



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Development of the Fourth River Basin Management Plan:

Evolving, Implementing, Communicating

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EPA Water Conference 2026

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Overview



- River Basin Management Planning In Ireland
- Ireland's third River Basin Management Plan,
Water Action Plan 2022-2027
- Development of the fourth River Basin Management Plan,
Water Action Plan 2028-2033

The Evolution of River Basin Management Planning in Ireland



Cycle 1 2009-2015

- Multiple River Basin Management Plans
- Local Authority-led with consultancy support
- Significant step forward in technical assessments

Cycle 2 2018-2021

- National Plan with Areas for Action
- Integrated catchment science and management
- Risk-based approach promoting targeted action – “the right measure in the right place”
- New Governance structures developed

Cycle 3 2022-2027

- Building on Cycle 2
- Multiple Benefits
- Data, evidence-base and tracking implementation – transparency on what is being done.
- A place in the plan for everyone

Water Action Plan 2024: Ireland's 3rd River Basin Management Plan

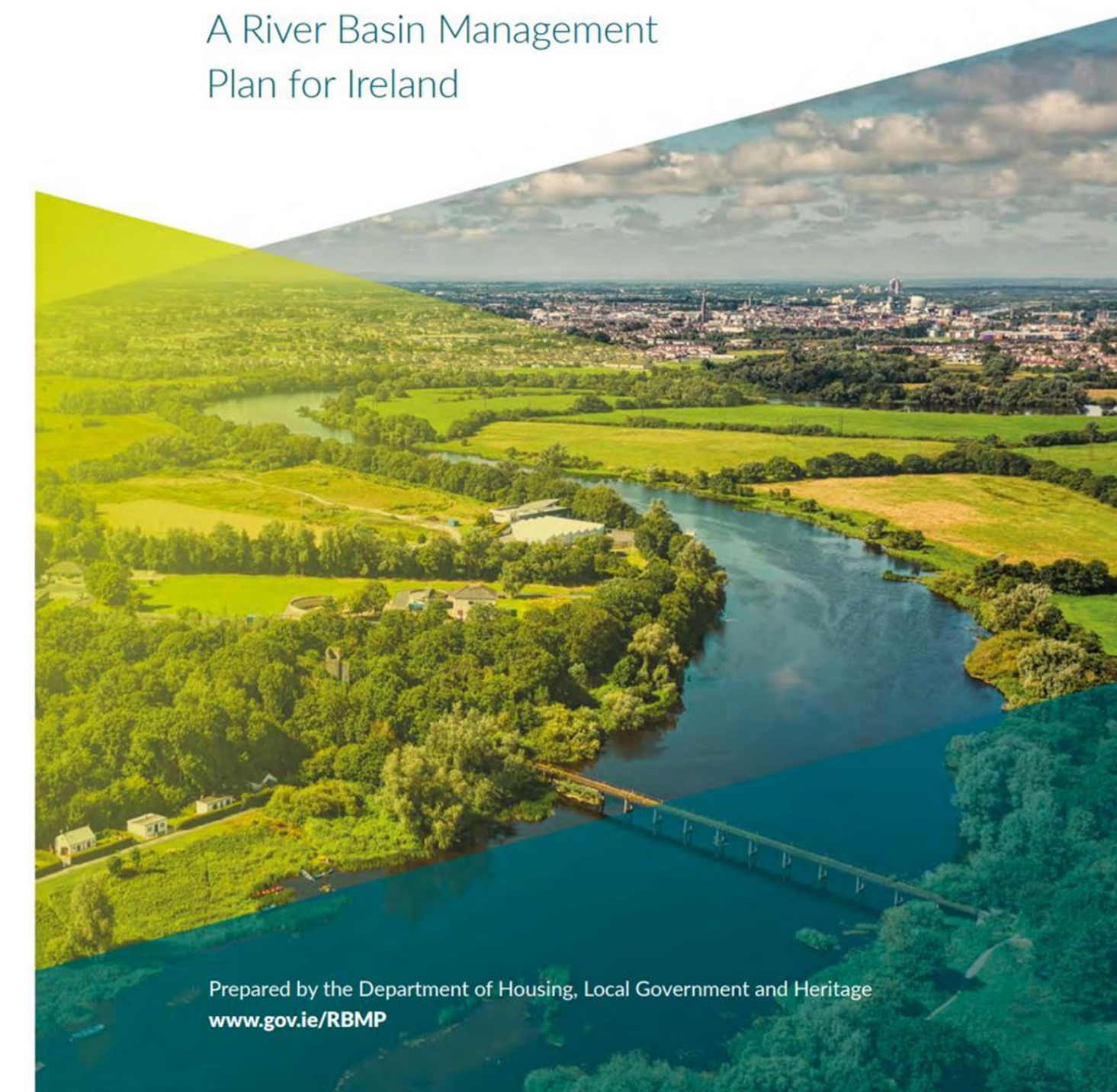
- Launched September 2024
- Government commitment to protecting & restoring Ireland's natural waters by complying with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive
- Accelerates the identification and implementation of the **right measures in the right places** to both **restore** and **protect** all water bodies
- Approx. 150 high level actions, 40 lead organisations



