

BETTER BEACHES FORUM ACTION PLAN

IMPROVE WATER QUALITY			
Action	Lead & Partners	Activity	Outcome and Date
Environmental Farming scheme	DAERA	<p>Last intake for EFS was Jan 2025.</p> <p>The successor scheme is called Farming with Nature. The Farming with Nature Transition Scheme aims to increase the extent of habitats on farmed land across Northern Ireland. The actions available will create new habitats, provide new green infrastructure, protect watercourses and contribute to carbon sequestration on farms.</p>	<p>For EFS outcomes see annex.</p> <p>Applications for 2025 Farming with Nature Transition Scheme closed on Monday 4th August.</p>
Wastewater infrastructure improvements	NIW (DfI)	A further £2.5M investment planned to remove a UID impacting Carnalea Stream.	<p>Still awaiting planning and land agreement. Funding has been deferred to PC28 with a view to bringing it forward if/when these agreements are reached. Investment has increased significantly from £1.4M to current estimate of £2.5M due to revised solution, inflation and cost of materials, which is subject to change when the RPI index is applied (is dependent on the year it progresses).</p>

		<p>NI Water PC21 Living with Water Investment includes a further £1.6M investment planned to commence end of 20/21 to remove 3 UIDs impacting Rathmore Stream.</p> <p>The Shellfish and Bathing Waters Remediation (SaBRE) Project - NI Water has completed the Larne Lough and Newcastle Integrated Environmental Models (IEMs) and presented to NIEA/DAERA through the Catchment Based Outcomes (CBO) Group. NI Water are using these IEM models for capital work planning.</p> <p>SWELL Project – NI Water has taken the Carlingford SWELL model and undertaken bacterial source apportionment. The Carlingford IEM was presented to NIEA/DAERA through the CBO Group. NI Water are using this IEM for capital work planning.</p> <p>Ballyholme Pilot Collaborative Project – NI Water has completed sampling and site investigation (April 2024 – February 2025). Final reporting is being collated. NI Water/DAERA will use findings to plan next steps. NI Water / DAERA will use findings to plan next steps.</p>	<p>This has been deferred to PC28. If a derogation is approved by DAERA/NIEA the land purchase could proceed, and construction could commence relatively soon.</p> <p>Modelling – Complete</p> <p>Capital works planning - Ongoing</p> <p>Modelling – Complete</p> <p>Capital works planning – Ongoing</p> <p>Sampling and site investigations – Complete</p> <p>Next step planning– Ongoing</p>
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Further Studies and Investment	NIW (DfI)	<p>Continue to update GIS asset maps to improve sewer network information availability – improve pollution investigation and risk-based prioritisation of public expenditure.</p> <p>Community Outreach Work – continuation of Education and awareness through educational visits</p> <p>Refillution Campaign launched in NI in partnership with Councils – aimed at reducing plastic bottle usage and marine plastic litter.</p>	<p>Ongoing for future work packages</p> <p>On-going. School Video Competition re ‘The Value of Our Water Environments’ launched September 2021.</p> <p>On-going.</p>
Advice leaflet on misconnections	NIW (DfI)	See annex	See annex
Combined Sewer Overflow monitoring	NIW (DfI)	<p>Event and duration monitors at all CSO’s within 2km of designated bathing and shellfish waters.</p> <p>PC21 summary – 646 WwPS/CSO sites nominated in PC21 Business Plan - delivery in three phases via three two-year projects:</p> <p>Phase 1 (PC21 Yrs 1&2) - 100 nominated sites Phase 2 (PC21 Yrs 3&4) - 250 nominated sites Phase 3 (PC21 Yrs 5&6) - 296 nominated sites</p>	<p>PC21 Summary: During the PC21 period, NIW will continue to develop its use of EDM technologies and embed the necessary verification systems. In addition, NIW will establish fit for purpose databases and real-time dashboard reporting systems. Priority will be given to bathing water locations, subject to available funding.</p> <p>NIW and DAERA are developing a Proof of Concept Project to determine feasibility and</p>

