



OFFICIAL DAERA MINUTES - DRAFT

MEETING TITLE	Better Beaches Forum
DIVISION/BRANCH REFERENCE	Marine & Fisheries Division, Marine Strategy
VENUE	Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Oxford Island
DATE/TIME	05.11.2025, 1000 - 1200
LIST OF ATTENDEES	<p>NI Water: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]</p> <p>DAERA: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p> <p>NIEA: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Ards and North Down Borough: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Mid and East Antrim Borough Council: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p> <p>Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council: [REDACTED]</p> <p>AFBI: [REDACTED]</p> <p>National Trust: [REDACTED]</p> <p>NI Marine Task Force: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Newry, Mourne & Down Council: [REDACTED], [REDACTED]</p> <p>Antrim & Newtownabbey Council: [REDACTED]</p> <p>RNLI: [REDACTED]</p> <p>NI Sports Forum & Triathlon Ireland: [REDACTED]</p> <p>The Wave Project: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Innovations and Consultancy Services: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p> <p>Mae Murray Foundation: [REDACTED]</p> <p>Ulster University: [REDACTED]</p>
APOLOGIES	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [REDACTED] welcomed everyone and gave an introduction of the Better Beaches Forum (BBF) for any new attendees, highlighting the objectives of the Action Plan and the importance of the collaborative approach which the BBF offers. The draft minutes from the last Forum meeting (June 2025) were accepted with no comments.

- Updates to the BBF Action Plan were discussed with thanks given to all who had already supplied information. DAERA has created an annex of past achievements of the Better Beaches Forum to streamline current action plan so that it focuses on highlighting current updates and priorities. This will be circulated to members of the BBF for comment. **(Action 1)**
- █████ informed BBF members that DAERA intends to launch a water quality comms plan in 2026 – this will involve engagement with stakeholders and trusted partners.
- █████ gave an update on the 2025 bathing water compliance results, highlighting that results are based on Faecal indicator organisms (FIO) and not blue-green algae. The summary of results;
 - 24 bathing waters - excellent
 - 5 bathing waters - good
 - 3 bathing waters - sufficient
 - 1 bathing water - poor

Three sites have improved in classification this year: Brompton, Cushendall and Ballyholme. It was also highlighted that the classifications of the 7 new identified sites are based on only 3 years data and 4 years is needed for full confidence.

FEEDBACK FROM BATHING WATER OPERATORS

- █████ (Causeway, Coast & Glens Borough Council) - provided an update on the new swim shelter at Castlerock- this was built from previous bathing boxes beside an old tidal pool. █████ highlighted that this new addition was well received by the public and has increased demand for similar elsewhere. █████ also provided an update on the new information display cabinet at Whiterocks Beach. This provides a more modern, aesthetically pleasing way of displaying information to the public. Similar cabinets are planned to be rolled out across further beaches over the next couple of years.
- █████ (National Trust) - provided an update on his experience at Portstewart from over the bathing season. Portstewart had a good year, plenty of days at capacity with being one of the busiest beaches in NI. Laurentiu provided positive feedback on communications and relations this season between relevant bodies to get information out to the public.
- █████ (Mid & East Antrim Council) – provided update on how they are continuing to use social media to promote bathing waters. █████ highlighted the popularity of the post about the advice against bathing at Portmuck on the 30th of July which had 60,000 views and generated new users. That is compared to their next most popular post (trail safe event) which had 13,000 views. Minister Lyons advocating for a temporary shelter to be provided at Ballygalley. They have had ongoing issues at this site with land ownership for any permanent structures. Portmuck is a very popular bathing site however accessibility isn't great e.g. if emergency services needed to access site would be difficult. █████ highlighted the great work that MEA outdoors is carrying out with social media

and the effective use of answering questions from the public to stop the spread of misinformation. This was recognised by MEA Outdoors being a finalist in the NI Social Media Awards.