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WaterAction Plan 2024

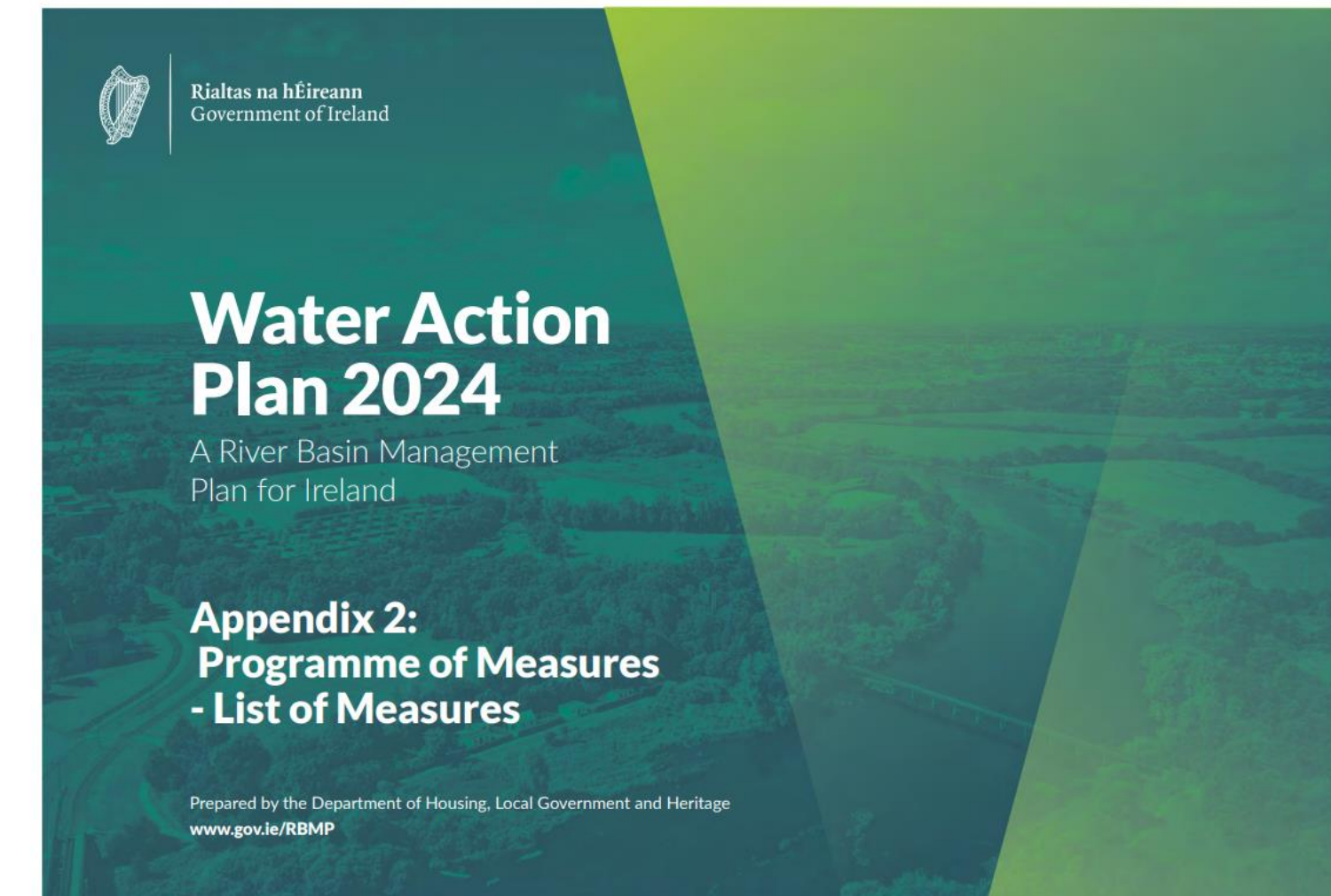
A River Basin Management
Plan for Ireland



