Implements the Nitrates Directive through the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations.
- Purpose is to protect and improve water quality from agricultural impact from **both Nitrogen and Phosphorus**.
- Whole of territory approach.
- Non-compliance considered high (30-40%).
- Interim Review of Fifth NAP – additional measures going to consultation in coming weeks.
- **High Court Judicial Review of the Fifth NAP – has now been referred to the CJEU.**



# Farming for Water European Innovation Partnership (EIP)

5-year, **€60million** project jointly funded by DHLGH and DAFM.

## The project aims to:

- Support the adoption of measures on farms where agriculture has been identified as a significant pressure.
- To drive improvements in water quality while also benefiting climate change mitigation & biodiversity protection.

## This project builds on:

- LAWPRO's catchment science approach to protect and restore good/high quality in our water bodies.
- The work of the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP).

Working with farmers to adopt innovative nutrient management practices and through the application of natural water retention measures to help reduce losses of nutrients, sediment and pesticides to water.



<https://farmingforwater.ie/>

## Project Partners

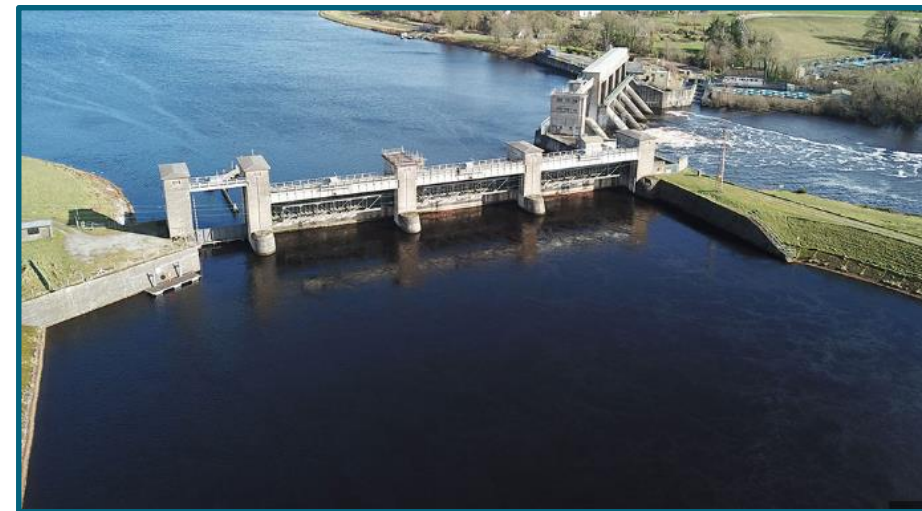


# Water Action Plan 2024: Main Goals for Hydromorphology

- Establish a Hydromorphology Expert Group to support the new National Hydromorphology Programme.
- Development of a new enhanced and consolidated legislative regime to address pressures on the physical condition of waters.
- IFI will establish a restoration programme to mitigate the negative impact of past construction in or near rivers.
- IFI pilot projects: River Dodder, Annacotty Weir, Ardnacrusha/Parteen, Clohamon Weir.
- Heavily Modified Water Bodies: justification assessment, public consultation, designation.
- Review of arterial drainage requirements and the underpinning Arterial Drainage Act to inform future land use policy decisions.



Source: Inland Fisheries Ireland



Source: ESB



# Water Action Plan 2024: Hydromorphology

## Hydromorphology Expert Group

- Work plan – 6 months to deliver
- Long-term actions (legislation, national restoration programme)
- Short-term actions (interim solutions)



## Stakeholder Representation:

- DHLGH: Water, NPWS, Planning
- DECC: Fisheries
- DAFM: Nitrates, biodiversity, engineering
- DPER: OPW
- EPA
- IFI
- Waterways Ireland
- LAWPRO
- Teagasc
- Uisce Eireann
- ESB
- Academic Expert

# Policy, Legislation & Future Regulatory Framework

**Long-term Action:** DHLGH will lead the development of a new enhanced and consolidated legislative regime to address pressures on the physical condition of waters.

