

water matters

"Have your say!"

On an island with a lot of rain, it can be hard to take water problems seriously. But even the island of 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:

- there are more drinking water abstractions from surface waters in the North Western district than from any other district in Ireland
- the protection of our high quality areas from inappropriate development is essential
- illegal dumping in the border areas and in the uplands of the district threatened to pollute waterways
- invasive alien species like Common Cord Grass and Zebra Mussels are spreading in the waters of the district
- new individual houses and housing clusters, reliant on septic tanks, threaten water quality. County Cavan have bye-laws to deal with pollution from septic tanks whilst demand for rural housing in Northern Ireland has sparked debate about planning policy. Development on floodplains also risks having 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 western
international
river basin district

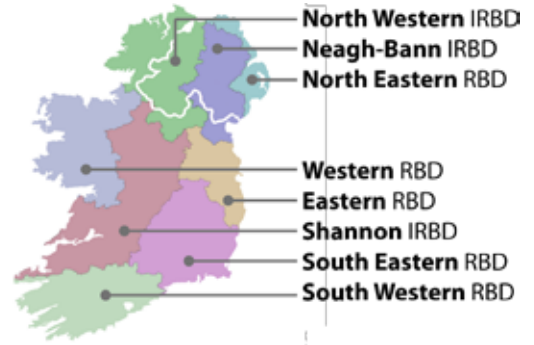


That's what the EU Water Framework Directive is about: it requires member states to ensure that their waters achieve at least good status by 2015 and that status doesn't deteriorate in any waters.

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.nwirbd.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 Western International River Basin District includes all of County Donegal, large parts of Fermanagh, Cavan, Londonderry, Monaghan and Tyrone, significant areas of Leitrim and Longford and a small portion of Sligo. A project office acts on behalf of the public authorities involved in both jurisdictions.

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 website www.nwirbd.com or requested from the contacts 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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