Summary of Programme of Measures



- Focused attention in 517 Areas for Action
- Sectoral Action Work Plans
- Catchment Management Work Plans
- Full capacity in the “Farming for Water” EIP Project
- 4,500 farms inspected per year under National Agriculture Inspection Programme
- Mitigation of barriers under the National Barriers Mitigation Programme
- Uisce Éireann investment in 108 WWTPs, 77 collection networks and 92 related national programmes
- Establish the Programme Delivery Office to track implementation



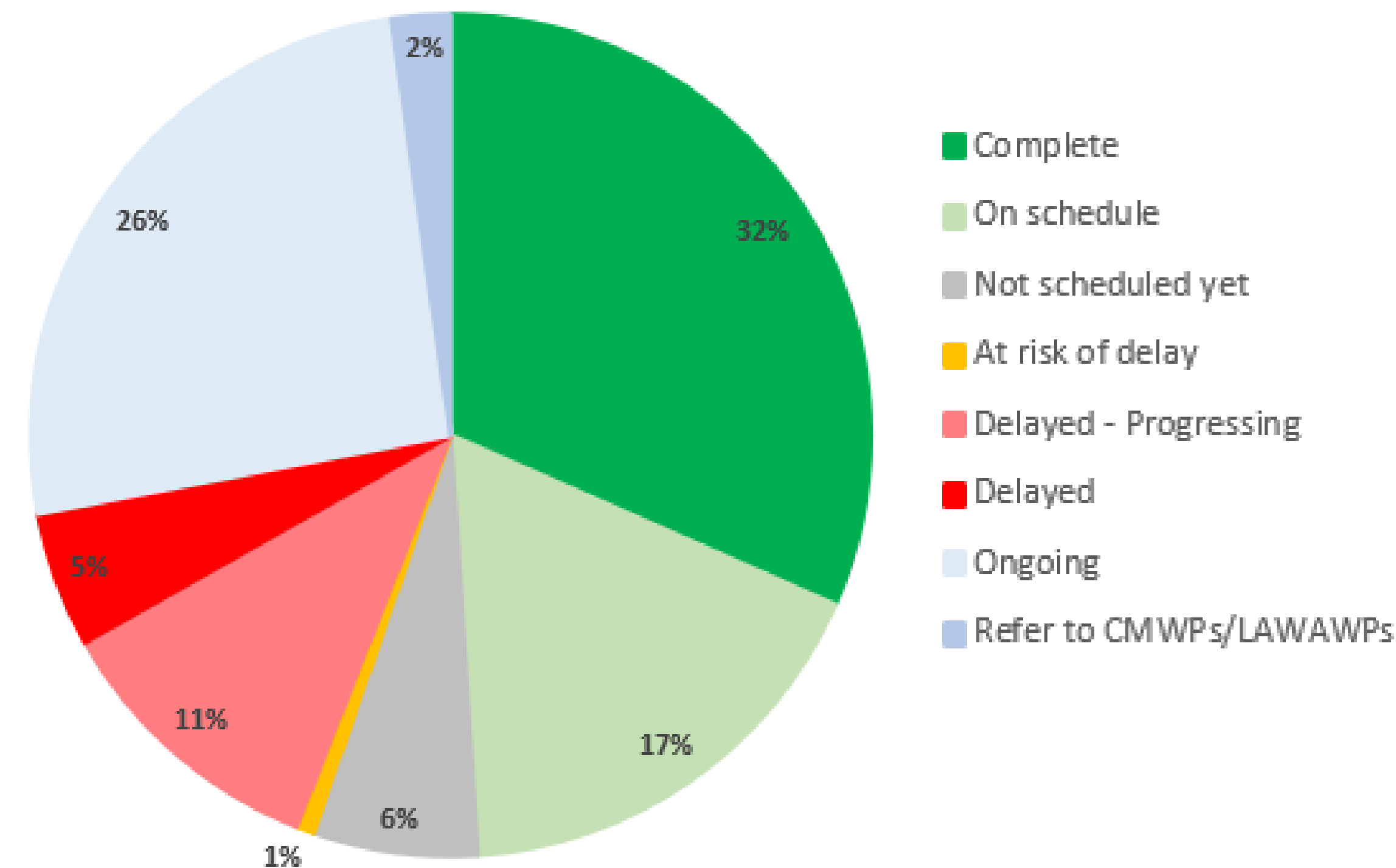
www.gov.ie/rbmp

Implementation of the Water Action Plan 2024



- Implementation of the Water Action Plan is progressing well
- As of the end of 2025, 50% approx. of the total number of actions are delivered or on track to be delivered.
- Implementation is ongoing for 26% of actions.