The following key pieces of legislation are likely to be amended and/or repealed\*:

- Planning and Development Act (2000)
- Planning and Development Regulations (2001)
- The Arterial Drainage Acts (1945 and 1995)
- The Local Authorities (Works) Act (1949)
- EIA (Agriculture) Regulations (2011)
- Fisheries Act (1959)
- Foreshore Act (1933)

\*consideration to be given to the Nature Restoration Law  
\*examination of the Nature Directives in scoping of requirements

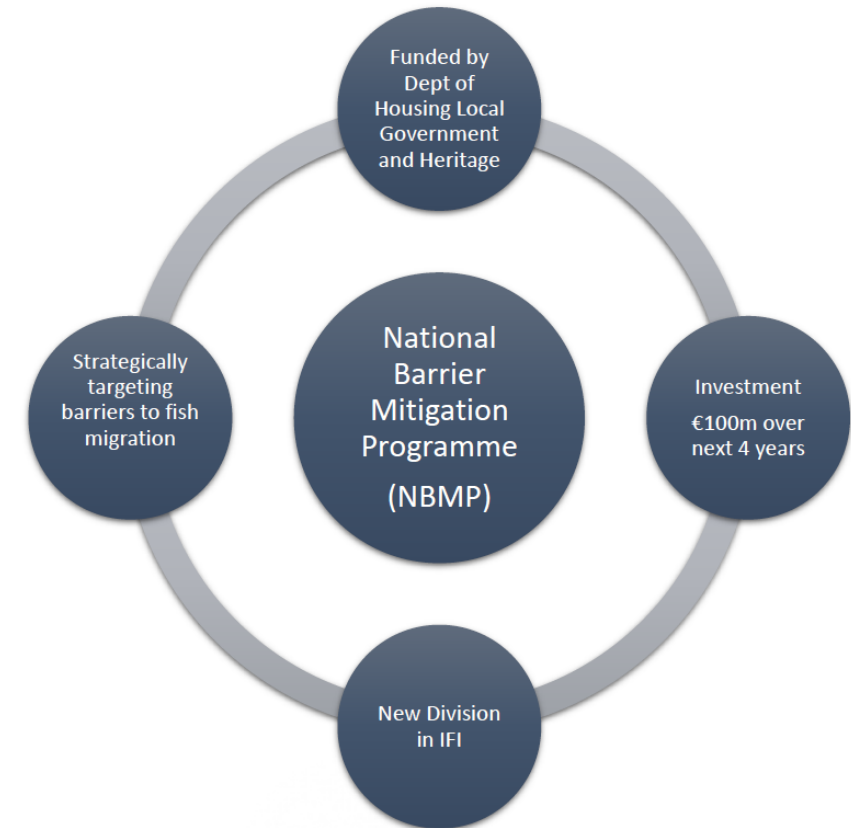
# Nature Restoration Law / National Restoration Programme

## Article 7: River Connectivity

- Restoration of the natural connectivity of rivers and natural functions of the related floodplains.
- Remove artificial barriers that prevent the connectivity of surface waters, so that at least 25,000 km of rivers are restored to a free-flowing state by 2030.

## National Barrier Mitigation Programme (IFI)

- Newly resourced barrier mitigation team, co-funded by DECC and DHLGH.
- Building on National Barriers Programme geodatabase (over 73,000 potential barriers identified nationally).
- Mitigation of approximately 257 problem barriers during 3<sup>rd</sup> RBMP cycle (range of small, medium and large-scale).
- Four pilot projects: Annacotty, Clohamon, Dodder, Lower River Shannon.



Credit: Hazel King, Head of Barrier Mitigation Division, IFI



# Water Action Plan 2024: Forestry

- HYDROFOR Project recommendation: cease afforestation on peat soils in acidic headwater catchments.
  - DAFM applying various water and non-water related policies, procedures and protocols that combine to rule out afforestation on such sites, or limit to appropriate, multi-benefit native woodland.
- Actions relating to water setbacks:
  - Increase area of forests with appropriate setback after clearfell
  - Apply appropriate setback (and other water protection measures) in new forests, supported under the 2023-2027 Afforestation Scheme
- Under Afforestation scheme, fund native woodland creation on public land (Forest Type 3).
  - Woodland-based solutions to protect drinking water sources and water in general.