			requirements of providing near real time EDM data at bathing waters.
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IMPROVE BEACH CLEANLINESS, FACILITIES MANAGEMENT & SIGNAGE			
Action	Lead & Partners	Activity	Outcome and Date
Improve accessibility to beaches	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Liaise with Mae Murray Foundation to improve accessibility at beaches	For summary of accessibility developments made until summer 2025 see annex.
	National Trust	Portstewart Strand is a fully inclusive beach with fully working changing places facility and the Partnership with Mae Murray Foundation is in place to offer the accessible beach chairs, beach mats for access to the tide line, mobile hoist and floating chairs all year around	New storage facilities, access walkway, beach mats and equipment on site ready for use.
	Newry Mourne & Down District Council	Working with Mae Murray Foundation to improve accessibility at Tyrella Beach through storage & management of inclusive equipment in new amenity building within the carpark.	Building due to be completed Summer 2025, Seasonal staff will be trained by Mae Murray Foundation in use of equipment and booking system will be via Mae Murray Foundation Book Inclusive Beach Equipment

<p>Highlight safety issues at beaches</p>	<p>Department of Transport Lead (DAERA and Bathing Water Operators input)</p>	<p>Investigate measures which could be adopted to address potential safety issues at bathing waters.</p>	<p>See annex for past work</p>
<p>Water Safety Forum NI</p>	<p>MEABC</p>	<p>Outdoor Recreation Officer sits on the forum from a local Council perspective</p>	<p>Working towards a strategy for NI and to promote safety in our waters and reduce drowning. Working in a collaborative multi-agency approach to identify areas of risk through data analysis. People involved include various NI councils and other organisations such as RNLI, NIFRS, PSNI, HM Coastguard and many more.</p>
<p>Water Safety Week</p>	<p>MEABC</p>	<p>OROs continue to promote water safety week</p>	<p>Working with RNLI, RLSS and HMCG to get relevant safety messages out to residents and visitors. June 2024 held an event at Ballygally Beach with officers from RNLI and RLSS providing workshops and activities. 2025 online promotion of safety messages. Providing links for schools to access resources and doing a drop in event at Ballygally for safety messaging and information.</p>

Facilities Management	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council & Glens Borough Council and Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme	New swim shelter at Castlerock Beach	Launched June 2025
	National Trust	Murlough – Changing facilities will be installed in the main car park along with signage upgrade/information centre.	Due to commence early 2026.
Signage	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	New beach information display cabinet at Whiterocks Beach - useful for displaying general public information and specific Blue Flag Award information.	We plan to roll out similar cabinets across our Award beaches over the next couple of years.

KEEP PUBLIC & MEDIA BETTER INFORMED			
Action	Lead & Partners	Activity	Outcome and Date
SWIM – INTERREG project	UCD, AFBI, KNIB	See annex	See annex
SWIM NI - Water Quality Prediction Models Impact DAERA Schemes, E & I project	AFBI, KNIB	Water Quality Prediction Models Impact DAERA Schemes (WQPMIDS), AFBI research project SWIM NI will further develop water quality prediction models at 12 bathing waters: Castlerock, Portrush Curran, Ballycastle, Waterfoot, Carnlough, Ballygally, Brown’s Bay, Crawfordsburn, Ballyholme, Millisle, Ballywalter and Newcastle.	See annex for past work. The final report for WQPMIDS was submitted to DAERA in March 2025, including a report on the intensive Ballyholme study. Conclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statistical modelling approach may not be the most appropriate method to apply in areas where the bathing waters water quality conditions are in general good. • Ballyholme catchment study: FIOs and microbial source tracking (MST) identified several sources of contamination from the catchment. Many of these sources will cause failures at bathing waters independently of the environmental drivers included in the models. • Improvements to water quality prediction models would provide a stronger foundation for evidence-based decision-making in bathing water management, helping to balance public health