- Of the 16% of actions delayed, 2/3 are progressing while 1/3 have not yet commenced due to:
 - Resource constraints
 - Dependency on other actions

➤ Water Action Plan actions and supplementary Sectoral Action Work Plan actions



Implementation of the Water Action Plan 2024



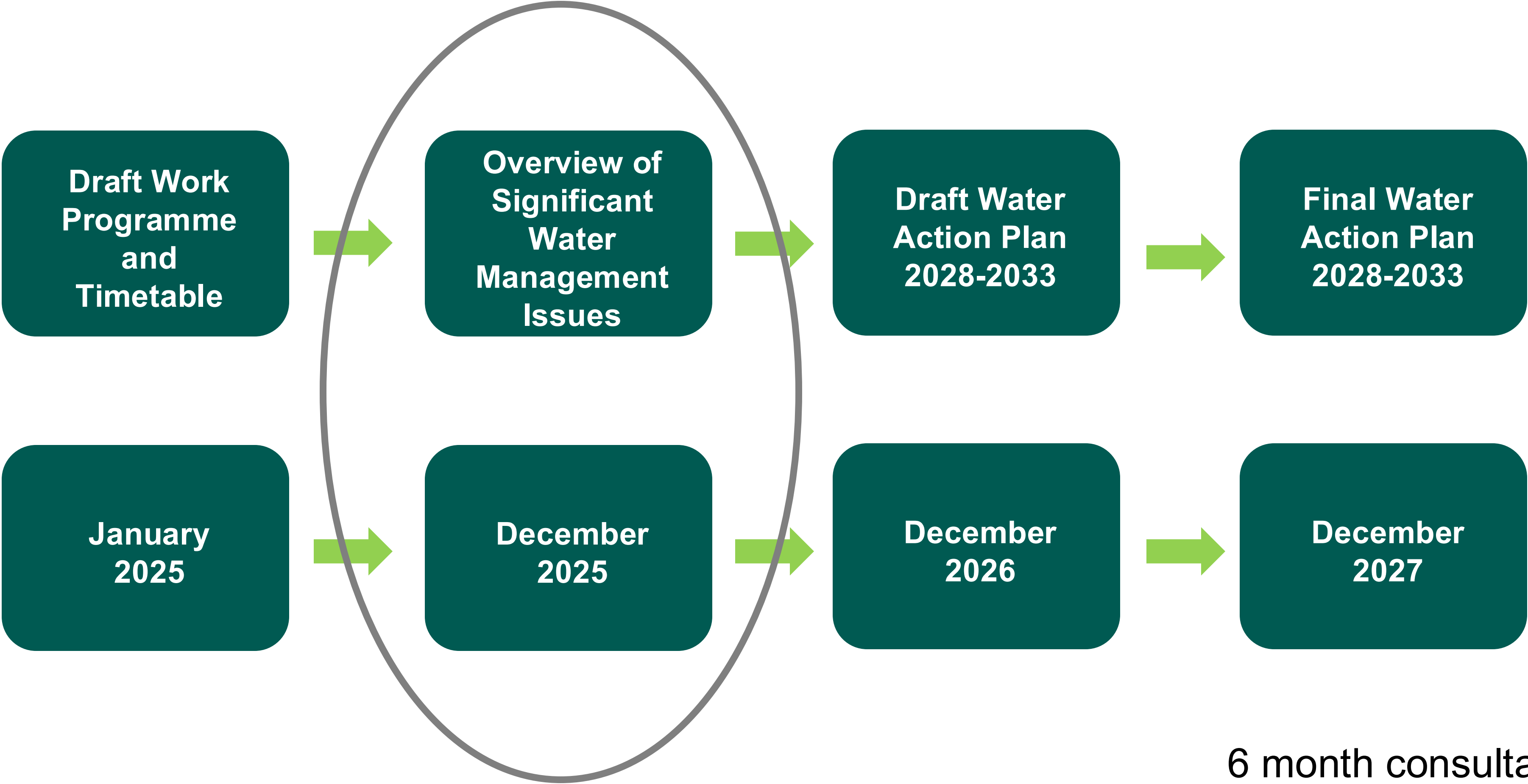
- Interim Review on the implementation of the plan identified key challenges to implementation:
 - **Data**
 - Availability, quality, data sharing
 - Understand implementation at the waterbody scale and in turn, effectiveness of measures and identification of gaps to inform future river basin management planning and development of Catchment Management Work Plans.
 - **Processes related to capital projects**
 - Delay within various phases of projects and knock on effect to other phases.
 - **Capacity**
 - Additional resource need to support implementation of the Water Action Plan 2024