Source: Forests for Water, Teagasc

# Water Action Plan 2024: Forestry

- DAFM to launch new Forests for Water option (Forest Type 2) under the Afforestation Scheme.
  - Offers added incentives for farmers/landowners to promote the creation of new native forests.
  - Provides water services, improvement to water quality, drinking water source protection, natural water retention, habitat improvement and expansion of alluvial woodland.
- DAFM to continue to address forestry-related water incidents.
  - Reported by DAFM inspectors/LAWPRO, reported to DAFM.
- Water protection/enhancement training to be provided by DAFM (commencing Q3 2024) for:
  - Registered foresters/consultant ecologists/machine operators.
  - Design, implementation of forestry projects.



# Water Action Plan 2024: Urban Wastewater

- Uisce Éireann investment in wastewater infrastructure (over 2.3bn) in the period 2020-2024:
  - 129 wastewater treatment plants.
  - 96 collection networks.
  - 92 national programmes.
- Review 197 water bodies where urban wastewater is a significant pressure
  - Projects are completed (8)/progressing in 59 water bodies.
  - Remaining water bodies currently being assessed for appropriate solutions, completion by 2027.
- Compliance with EU (Waste Water Discharge) Regulations 2007-2020
  - Apply for reviews of Waste Water Discharge Authorisations, where required.
  - Submit to the EPA for review.



Photo: Stillorgan Covered Reservoir, from Uisce Éireann

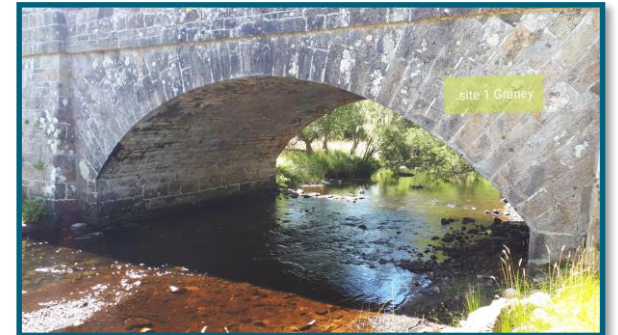


Photo: Graney River, Waters of LIFE project



Photo: Construction of Arklow Waste Water Treatment Plant, from Uisce Éireann



# Water Action Plan 2024: Urban Wastewater

- Deliver a multi-annual investment programme to provide wastewater infrastructure for villages not served by public wastewater collection systems.
- Uisce Éireann's Enhanced Ambition Programme will deliver at least 10 wastewater treatment plant upgrades not funded under the current investment plan where discharges are a significant pressure impacting on WFD objectives.
  - Funding worth 17m for WWTP upgrades.
- Complete negotiations and transposition into Irish law of the recast Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.
  - Criteria for the performance of Combined Storm Water Overflows will be updated and reflected in guidance and standards.



Photo: Avonmore River, Waters of LIFE project

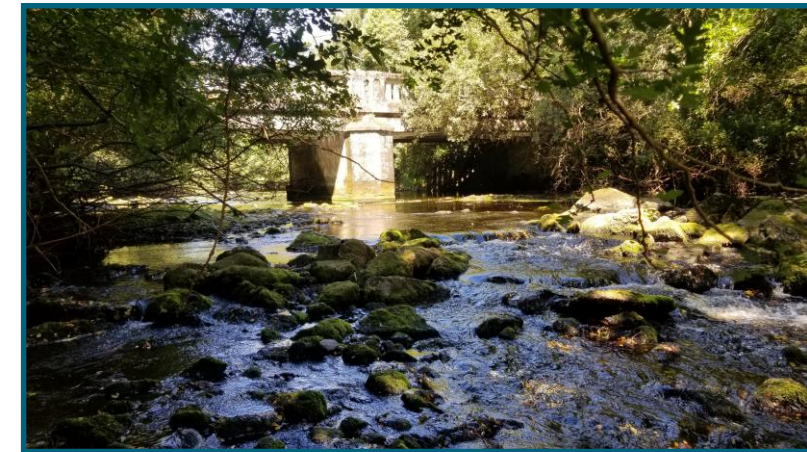


Photo: Avonmore River, Waters of LIFE project

# Water Action Plan 2024: Urban Wastewater

- Uisce Éireann will continue investment in storm water overflows.
  - 139 storm water overflows 2022-2027
- Uisce Éireann's will continue to develop and update the Gap Analysis tool to reflect their understanding of future needs and consequent investment requirements.
- Research and Innovation Programme on Nature-based Solutions for small WWTPs
  - Enhanced monitoring.
  - Method for seasonal Emission Limit Values will be developed along with design manual



