

I NIEA WATER MANAGEMENT UNIT FRESHWATER MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT INTERNAL DOCUMENT CONTROL				
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Team	FMA – Freshwater Investigations			
Document Title	Follow up invertebrate investigation in the Cross Hill Burn, Kells, Co Antrim – February 2026			
Purpose	To reassess the health of the invertebrate communities following reports of low RMI scores in the Cross Hill Burn, Kells, February 2026.			
Related Documents	AE1/25/2864127 - NIEA - WSE - FMA - FI - Cross Hill Burn - November 2025			
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Follow up invertebrate investigation in the Cross Hill Burn, Kells, Co Antrim – February 2026

Introduction

The freshwater investigation (FI) team conducted three surveys on the Cross Hill Burn between November/December 2025 (AE1/25/2864127). These surveys, using ARMI methods, revealed an area upstream of Kells town with extremely suppressed invertebrate scores with no pollution source identified. On the 18th of February 2026, the FI team conducted a follow up survey to help measure any improvement in invertebrate assemblages.

Results

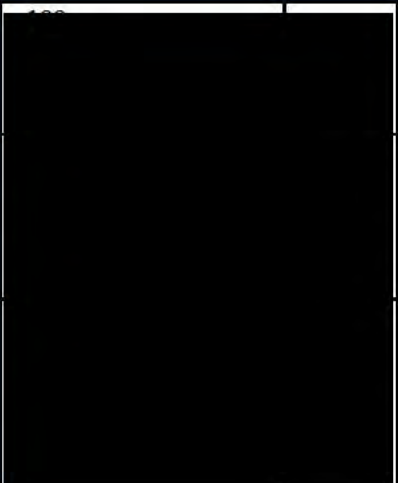
Site No.	Location	IGR	Dec 2025 RMI score	Feb 2026 RMI score	February 2026 Field Notes
Jar 3			12	11	No obvious signs of pollution. Healthy score.
Jar 5			1	8	Slight traces of sewage fungus on stones
Site 2			2	3	Very poor score. No sensitive inverts. 10% diatomaceous algae on stones. 5% thin sewage fungus on stones and some tufts. Large amount of grass debris in sample and hanging from high water mark on overhanging trees. Reported to NIEA Emergency Pollution Hotline.

Table 1 RMI score and field notes.

The results (Table 1 and Figure 1) show a similar, healthy score at the upstream site (Jar 3), when compared to the previous sample taken in December 2025. There was a major improvement from the previous score at Jar 5, possibly due to recolonisation of invertebrates from the upstream source. However, site 2 [REDACTED], does not show any major improvements currently. This may be due in part to the distance downstream and the time taken for invertebrates to recolonise. The sustained low score may also be attributed to a recently reported (18/2/26) pollution event in this vicinity, where large amounts of organic matter (Photos 1 & 2) were observed in the channel upstream of site 2.

