

# PRESS RELEASE

## EPA Report on Water Quality



[www.nationalwaterforum.ie](http://www.nationalwaterforum.ie)

### WHO

A STATUTORY STAKEHOLDER  
BODY

### WHAT

A NEW APPROACH TO WATER  
GOVERNANCE IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

### ADVISORY BODY TO

MINISTER FOR HOUSING,  
PLANNING AND LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT

IRISH WATER

WATER POLICY ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE

COMMISSION FOR  
REGULATION OF UTILITIES

### DEBATE & ANALYSIS

WATER QUALITY

RURAL WATER CONCERNS

IRISH WATER CUSTOMER  
CONCERNS

WATER IMPLEMENTATION

An Fóram Uisce | The Water Forum welcomes the EPA Report although it is rather disheartening reading. An increase of 115 surface water bodies at poor status since 2009 is a major step backward in our attempt to improve water quality and meet our objectives under the Water Framework Directive. Of great concern to the Forum membership is the continued loss of high status surface water bodies 94, equating to a 4.4% loss since 2009 with the continued decline in the most pristine sites from over 500 in the late 1980s to only 20 in this assessment. The stress on our lagoons and estuaries continues with only 38% at good status shows that these are under significant pressure from our activities.

The net improvement in lake water status is welcome although the continued upward trend in total phosphorus concentrations in a quarter of lakes assessed is a concern for future water quality. A net improvement in the condition of our coastal waters and 98% of groundwater remaining at good status is welcome.

The significant increase in fish kills from 17 in 2017 to 40 in 2018 could reflect the impacts of climate change on our waterways with kills resulting from low flow levels and increased water temperatures.

The River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 identifies 1460 water bodies at risk of not achieving their water quality objectives under the WFD. The report finds that human activity is the primary pressure on these waterbodies. Agriculture is a significant pressure on over 700 water bodies with hydro-morphology (drainage measures and sedimentation) and waste water impacting on approximately 300 waterbodies each.

Excessive nutrients (from agriculture and waste water) causes excess plant growth, algal blooms and reduced oxygen impacting on water quality and biodiversity. Pesticides and herbicides impact very negatively on water bodies and considering that 80% of the water we use comes from surface water bodies more action is needed to reduce the use of these chemicals.

In light of, these identified pressures and the Irish economic development agenda, including that of farming, together with general planning decisions which impact on urban waste water treatment capacity, must all be interrogated against the explicit national priority of protecting and improving our water bodies.

*Professor Tom Collins, Chair of The Water Forum, stated 'In March 2020 the Water Forum will host a national symposium on the theme of Ireland's Waters: Re-imagining the Future with a focus on landscape management for food production and water quality. We envisage that this Symposium will open a conversation throughout the country on the challenge of reconciling our economic development objectives with those of protecting and enhancing our water bodies. The forum believe there needs to be a debate on how we can manage our landscape for water quality and for resilient communities'.*

The more co-ordinated catchment based working being led by LAWPRO and supported by the EPA and other agencies is delivering results. The Forum would support a more ambitious programme of activities, as currently only 191 catchments (726 waterbodies – 15%) are prioritised out of 1460 water bodies at risk of not meeting our objectives for water quality.

The Water Forum will seek to develop policies for a more ambitious approach to improving and protecting our water resources. We would like to see farming practice that does not negatively impact on our environment yet provides a sustainable income to farmers. Informing the CAP reforms will be an important part of this process as will be continued pressure for more urgent actions on waste water treatment programmes and for innovative solutions for water conservation measures.

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WFD IMPLEMENTATION

RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT

### Continued

An Fóram Uisce|The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 27 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

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