- [REDACTED] (Newry, Mourne and Down Council) – provided update that new mapping and events were successful. New signage is being displayed at the entrance to Tyrella Beach. A discussion about Tourism NI and signage followed. **(Action 2)**
- [REDACTED] (The Wave project) - provided update that 50-60 sessions were carried out from Benone to Portrush with very little interruption. Highlighted that communications have been better this year from social media, councils etc. Noted the limitations of the Bathing Water Dashboard for Blue Green data and not being real time data and highlighted the difficulties this can pose for business's.

BATHING WATER QUALITY DASHBOARD UPDATE

- [REDACTED] (DAERA) gave an update on the Bathing Water Quality Dashboard. First bathing season in operation. Addressed limitations not being in real time- can only be as fast as the tests being carried out for FIO. Discussed future works plans (subject to business case approval) –
 - Addition of Blue Green Algae data for 2026
 - Incorporating SWIM NI modelling
 - Automated posters
 - Internal Proof of Concept project for EDM data for Ballyholme and Newcastle with NIW.

[REDACTED] highlighted that bathing water profiles for each site can be accessed through the Bathing Water Quality Dashboard and asked if each BWO could look through their sites and notify of any changes. **(Action 3)**. Proposal that DAERA will only update profiles when a change occurs instead of annually.

[REDACTED] (NIW) gave an overview of what is involved in the pilot EDM project being planned for Ballyholme and Newcastle and potential outcomes. Further discussions followed centring around quicker information production and other sites in NI. [REDACTED] also highlighted in GB they have a National Storm Overflow Hub.

NI WATER UPDATE

- [REDACTED] (NIW) presented on the work being carried out by NIW to help improve bathing water quality. This included capital works at Newcastle, North Coast outfalls and Bangor. [REDACTED] also discussed the challenges within wastewater investments due to funding constraints. A review was also given on the 2024 EDM data available on the NI Water website and that there will be an update on this data by the end of Nov 2025. Discussions followed on funding constraints and the consequences if investment in wastewater infrastructure doesn't happen.

Questions were also raised around nature-based solutions being considered at the planning stage-investments around these already called for in the Blue Carbon action plan and efforts could be aligned with collaborative work.

BLUE GREEN ALGAE UPDATE

- [REDACTED] (DAERA) presented an update on Blue Green Algae through the 2025 bathing season. A brief overview of the interagency protocol was given and the number of 'advice against bathing' notices issued because of BGA. Bathing water sites affected were: Rea's Wood, Magilligan Benone, Magilligan Downhill and Portstewart. The next steps for the future work was then presented which included a review of the protocol and implantation of audit findings, continued surveillance of bathing waters and continued work on gaining accredited testing. A 2025 Blue-Green Algae report will also be published and shared with BBF members. **(Action 4)** several discussions followed with regards to blue green algae. This included concerns over testing, potential dangers, push back from the water sports industry and the depth of knowledge known (and still to discover) about BGA and how it behaves in different environments.

BATHING WATER REVIEW UPDATE

- [REDACTED] (DAERA) gave an overview of the main topics to be looked at in the bathing water review. A brief review was given on the EIP and the review of implementation of the bathing water regulations in NI report. [REDACTED] (Innovations and Consultancy Services) spoke about the upcoming stakeholder workshop on the 18th of November and encouraged attendance. [REDACTED] then finished off with an overview of the bathing water review process and the policy requirements. It was noted that the previous 2022/2023 Bathing Water Review will be sent out with the minutes of this meeting. **(Action 5)**

Finally, a special word of thanks to all the presenters for such informative talks.

ACTION POINTS/OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE/TARGET DATE:

- **Action 1** – DAERA – Annex of past achievements of the BBF to be circulated to members for comment.
- **Action 2** – BWO – review to see if additional/updated signage is needed.
- **Action 3** - BWO – review bathing water profiles and notify DAERA of any changes needed.
- **Action 4** – DAERA – Circulate 2025 Blue-Green Algae report to BBF members when complete
- **Action 5** – DAERA – Circulate 2022/2023 Bathing Water Review Report with minutes.

Minutes written by: [REDACTED]

Date: 06/11/2025