			<p>considerations with the need for accurate and reliable water quality predictions.</p> <p>As the contract for this work has finished DAERA are currently in process of transferring the WQPMIDS modelling to a DAERA hosted platform.</p>
<p>DAERA Funded E&I project:</p> <p>Understanding AMR: Wastewater and Bathing waters</p>	AFBI	Testing bathing water and freshwater from identified bathing locations for the presence of antimicrobial resistant faecal bacteria and tracking the sources of these bacteria.	The project started in May 2025
<p>2025/2026 Bathing Water Review</p>	DAERA	Minister has agreed to the co-design approach for the Bathing Waters Policy Review in Northern Ireland 2025/26.	An introduction to the Bathing Waters Policy Review in Northern Ireland 2025/26 was provided by our independent consultants Innovation & Consultancy Services at the Better Beaches Forum and followed by a one-day workshop for stakeholders on Tuesday 18 th November 2025.
<p>Blue Green Algae Incident Management</p>	DAERA	Since 2023 DAERA has continued to monitor for blue-green algae during the bathing season. Incidents are responded to with assistance and advice being given to bathing water operators and the general public.	The Department led the development of the Interagency Blue-Green Algae Monitoring Protocol Launched in May 2024 to help navigate a joint up approach across NI. Partners meet regularly and include MFD, NIEA, FSA, PHA, AFBI and NIWater. The protocol is available via Inter-Agency Blue-

			<p>Green Algae Monitoring Protocol Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</p> <p>The parameters highlighted in the Interagency Blue-Green Algae Monitoring Protocol were adopted for bathing water monitoring in 2024.</p> <p>All results of water sample testing, as well as the approach taken by the Department, during the 2024 bathing season, have been released and are available via Blue-Green Algae Monitoring in Northern Ireland Bathing Waters Summary Reports Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</p> <p>Monitoring has continued throughout 2025. Blue green algae was detected and advice against bathing issued on occasion at the following bathing sites; Benone Beach, Portstewart Strand and Downhill. Advice against bathing was issued at Rea’s Wood on 10 July and has remained in place. A full report will be issued in 2026.</p>
Bathing Water Dashboard	DAERA	A new interactive Bathing Water Quality Dashboard to help the public make informed decisions about where and when to swim across Northern Ireland’s 33 identified bathing sites.	<p>Launched July 2025.</p> <p>The dashboard features an interactive map, search and filter tools, weekly sampling results, and links to detailed Bathing Water Profiles.</p>
MEA Outdoors Information Platform	MEABC	MEA Outdoors providing online information on Bathing Water Results and general information on water quality in general	This is ongoing both in the bathing water season with the results being uploaded to Instagram and FB weekly, with any failure information being uploaded. Providing open

			dialogue with bathers. Following DAERA's procedure and sharing DAERA's messaging around WQ and other issues.
NIMTF Ocean Advocates	NIMTF	<p>Collective network of society who want to get more involved in marine environmental policy and its development.</p> <p>NIMTF will resume meetings with Senior Officials for DAERA/DfI in February to address the wider issues of water quality holistically.</p>	<p>NIMTF have been raising the profile of the Bathing Water Dashboard through the trial "NIMTF Ocean Advocates" programme and via social media and public engagement events.</p> <p>NIMTF will start to also promote the MEA Outdoors Information Platform through the trial "NIMTF Ocean Advocates" programme and via social media and public engagement events.</p> <p>From February these meetings will run every 6 months.</p>
CMAP - Coastal Monitoring and Adaptation Planning Project	Ulster University	<p>Funded by PEACEPLUS with National Trust being among one of the partners – CMAP will monitor many of the beaches around Northern Ireland including - Cushendun, Portstewart Whitepark Bay Dundrum/Mourne Plain and Ballywalter/Cloughey. It will bring together coastal monitoring, mapping and community engagement to: collect consistent data on shoreline change;</p>	<p>Project delivery runs from 2025-2029.</p>

		<p>assess risks to habitats, heritage and access; and produce decision-ready adaptation options for local authorities and partners.</p> <p>The Beach Monitoring will produce monthly data and will include beach profiles, volumes, 3-dimensional shape and shoreline position over 3-years.</p> <p>There will also be Coast Snap stations installed which will support the public contributing to the monitoring of coastal change Home - CoastSnap-Citizen Science App</p>	
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