

Significant Water Management Issues

# Protected Areas in the North Western River Basin District

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## Protected areas

There are many areas in the North Western River Basin District (RBD) where the water environment is particularly important for wildlife conservation, bathing, drinking water supply, shellfish harvesting, or their vulnerability to eutrophication. These areas are known as 'protected areas' and are given particular legal protection. These designated areas are vital to ensure that the diverse ecosystems and cultural and economic benefits within them are safeguarded.

## Drinking Water Protected Areas

There are 61 Drinking Water Protected Areas in the North Western RBD, including groundwater. Since 2010, Northern Ireland Water have produced and reviewed Drinking Water Safety Plans for Drinking Water Protected Areas which assess and mitigate against the risks to drinking water quality.

Implementation of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive encourages integrated pest management to reduce risks to drinking water supplies and the environment. Within the agricultural sector, good practice is promoted in relation to the use of pesticide and fertiliser storage, handling and use. NIEA is working in partnership with Ulster Farmers Union, DARD and Northern Ireland Water (Water Catchment Partnership) and through the Voluntary Initiative to support action and advice to reduce pesticide emissions to surface and groundwater.

The Department for Regional Development, in partnership with Northern Ireland Water, Rivers Agency and NIEA, is developing a Long Term Water Strategy. The Strategy aims to encourage a sustainable and integrated approach to managing the different water needs within a catchment while promoting regional development without compromising the environment or increasing flood risk. A consultation on the Strategy will be launched in 2014.

## Rivers and Lakes Protected under the Freshwater Fish Directive

Within in the North Western RBD 1681 km of rivers and 149 km<sup>2</sup> of lakes are identified as salmonid. From the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2013 the Freshwater Fish Directive will be repealed and subsumed into the Water Framework Directive. Equivalent levels of protection and objectives for freshwater fish will be provided by the Water Framework Directive from that date onwards.

## Nutrient Sensitive Areas

The main aim of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive is to protect the water environment from the adverse effects of urban waste water discharges and waste water discharges from certain industrial sectors. This will be achieved by ensuring discharges from relevant waste water treatment works meet the appropriate emission standards set out in the Directive. There are 4 Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive sensitive areas in the North Western RBD; Upper and Lower Lough Erne and their catchments, the Foyle, Faughan and Roe River catchments.

The Nitrates Directive is aimed at preventing and reducing water pollution by nitrates from agricultural sources. A total territory approach has been adopted in Northern Ireland for the Nitrates Directive.

The introduction of actions under the Nitrates Action Programme and the Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) Regulations has contributed significantly to reducing the concentration of nutrients in the water environment from agriculture. Under the Nitrates Directive the action programme has to be reviewed every four years. The current review has now started, with a

revised Nitrates Action Programme due to be made in December 2014.

### **Protected Areas in the Marine Water Environment**

Protected Areas within marine waters include shellfish waters and bathing waters. These sometimes need specific protection against faecal contamination or from other physical issues such as trawling. Faecal bacteria can affect public health, and the largest sources are found in sewage effluent and run-off from animal manure. Discharges from storm overflows and urban run-off can contain faecal bacteria. Faecal bacteria can be present in bathing waters, and can affect people using these waters, particularly while swimming. Faecal bacteria can also accumulate in shellfish, which means that shellfish harvested for consumption have to be treated to ensure they do not pose a threat to human health.

#### **Shellfish Waters**

In the North Western River Basin District there are 2 shellfish waters currently designated under the Shellfish Waters Directive (79/923/EC); Balls Point and Longfield Bank, both within Lough Foyle. In 2012, both Balls Point and Longfield Bank complied with the guideline standard for coliform standards.

NIEA and Marine Division manage shellfish waters to ensure that there is no deterioration in water quality, and that progress is made towards compliance with guideline standards. Compliance is assessed by measuring faecal indicators and other prescribed contaminants in shellfish flesh.

From 22 December 2013, the Shellfish Waters Directive will be repealed and subsumed into the Water Framework Directive. Equivalent levels of protection and objectives for shellfish water will be provided by the Water Framework Directive from that date onwards. Relevant shellfish waters contaminants will be monitored under Water Framework Directive Annex VIII and Annex X specific pollutants and priority hazardous substances. In recent years the relevant Water Framework Directive environmental quality standards have not been exceeded.

Pollution Reduction Programmes are currently being revised for all shellfish waters and will be available in March 2014.

#### **Bathing Waters**

There are 3 bathing waters within the North Western District; Magilligan (Benone), Magilligan (Downhill) and Castlerock.

In 2013, Magilligan (Benone) and Magilligan (Downhill) complied with the guideline standard of the Bathing Waters Directive (76/160/EEC), while Castlerock complied with the mandatory standard. On the basis of these results, Castlerock has been identified for further investigation in 2014, as it failed to meet the guideline (but met the mandatory) standard on four consecutive occasions.

The revised Bathing Waters Directive 2006 established new numerical standards for bathing waters that are more stringent than the current standards. Using these new standards, both Magilligan (Benone) and Magilligan (Downhill) were provisionally classified as 'Excellent' and Castlerock as 'Good' in 2012/13.

### **Areas designated for the protection of habitats or species (Natura 2000 sites)**

These are areas designated for the protection of habitats or species where the maintenance or improvement of the status of water is an important factor in their protection. Within the North Western RBD there are 24 water dependent Special Areas of Conservation designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC); Pettigoe Plateau, Teal Lough, River Foyle & Tributaries, Faughan River & Tributaries, River Roe & Tributaries, Moneyga Bog,



Black Bog, Deroran Bog, Tonnagh Beg Bog, Moninea Bog, Lough Melvin, West Fermanagh Scarplands, Cuilcagh Mountain, Fardrum & Roosky Turloughs, Owenkillew River, Slieve Beagh, Magilligan, Carn-Glenshane Pass, Cranny Bogs, Fairy Water Bogs, Tully Bod, Cladagh (Swanlinbar) River, Magheraveely Marl Loughs, and Upper Lough Erne.

There are 4 water dependent Special Protection Areas designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC); Upper Lough Erne, Slieve Beagh-Mullaghafad-Lisnaskea, Pettigoe Plateau and Lough Foyle.

'Conservation objectives' describe the targets for Natura 2000 Protected Areas to reach and maintain in favourable condition, the habitats and species for which they are designated. The targets within these conservation objectives may be more stringent than those required to meet good ecological status. This may be due to the particular requirements of the wildlife or habitats at these sites that carry the highest level of nature conservation designation. Work is ongoing to align, as far as possible, the objectives and standards for the Water Framework Directive and Natura 2000 Protected Areas. This will enable better targeting and coordination of measures at these most sensitive sites.

