

River Basin Management Plans

Groundwater Classification Methodology Surface Water Quantitative

December 2014



An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**



www.doeni.gov.uk/niea

**Northern Ireland
Environment
Agency**

Groundwater Classification Methodology

Surface Water Quantitative

December 2014

Introduction

All groundwater bodies in Northern Ireland will be classified in 2014-2015 to establish whether they are at good or poor status utilizing monitoring data for the past 6 years (2009 to 2014). Status is divided in qualitative and quantitative status and a number of tests are carried out for each, see Figure 1.

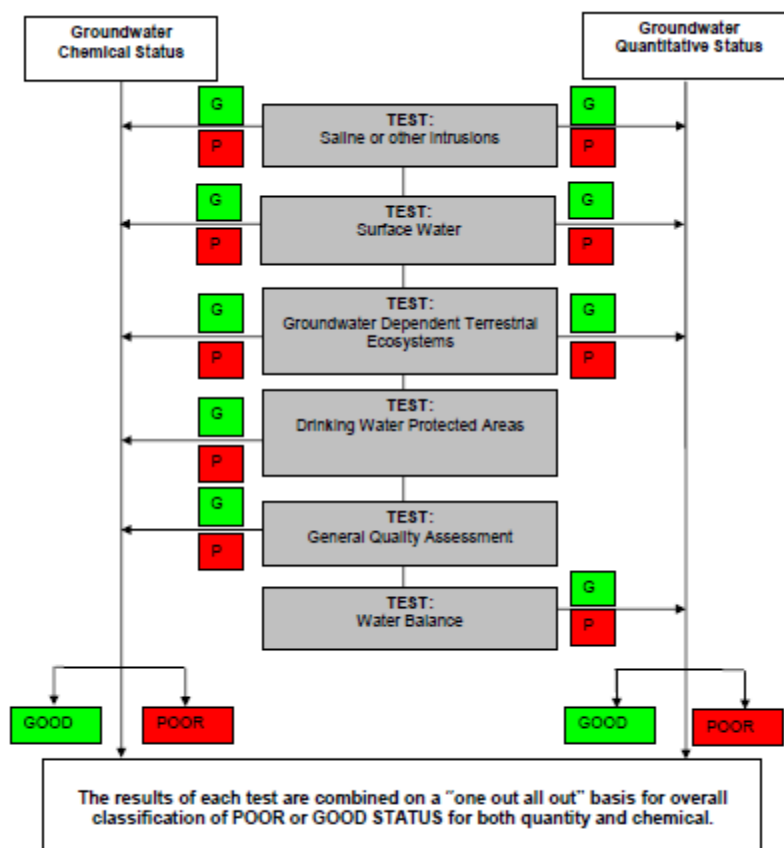


Figure 1: Overview of classification tests [from UK Technical Advisory Group paper 11b(i)].

Surface Water Quantitative classification

The Surface Water Quantitative classification test evaluates whether an abstraction or set of abstractions are likely to be leading to a deterioration in status of a surface water body. Abstracting groundwater reduces the volume of water that discharges into a surface water feature as base flow. Surface water features can include rivers, ponds, lakes and wetlands. If this reduction is too great, it can lead to the river, river flows and lake levels being threatened and ultimately the surface water feature may

dry up for periods. This can have serious consequences for ecosystems dependent upon the water supply.

If a surface water body is found to be at poor status due to groundwater abstractions, the groundwater body or bodies with which that surface water body is hydraulically connected will be characterised as being at poor status.

Explanation of the method is given below, with specific detail given to the origin and processing of data required for the implementation of the method.

This method is derived from the UKTAG guidance for quantitative classification, updated for the second RBP cycle (UKTAG, 2012).

1. Identify all surface water bodies that are at less than good quantitative status (on a scale from high – good – moderate – poor) using LowFlows Enterprise.



2. For the subset identified in step 1 only: identify those catchments where greater than 50 % of the allowable abstraction can be attributed to groundwater. Classify the associated groundwater body or bodies as poor status.

Old and new standards

This test is a new method to assess the quantitative impact of groundwater abstraction on hydraulically connected surface water bodies. The test was not conducted in 2008/ 2009. It has been applied using Low Flows Enterprise assessments based on current river water bodies and standards.

Groundwater Abstractions

The licensing of abstractions was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2007. It is confidently assumed that the majority of the large and therefore significant groundwater abstractions have now been licensed and are included within the abstraction licensing database. It is however acknowledged that there are a lot of small abstractions, such as those associated with farming, that as yet have not been licensed and are therefore not included within the abstraction licensing database.

For the purposes of the classification one average over the last six years of abstracted groundwater volumes for each licence was calculated. This would exclude spring or spring fed abstractions.

LowFlows Enterprise Model

The system estimates river flows for any river reach within Northern Ireland even where measured flow data are not available. LowFlows Enterprise is a regional NI model where it integrates within a GIS framework the latest hydrological models for predicting natural and artificially influenced river-flows within NI ungauged catchments.

Previous computer based flow models have applied methodologies adapted from elsewhere within the British Isles and have not necessarily been representative of NI river flow regimes. The software provides catchment characteristics and flow statistics for any specified catchment using spatial data sets from NI.

LowFlows Enterprise will have only licensed groundwater abstractions programmed into it. LowFlows Enterprise uses a Theim approximation method, which relies on aquifer properties derived by The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland for six different hydrogeological typologies. The Theim approximation calculates a flow reduction plan for nearby river stretches and this is then applied to a river flow model to demonstrate the effect of the abstraction on that river stretch.

References

UKTAG Paper 11b(ii), (2012). *Groundwater Quantitative Classification for the purposes of the Water Framework Directive*. www.wfduk.org