Photo: Saggart Covered Reservoir, from Uisce Éireann



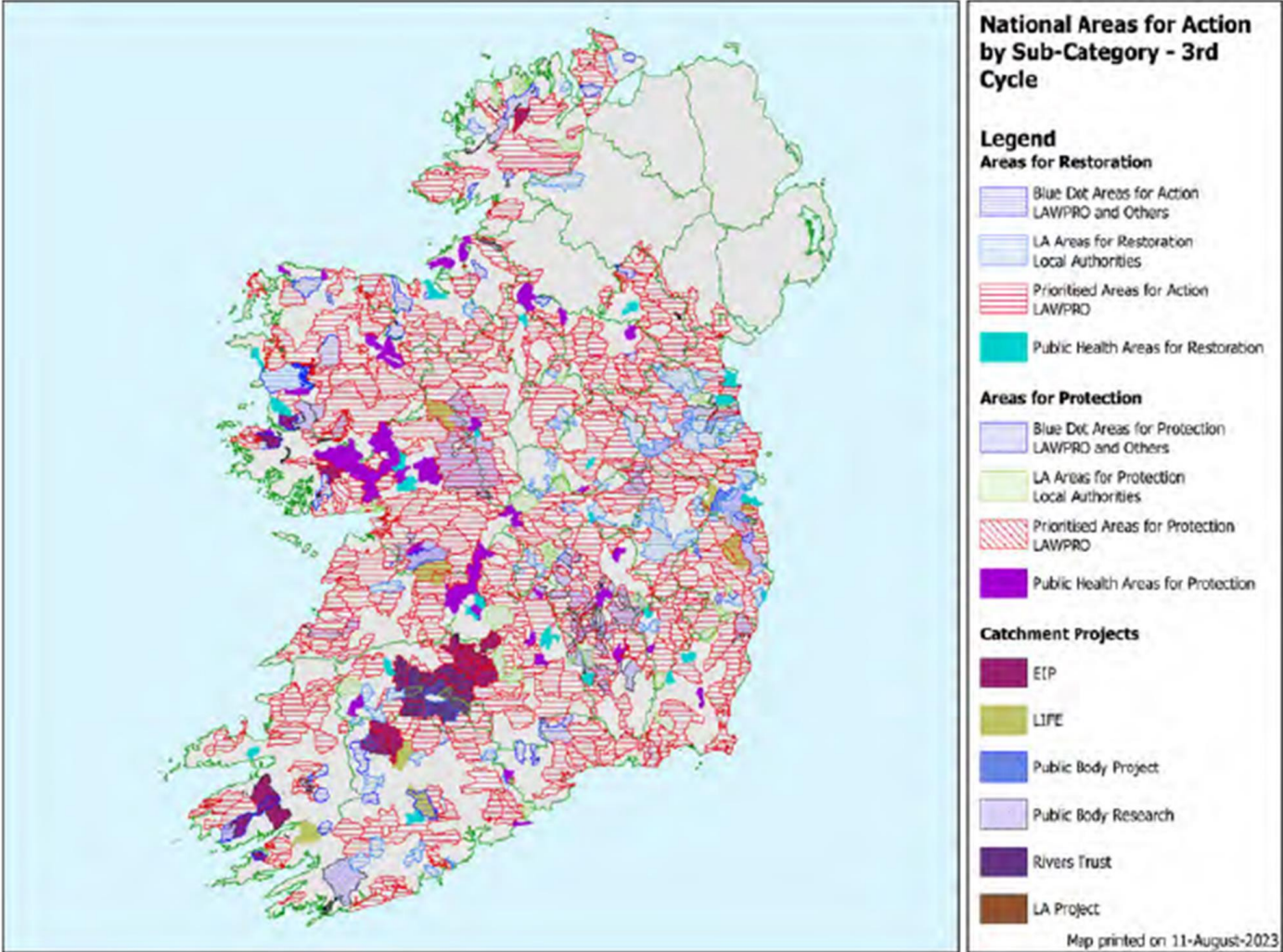
Photo: Integrated Constructed Wetland in Lixnaw, Co. Kerry from Uisce Éireann



# Water Action Plan 2024: Areas for Action (517 no.)

- **428** not meeting their environmental objectives require restoration.
- **89** are meeting their environmental objectives but require dedicated protection measures to ensure their water quality does not deteriorate from identified risks.
- **17** are subject to initiatives / projects.

