



Consultation on the Bathing Waters Policy Review for Northern Ireland

Easy read version



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

About this document

This is an Easy Read version of a consultation.

A consultation is when the government asks people what they think before making decisions.



This document is also available on the DAERA website at:
www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-bathing-waters-policy-review-northern-ireland

You can get a copy of this document in other formats, such as:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other languages

To request an alternative format, please contact us:



- Water Policy Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast
BT3 9ED
- **Email:** waterpolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

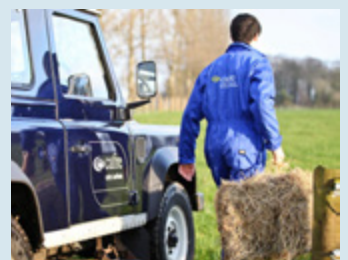
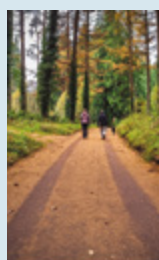
About us

We are the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

What we do?

Here are some of the things we do:

- We look after the development of farming, forests and fishing in Northern Ireland.
- We provide a service to look after the health and welfare of animals, fish and plants.
- We look after the environment and rural affairs in Northern Ireland.
- We provide research, expert advice and education.
- We look after some parts of public health in how food is made.



What is this consultation about?

This consultation is about bathing waters in Northern Ireland.
You can tell us what you think.

What are bathing waters?

Bathing waters are places where lots of people go swimming.

These are usually:

- Beaches by the sea
- One inland site (a lake)

There are **33 bathing waters** in Northern Ireland.

Who is running this consultation?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is running this consultation. DAERA wants to make sure:

- Water is safe for people to swim in
- Information is clear and easy to understand
- That our systems to deliver this still work as swimming habits change

Why is DAERA reviewing bathing water policy?

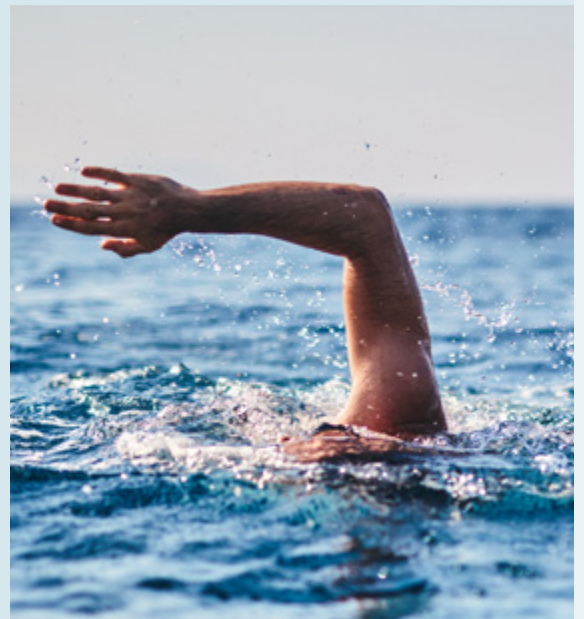
DAERA is reviewing bathing water policy because:

- More people swim all year round
- Outdoor swimming is more popular
- Some places are used more than others
- Advice from health experts has changed
- DAERA wants to make sure people stay safe when they swim

What does our bathing water programme look like today?

- There are **33 identified bathing waters** in Northern Ireland
- Most are coastal, and one is inland
- Water quality is checked during the bathing season

The bathing season currently runs from **1 June to 15 September**.



How is water quality checked?

During the bathing season DAERA:

- Takes water samples (often weekly)
- Tests for bacteria that can make people ill
- Checks for pollution and blue green algae
- Publishes results online

Each site is given a rating:

- **Excellent** • **Good** • **Sufficient** • **Poor**

If a site is Poor, advice against bathing must be shown.

How do people get information?

DAERA provides information through the **Bathing Water Quality Dashboard**, which:

- Shows an interactive map of all bathing waters
- Gives clear colour coded results
- Links to site specific advice

The results are not real time, and this is clearly explained.

What is DAERA asking for your views on?

The consultation asks questions about **eight main areas**.

1. Sharing information with bathing water users

DAERA wants to know:

- Do people use the online dashboard?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Are there better ways to share information?

2. Length of the bathing season

The bathing season is when water testing happens.

Right now, the bathing season runs from: 1 June to 15 September.

DAERA is asking if the season should change.

Possible options include:

- Keeping it the same
- Making it longer
- Having different seasons at different sites
- Monitoring some sites all year round

This is because many people now swim in spring, autumn and winter.

3. A risk based approach to monitoring

Some bathing water sites always have very good water quality.

DAERA is asking if:

- These low-risk sites could be tested a little less often
- Higher-risk or new sites could be tested more often

This could help DAERA use staff and money more effectively and all sites would still meet minimum legal testing rules

4. How bathing waters are identified

DAERA wants to check if the rules for deciding what counts as a bathing water are still right.

The rules include:

- lots of people swim there
- it is safe and accessible
- Someone will act as the **Bathing Water Operator**. The Bathing Water Operator has the responsibility to manage the site and to display information.

DAERA is also asking if Northern Ireland should use a more flexible system, like other parts of the UK, instead of changing the law each time a site is added or removed.

DAERA also wants to focus on activities with the highest health risk, like full swimming.

5. Monitoring new candidate sites

DAERA may monitor potential new bathing water sites first, before deciding if they become official bathing waters. These would be called candidate sites.

This could:

- Provide early safety information
- Help decide if a site should become an official bathing water

DAERA wants your views on whether this approach should become a formal step.

6. Removing automatic loss of bathing water status

At present, a site can lose its bathing water status after five years of poor results.

This has never happened in Northern Ireland.

Other parts of the UK now decide case by case instead.

DAERA is asking if Northern Ireland should:

- Stop the automatic rule
- Decide based on evidence and if improvement is possible

Advice against bathing would still be shown where needed.

7. Making sure monitoring matches where people swim

Over time, people may start swimming in different parts of a beach or water body.

DAERA is asking:

- Are the current testing points in the right place?
- Should they be moved to better match where people swim?

8. Other ideas and suggestions

DAERA welcomes:

- Any other ideas
- Suggestions to improve safety
- Better ways to share information
- Ideas to improve water quality



Application form for new nominated sites

Anyone can suggest a new bathing water site.

DAERA asks that nominations include:

- Evidence people regularly swim there
- Information on safety and access

How can I respond?

- The consultation is open to everyone
- Responses are made online via Citizen Space
- The consultation runs for 12 weeks

A photograph of a person in a black wetsuit and an orange cap running through the ocean surf. The person is seen from behind, splashing water as they move. The ocean is a mix of blue and white foam from the waves. The sky is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Your views will help shape future bathing water policy in Northern Ireland.

Have your say

Please tell us what you think about our proposed plan by visiting this website:



- **Clicking on this link to answer the questions:**
[Consultation on the Bathing Waters Policy Review for Northern Ireland - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#)



- **Email:** waterpolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk
to request a written response template.

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Find out more



- **Get a copy from our website:**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-bathing-waters-policy-review-northern-ireland

Dates

You can tell us what you think from **12 Noon, Friday 29 May 2026**
until **5pm Friday 21 August 2026**.