

# Planning for third cycle River Basin Management Plan 2021 - 2027

December 2019

## Consultation on Significant Water management Issues

### Executive Summary

## Introduction

Northern Ireland's water resources are managed and protected using a catchment based approach which includes rivers, lakes and groundwater as well as coastal and marine water bodies. The European Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), which has been transposed into national legislation, requires the production and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) in six yearly cycles. The River Basin Management Plan takes an integrated approach, identifying those water bodies which can be classified as being at 'good or better' status, as well as setting the objectives and programme of measures for the next six year cycle to help improve those water bodies which are classified as below 'good' status.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle RBMP period runs from 2021-2027. As part of the development of this next cycle plan the Department must, by 22 December 2019, publish for public consultation a report on 'Significant Water Management Issues' (SWMI) in Northern Ireland. NIEA has prepared the attached SWMI Report which will be available for public consultation until June 2020.

**Chapter 1** of the Report provides a short introduction explaining the purpose of the SWMI document and the background to the Water Framework Directive, its objectives and linkages to other key relevant legislation, plans and strategies.

**Chapter 2** of the report provides a summary of the 2018 interim water body classification results, assessing progress towards meeting the objectives for 2021. These objectives were set in the second-cycle river basin management plan covering the period from 2015 to 2021. Classification results are reported in so-called 'status' classes. Full details of the classifications are available in Appendix 2 on the website.

**Chapter 3** analyses the main pressures impacting on water quality and outlines potential measures to address them. The chapter also deals with emerging issues like plastics and anti-microbial resistance.

**Chapter 4** shows how we work together with the relevant authorities in Ireland to ensure a coordinated approach to the cross border water bodies. Further details on this can be found in Appendix 6.

The report is supplemented by appendices and supporting material on the DAERA webpage.

### **Key findings**

The 2015 classification showed that 37.4 % of all water bodies (rivers, lakes, coastal and marine water bodies, groundwater) were at good or better status. The second cycle River Basin Management Plan objective (aims) was to improve the status of water bodies, so that 70 % of all water bodies would be at good status by 2021. The results of the 2018 interim update, where 36.6 % of water bodies were at good or better status, indicate that Northern Ireland is now unlikely to achieve that objective. While the overall figure does include water bodies where status has improved, unfortunately this has been offset by a higher number of water bodies that have deteriorated in status.

A more detailed analysis was carried out for river water bodies to identify the key reasons for the deterioration and failure to improve status in a sufficient number of water bodies. The main pressures on the status of water bodies are agriculture and waste water-related impacts (urban development).

Evidence of agricultural pressures on water bodies include:

- an increasing trend in soluble reactive phosphorus in rivers, which is also an indicator for the Programme for Government Outcome 2;
- point source pollution incidents where agricultural activity has been identified as the cause;
- an increase in livestock units, especially poultry in intensive farming units

Evidence of waste-water related pressures on water bodies include:

- point source pollution incidents where Northern Ireland Water activities have been identified as the cause
- an increase in sewage infrastructure at or near capacity with around 70 urban areas across Northern Ireland where new developments cannot be approved for connection to the sewer network.

### **Key questions**

This report presents the significant water management issues facing Northern Ireland in the third-cycle river basin management plan based on Northern Ireland

Environment Agency's analysis. NIEA has also included a draft list of actions (Programme of Measures) for discussion in Appendix 8. Through this consultation you, all stakeholders and members of the public are invited to give your views on:

- What you think are the significant water management issues in Northern Ireland?
- How you think we can all work together to address these issues for the overarching benefit all of the citizens of Northern Ireland?
- What measures you think should be progressed and how these measures (actions) could be delivered?

**Chapter 5** contains the full list of consultation questions.

## **Conclusion**

The latest (2018) statistics show that the percentage of water bodies at good or better status has not improved since the 2015 classification. As a result it is now unlikely that the 2021 objective of having 70 % of water bodies at good or better status will be achieved. In addition the number of water bodies being at good or better status has declined in the period between 2015 and 2018.

It is recognised that Northern Ireland will have to deal with the significant pressures on the water environment in the third-cycle river basin management plan running from 2021 to 2027 and that the main pressures are due to agriculture and waste water related impacts.

The public are invited to give their views on the report through this consultation.