Figure 27: Map of third-cycle Areas for Action

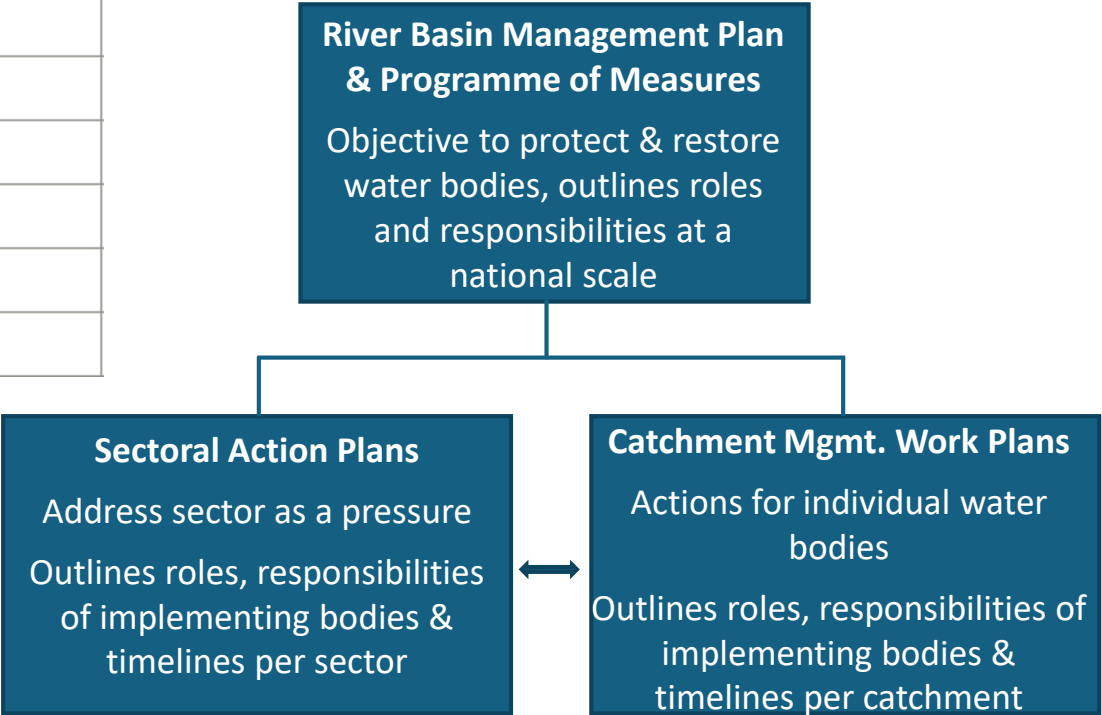


# Water Action Plan 2024 - Implementation

- 7 Sectoral Action Work Plans

| Sector                           | Lead authority                          |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Agriculture                      | DAFM, Teagasc                           |
| Hydromorphology                  | DHLGH, IFI, OPW, DAFM                   |
| Forestry                         | DAFM – Forest Service                   |
| Urban Wastewater                 | Uisce Éireann                           |
| Peat                             | NPWS, Bord na Móna, Local Authorities   |
| Drinking Water Source Protection | NFGWS, Uisce Éireann, Local Authorities |
| Invasive Alien Species           | NPWS, Local Authorities                 |

- 46 Catchment Management Work Plans
- Progress Tracking & Reporting: New Programme Delivery Office (DHLGH)



Interaction between Sectoral Action Plans & Catchment Management Work Plans



## Take home message.....

Implementation of the **right measure** in the **right place** is the key step to achieving Water Framework Objectives

*“Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such”*

**EU Water Framework Directive**

**Water Action Plan 2024:** <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/8da54-river-basin-management-plan-2022-2027/>