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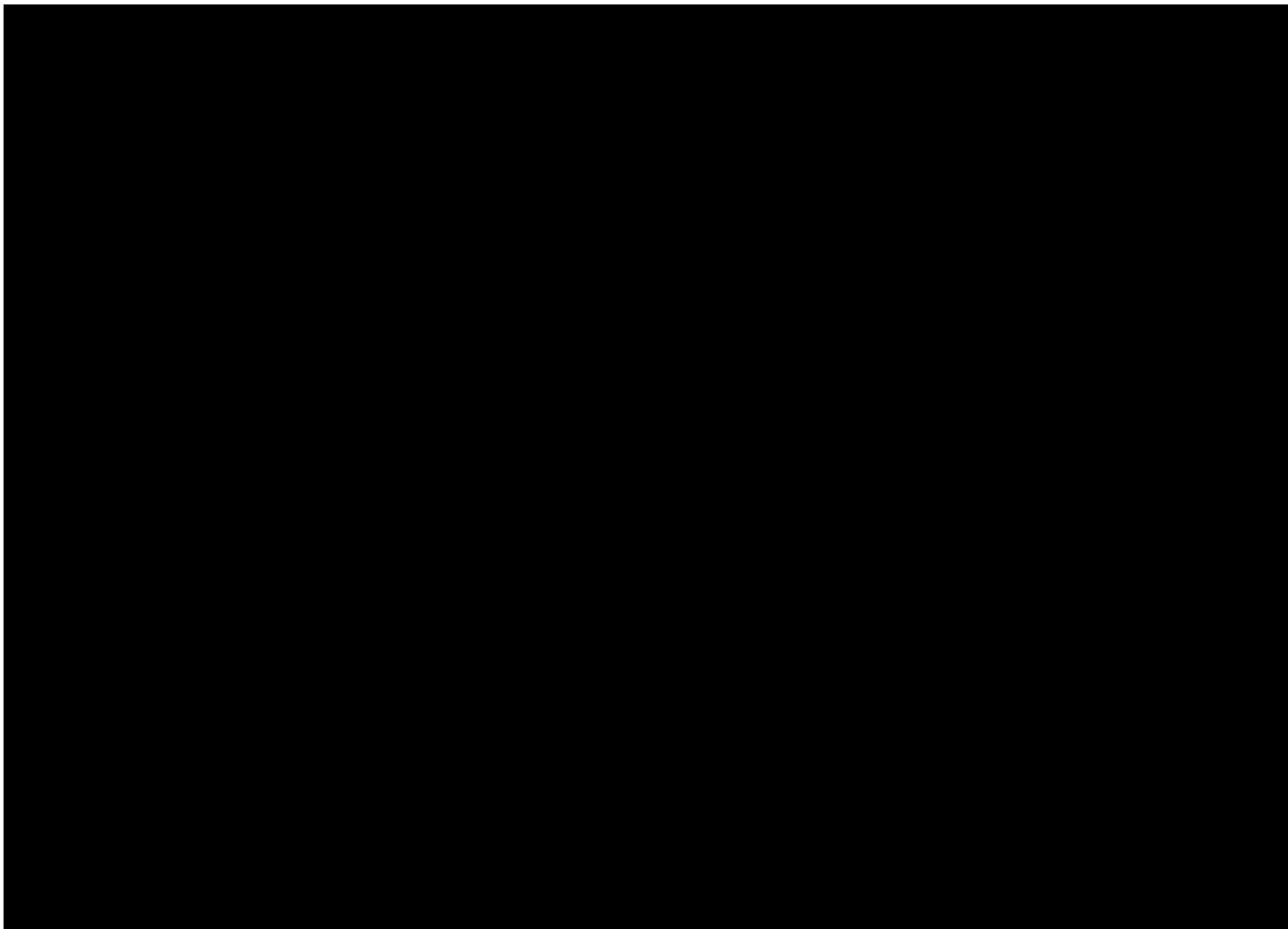


Figure 2: Showing the sites surveyed on the Cross Hill Burn on the 18th of February 2026.

Conclusion

Upland sites appear to be recovering from the pollution event that occurred in Autumn 2025. However, site 2 remains severely impacted. There is on site evidence of a more recent pollution event occurring above site 2, which was reported to the WPRT on the 18th of February 2026. This appears to have continued to impact on the invertebrate communities. The stretch of river upstream from site 2 is also heavily poached causing erosion and sedimentation which may be contributing to the low RMI score.

On 19th of February the NIEA Catchment Team was informed of the ongoing issues in the Cross Hill burn by the FI team. They hope to add this catchment to their 2026/27 schedule of works. The [REDACTED] is also going to email the Catchment Team email inbox, requesting if any further action can be taken.

Recommendations

- Further investigation is required by the WQI to identify the pollution noted on site above site 2 and downstream of Jar 5. It is recommended that a detailed river walk in this area may reveal a point source pollution that is responsible for the decimation of the invertebrate community downstream.
- Immediate remediation and mitigation are required to prevent further damage and loss to the ecological environment.
- WQIs should keep FMA FI and local stakeholders updated on the progress and remediation efforts.



Photo 1: Organic debris caught in vegetation after heavy rainfall.



Photo 2: Showing organic debris in the river and attached to vegetation