Development of the Water Action Plan for the fourth cycle, 2028-2033



- Building on from the Water Action Plan 2024
 - An increased level of ambition
 - Clarity on governance and collaborative implementation
 - Integrated Catchment Planning
 - Public participation
 - Multiple benefits
- Evolving, Implementing, Communicating

Development of the next Water Action Plan: Public Consultation Stages



6 month consultation periods at each stage leading up to final plan

Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI)



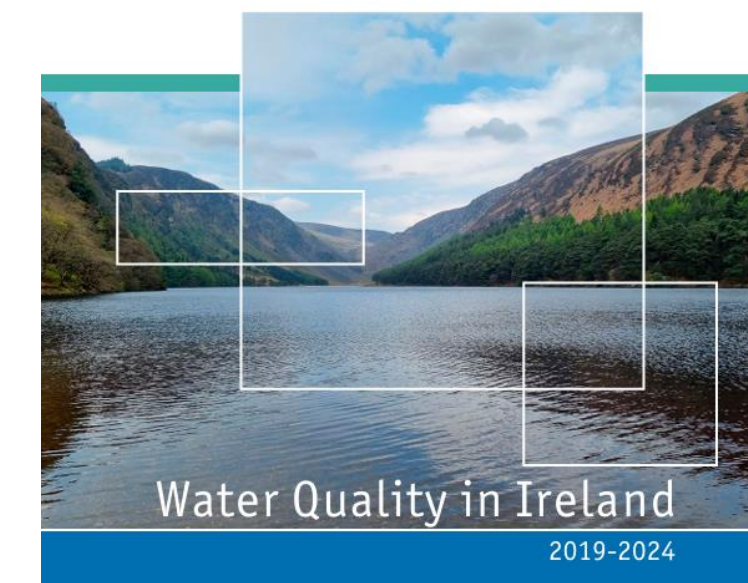
- Themes to explore:
 - *Public participation*
 - *Governance*
 - *Implementation*
 - *Policy coherence,*
 - *Maintaining a high level of environmental ambition with regard to the Environmental Objectives of the Water Action Plan*

- What is being done well?
- What can be improved?
- Are there blockages to improve water quality?
- Should we consider any other issues?

