

## Helen's Bay – Bathing Water Profile

Helen's Bay beach, County Down, Northern Ireland



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*Bathing Water Profiles are designed to help the public make an informed choice before bathing, providing detailed information on the physical characteristics of each bathing water as well as assessing the pollution risk to each site. They are a requirement of The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 and are reviewed in line with these regulations.*

Historical and Current bathing water compliance classifications for Helen's Bay can be found at – [Bathing Water Compliance](#)

**There is general advice not to bathe during or up to 48hrs after heavy or prolonged rainfall.**

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**Description** This popular tourist beach located on the North Down coast, is part of Crawfordsburn Country Park and is owned and managed by Northern Ireland Environment Agency. It is approximately 0.5km in length and comprised mostly of sand with a rocky shoreline at each end. The bathing water is backed by a public pathway and golf course, with the small village of Helen's Bay at the western end. Facilities within the vicinity of the bathing water include public toilets, a café, and a visitor centre at the nearby Crawfordsburn Country Park. The catchment area for this bathing water includes improved grassland, arable farming, and dense dwarf shrub heath. There is one small river which flows across the bathing beach from the golf course. This river flows through a rural environment and the village of Helen's Bay and may be influenced by urban and rural discharges.

**Site Details** Local council area – Ards and North Down Borough Council

Year of designation – 1988

Water sampling location – Lat 54.67342, Long -5.73696

### **Potential Pollution and measures to reduce impact on site:**

The potential sources of pollution have been split into three categories; wastewater (sewage) treatment works discharges, wastewater systems in urban areas and rural source pollution, including agriculture. DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division work with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and other departments to identify and resolve sources of pollution.

### **Wastewater (sewage) treatment works discharges.**

Approximately 2km to the west of the bathing water is an offshore outfall discharging secondary treated effluent from the Seahill, Ballyrobert, Crawfordsburn and Helen's Bay area. 10km to the east is a much larger outfall discharging treated wastewater from the greater Bangor area. The secondary treated effluent is discharged 600m offshore and receives UV disinfection during the bathing season.

### **Wastewater systems in urban areas.**

The urbanisation associated with the village of Helen's Bay and the wider catchment is a potential source of pollution, especially during and after periods of prolonged or heavy rainfall.

In the event of prolonged/heavy rainfall the wastewater system may become overwhelmed leading to an overflow discharge of wastewater. **This is why there is general advice not to bathe during or up to 48 hours after prolonged/heavy rainfall.**

The collection and treatment of wastewater has the potential to cause pollution as all combined collection systems are designed to overflow in periods of extreme wet weather or following failure of the system. This prevents overflows into residential properties. Within the Helen's Bay area there are combined sewer overflows (CSO), emergency overflows and wastewater pumping stations with associated emergency overflows, highlighted on Map 1.

There is also the potential for misconnections between the sewer system and surface drains, which may allow untreated wastewater to enter the water environment. Misconnections are not obvious, but when these become apparent NIEA pursues them as pollution incidents.

### **Rural source pollution – agriculture**

The land cover within the catchment area of Helen's Bay bathing water is improved grassland, farming, and dense dwarf shrub heath. Areas within the catchment where agriculture is the dominant land use may be subject to inputs from chemical fertilisers and organic wastes. Prolonged periods of rainfall can cause surface runoff of these organic wastes, such as animal slurries, contributing to the bacteria content in the water environment.

### **Other potential sources of pollution.**

- Dogs
- Horses
- Litter
- Fly tipping

### **Management measures:**

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017, take an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment. River Basin Management Plans (RPMP) are produced which detail all of Northern Ireland's water quality objectives and a programme of measures to achieve these objectives. Within these 'Programme of Measures' in each River Basin Management Plan are a number of measures which relate directly to the protection of bathing waters.

Helen's Bay bathing water is located in the North Eastern River Basin District. You can find more information about the North Eastern River Basin Management Plan below:

[Draft 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland 2021-2027](#)

Within the River Basin Management Plan programme of measures there are several schemes to address sources of pollution:

- Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) 2019-2022

- Knowledge Advisory Service (KAS)
- Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS)
- Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS)

### **Macro-algae, phytoplankton, and cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)**

Helen's Bay bathing water is not at risk of proliferation of macro-algae, phytoplankton, or cyanobacteria (blue-green algae).

### **What should I do if I see a pollution incident?**

If you see a water pollution incident, you should immediately contact NIEA through the **24 hr** Emergency Water Pollution Hotline:

**Phone: 0800 807060**

When pollution is reported or found to be affecting the water quality of a bathing water, an immediate investigation is instigated. All possible sources of pollution are checked and the bathing water is monitored until the effects of the incident have passed. During this time, bathing waters may be temporarily closed (by local authority or controlling body) until the water quality has improved and levels of bacteria are within mandatory standards.

### **Contact details**

For general information about bathing waters:

**DAERA** Marine and Fisheries Division  
 17 Antrim Road, Tonagh, Lisburn, BT28 3AL  
 Email: [Marine.InfoRequests@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Marine.InfoRequests@daera-ni.gov.uk)  
 Website: [DAERA Bathing Water Quality](#)

**Local Authority** Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Address: City Hall, The Castle, Bangor, BT20 4BT  
 Email: [enquiries@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)  
 Phone: 0300 013 3333  
 Website: [Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

**Bathing Water Operator** Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
 Address: Crawfordsburn Country Park, Bridge Road South, Helen's Bay BT19 1JT  
 Phone: 028 9188 3621

Map 1 Helen's Bay Bathing Water

