

**NIEA**  
**Freshwater Monitoring and Assessment**



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

Our reference: **DAERA/25-576**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Water Management Unit  
NIEA  
17 Antrim Road  
Lisburn  
BT25 2DA

[wmu.foi@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:wmu.foi@daera-ni.gov.uk)

**27 October 2025**

Dear [REDACTED]

### **Environmental Information Regulations 2004**

With regard to your request for information received by the Department on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 which sought the following information:

- (1) Recorded percentage difference of the 'blue-green algae' pollutant in Lough Neagh from October 1st, 2024 to October 1st 2025**

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds the information you requested which is attached as Annex A and further answers to your questions are outlined below.

- (2) The numerical difference (£) in DAERA funding directed at solving the 'blue-green algae' pollution in Lough Neagh (Comparing October 1st, 2024 to October 1st 2025), or in NI waterways generally.**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2024, DAERA has committed £200k to Phase 1 of the Lough Neagh Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) programme for in-lough mitigation

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Standard

of blue-green algae (BGA). The Department for Economy contributed £250k making £450k in total. Phase 2 of SBRI will commence shortly, and contracts are in the process of being agreed, so no funding committed as yet.

In addition, DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division had allocated £625k to Lough Neagh BGA programmes in the budget for the 2024/2025 financial year, which has risen to £2,316k for 2025/2026.

The DAERA Chief Scientific Adviser's Office has commissioned three projects under the DAERA Directed AFBI Research programme with a total value of £7,907,437 from April 2025 as follows:

- 24/T4/03 - Lough Neagh SHIELD (Study of Harmful Impacts affecting Ecosystems & Lough Dynamics) – Catchment and Lake Science – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2028 – Total agreed project cost of £5,762,884.
- 24/T4/05 - Monitoring and modelling of nutrient losses to water in agricultural catchments to evaluate the effectiveness of the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) and evaluate Agri-Environment Scheme measures. (NAP-BMP) – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2027 – Total agreed project cost of £1,854,683.
- 24/T4/06 - Lough Neagh - In-Lake Remediation Actions – Specifically focused on removal of vegetation (& associated Nitrogen & Phosphorus) & its management & reuse (mass, energy, nutrient) – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027 - £289,870.

A summary of all research projects is available on the DAERA Knowledge Hub on the DAERA website at <https://knowledgehub.daera-ni.gov.uk/>

**(3) The length of time (in years, including the first years date) that the NI Government has been aware of 'blue-green algae' pollutant in Lough Neagh, or NI waterways generally**

Blue-green algae or cyanobacteria occur naturally in freshwater and marine waters. DAERA has been monitoring phytoplankton in Lough Neagh since 2005 and data indicates that cyanobacteria was present then but has likely to have been present for much longer. Suitable conditions for BGA blooms to occur include abundant sunlight, still or slow-flowing water and sufficient levels of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus).

DAERAs official records of verified BGA blooms go back to 2022. DAERA continues to verify, record and report incidences of BGA blooms. More information may be found at

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/c2a28780d7554bed9d1f47f3ae710fa4/page/bluegreenalgaemap>.

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**<sup>®</sup>  
We invest in people Standard

**(4) The main difficulty (as DAERA sees it) in tackling the 'blue-green algae' pollution in NI water ways generally**

The key difficulties in addressing BGA are a legacy of nutrients locked within the sediments on the bed of lakes, such as Lough Neagh. Under certain conditions these nutrients are released to the water column and become available to algae and other organisms. Other ecological imbalances, such as the introduction of non-native species, can also contribute to the incidence of algal blooms. The impacts of the presence of the invasive species zebra mussels include - changes in nutrient cycles, changes to plant growth around lake margins, reduction in zooplankton and phytoplankton. Zebra mussels filter out algae and change nutrient cycles, but they do not filter blue-green algae, and this may lead to exacerbated issues.

**(5) Any official projections as to how long current levels of 'blue-green algae' pollution in Lough Neagh could take to solve, and some reasons for such projection(s)**

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and Ulster University carried out research to quantify and characterise the sediment phosphorus (P) in Lough Neagh and produce timescales to recovery models. Rippey et al (2021) (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0043135421004814>) used dating information from sediment cores to derive an estimate of the time that it will take for the P stored in the sediment to be immobilised in the lake.

The model estimated that the time for a 75 % reduction in the P sediment in Lough Neagh to be 41 years. It is important to note that the estimated timeframes provided by the model do not consider continued catchment inputs of P to the lake, which must be continued to be managed. Further research was carried out building on this model (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0043135422008053>), to derive supporting inflow concentrations, and to provide an estimate of the time a lake should take to achieve “Good” total phosphorus (TP) status if nutrient inputs from the catchment are reduced, which for Lough Neagh has been estimated at 21 years.

---

██████████, (2021), *Timescale of reduction of long-term phosphorus release from sediment in lakes*, *Water Research*, 200, 117283

---

██████████ (2022) *Recovery targets and timescales for Lough Neagh and other lakes*, *Water Research*, 222, 118858

---

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department.

If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing [daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk) or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**<sup>®</sup>  
We invest in people Standard