

water matters

"Have your say!"

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

- infrastructure (for example wastewater treatment plant capacity) is struggling to keep pace with development throughout the Shannon District
- invasive alien species not usually found in Irish waters are spreading (rapidly in some cases) to the detriment of our native species - for example the Zebra Mussel is now widespread throughout the Shannon District
- water supplies have been contaminated with the *Cryptosporidium* parasite
- individual houses and housing clusters, reliant on septic tanks, can threaten both surface and groundwater quality if not properly maintained
- development on floodplains can cause adverse effects on both water quality and flooding behaviour
- the Shannon system is being considered as a potential source of water for the Greater Dublin Area

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:

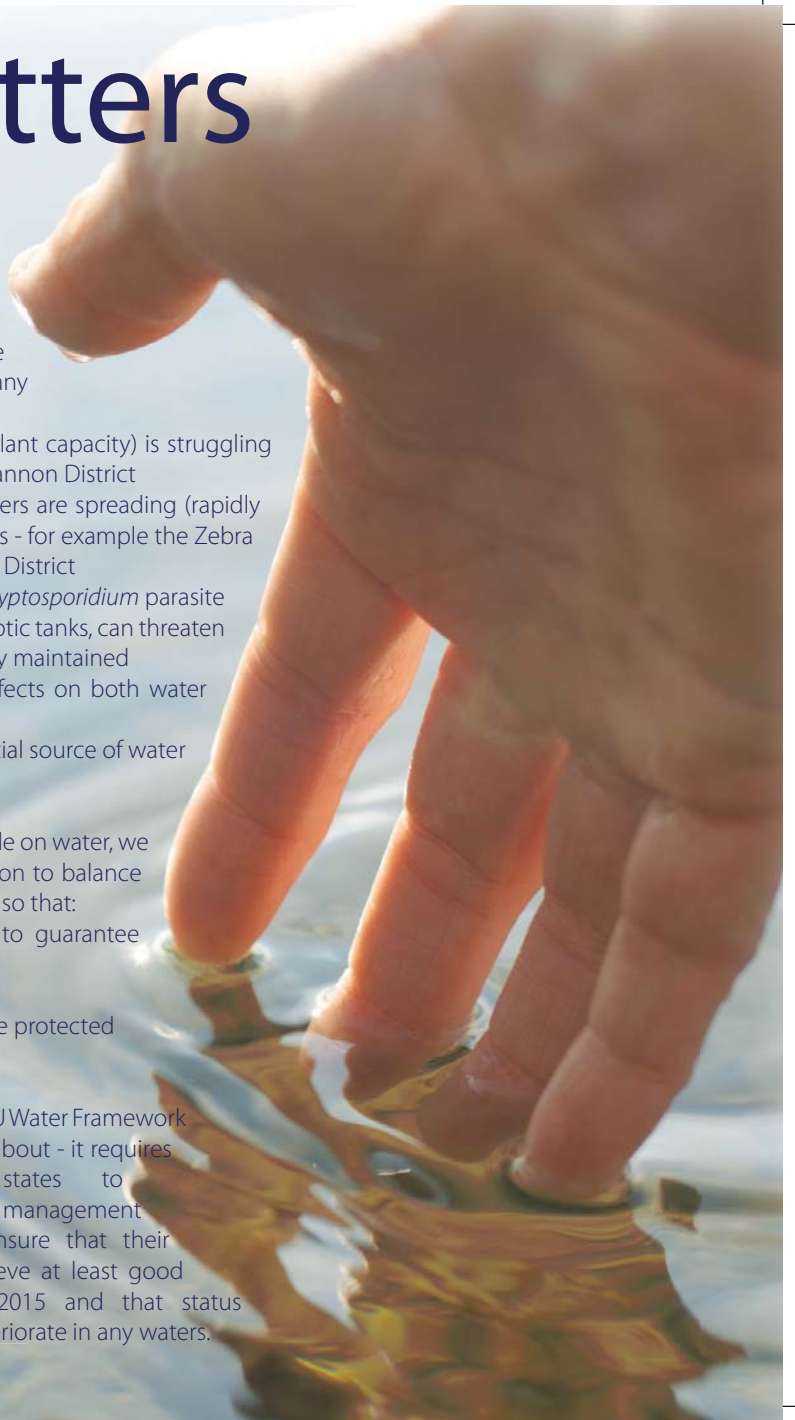
- drinking water sources are sufficiently protected to guarantee quality of supply
- we have enough water to sustain commercial use
- our native aquatic plant and animal communities are protected
- our waters can be used for recreation and tourism.

shannon
international
river basin district



That's what the EU Water Framework

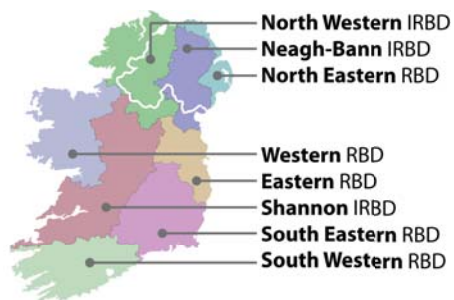
Directive is about - it requires member states to prepare management plans to ensure that their waters achieve at least good status by 2015 and that status doesn't deteriorate in any waters.



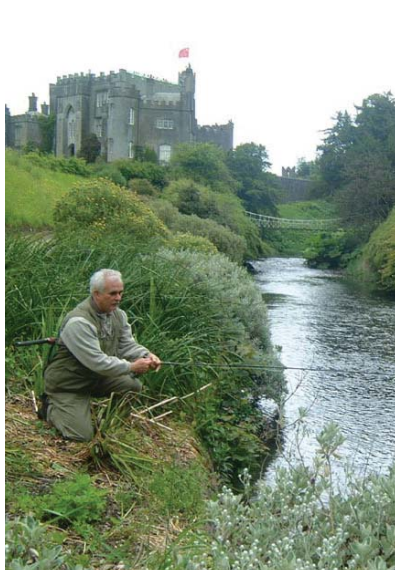
The Water Framework Directive

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 setting out:

- all the waters in each district. This 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 many useful reports can be accessed through the District's website www.shannonrbd.com. If this information is 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 Shannon International River Basin District includes large areas of counties Limerick, Clare, Tipperary, Offaly, Westmeath, Longford and Roscommon as well as significant portions of counties Kerry, Galway, Leitrim and Cavan. Other counties that have smaller portions in the Shannon District include Sligo, Mayo, Cork, Laois, Meath and Fermanagh. All of Limerick City is located within the District.

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.shannonrbd.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 on the suggested actions. Or perhaps we have missed something that should be brought to our attention. Now is your opportunity - take it!



Please send your comments to:

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printed on recycled paper

CarbonNeutral® publication