

# water matters

*"Have your say!"*

On an island with a lot of rain, it can be hard to take water problems seriously. But even Northern Ireland isn't immune. Sometimes there is too much water, sometimes there isn't enough, and sometimes it is polluted and unfit for any use. Although our water quality is generally good:

- in the east and north east most of the growing population lives near the coastline which can place pressure on wastewater treatment plants and water quality. Tourism adds extra seasonal pressure
- the protection of our high quality areas from inappropriate development is essential, for example Strangford Lough
- illegal dumping in the uplands in the district threatened to pollute waterways, for example in the Glens of Antrim
- some afforested areas are situated in sensitive salmon and trout spawning areas in upland headwaters
- invasive alien species such as the Australian Swamp Stonecrop, Japanese Knotweed, Parrot's Feather and Water Fern are spreading in the district
- new individual houses and housing clusters, reliant on septic tanks, threaten water quality, while development on floodplains risks adverse effects on both water quality and flooding behaviour.

As the population increases, and more demands are made on water, we need to plan for the future. We must take practical action to balance our demands so that all our waters are in a healthy state:

- so that drinking water sources are sufficiently protected to guarantee quality of supply
- so that we have enough water to sustain commercial use
- so that our native aquatic plant and animal communities are protected
- so that our waters can be used for recreation and tourism.

north eastern  
river basin district

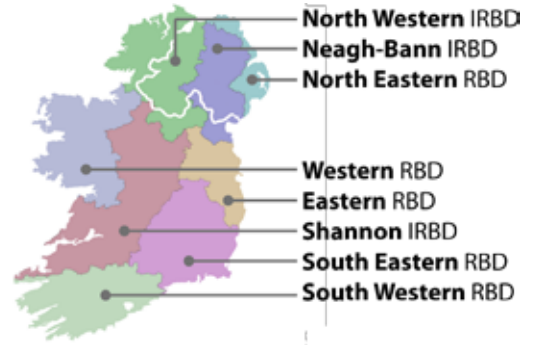


That's what the EU Water Framework Directive is about: it requires member states to ensure that their waters achieve at least good status by 2015 and that status doesn't deteriorate in any waters.

## The Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive is about managing our waters in natural, geographical units called River Basins. To make management practicable, neighbouring river basins have been grouped into River Basin Districts (RBDs for short). If a basin district crosses a national border, it is called an International River Basin District (IRBD), and both jurisdictions must cooperate in managing it.

This island has about 400 river basins, which have been grouped into eight districts: four RBDs wholly within Ireland, one wholly within Northern Ireland and three cross-border IRBDs. Each RBD or IRBD will have a management plan for its waters; a draft of each plan will be issued in 2008 and you will have an opportunity to comment on it.



The Water Framework Directive requires a structured approach: find out the facts, decide which of them need action, make a management plan, carry out the plan. The plan has to be based on the facts, and that means using the knowledge, understanding and views of people who use water in their everyday lives, whether drinking it, fishing, feeding cattle with it, swimming, using it in manufacturing or power generation or even just walking the dog alongside it. That is why the process includes consultation at every stage.



## What has happened so far

As you have seen, the first stage of implementing the Water Framework Directive is about finding out the facts — in detail. That has meant listing:

- all the waters in each district. That includes both the surface waters — rivers, lakes, canals, reservoirs, estuaries and coastal waters — and the underground waters (groundwaters) and the lands that drain into them
- all the human uses of those waters and the human activities that affect them. That covers everything from the provision of drinking water through industrial and agricultural discharges to the construction of quay walls and harbours
- all the non-human uses: not just the animals and plants that live in the waters but also those on the fringes. Some important and vulnerable species and habitats need particular attention
- all the existing controls on the human uses of water: everything from EU Directives through national legislation and industry codes of practice to conditions on planning permissions
- all the threats to the quality of the waters, ranked in order of importance.

This work was started several years ago and several useful reports can be accessed through the district's website [www.nerbd.com](http://www.nerbd.com). If these lists are not right, the River Basin Management Plans (which come at the next stage of the process) will not be right either. That's where you can help.



## How you can help

The North Eastern River Basin District is the smallest in the island of Ireland, lying entirely within Northern Ireland. It takes in large parts of counties Antrim and Down and a small portion of County Londonderry. The implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the North Eastern district is coordinated by the Department of the Environment and Environment and Heritage Service, through the Interdepartmental Working Group, which includes all the relevant government departments and is facilitated by the North-South SHARE Project.

Much work has gone into finding out the facts: identifying all the waters in the district, finding out their current status and condition, listing the uses made of the waters and the pressures on them. That work is continuing, but there is enough information at this stage to put the preliminary findings in a booklet and ask you to comment on them.

The booklet of preliminary findings can be downloaded from the district's website [www.nerbd.com](http://www.nerbd.com) or requested from the contact below. It gives a preliminary overview of the main problems in our waters and the actions suggested to solve these problems.

You can help by reading the booklet (or just the sections that most interest you) and making comments to correct or improve the listing of problems and the suggested actions.

### Please send your comments to:

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