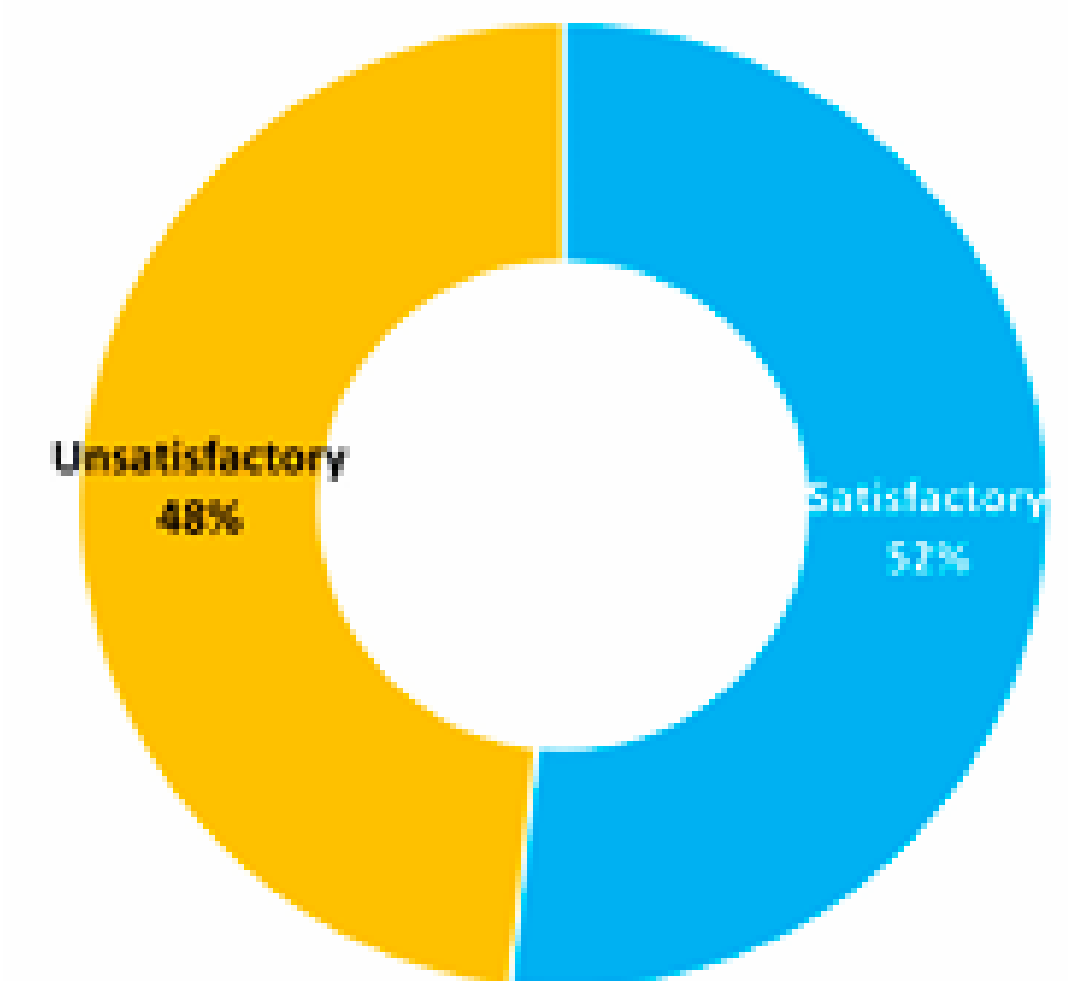
River Basin Management Planning beyond 2027

- Fifty-two percent of surface waters in Ireland are currently meeting their Water Framework Directive target – compliance gap.
- Discussions at EU level on the 2027 deadline and exemptions.
- A high level of environmental ambition will need to be maintained in the fourth cycle to close any remaining gaps > implementation focus.
- Since publication of the Water Action Plan 2024, Department's Water Quality Capital Programme will provide funding up to 2030:
 - Extension and expansion of Farming for Water EIP
 - National Mitigation Barriers Programme
 - Urban Nature Based Solutions projects

.....Supporting multiple policies



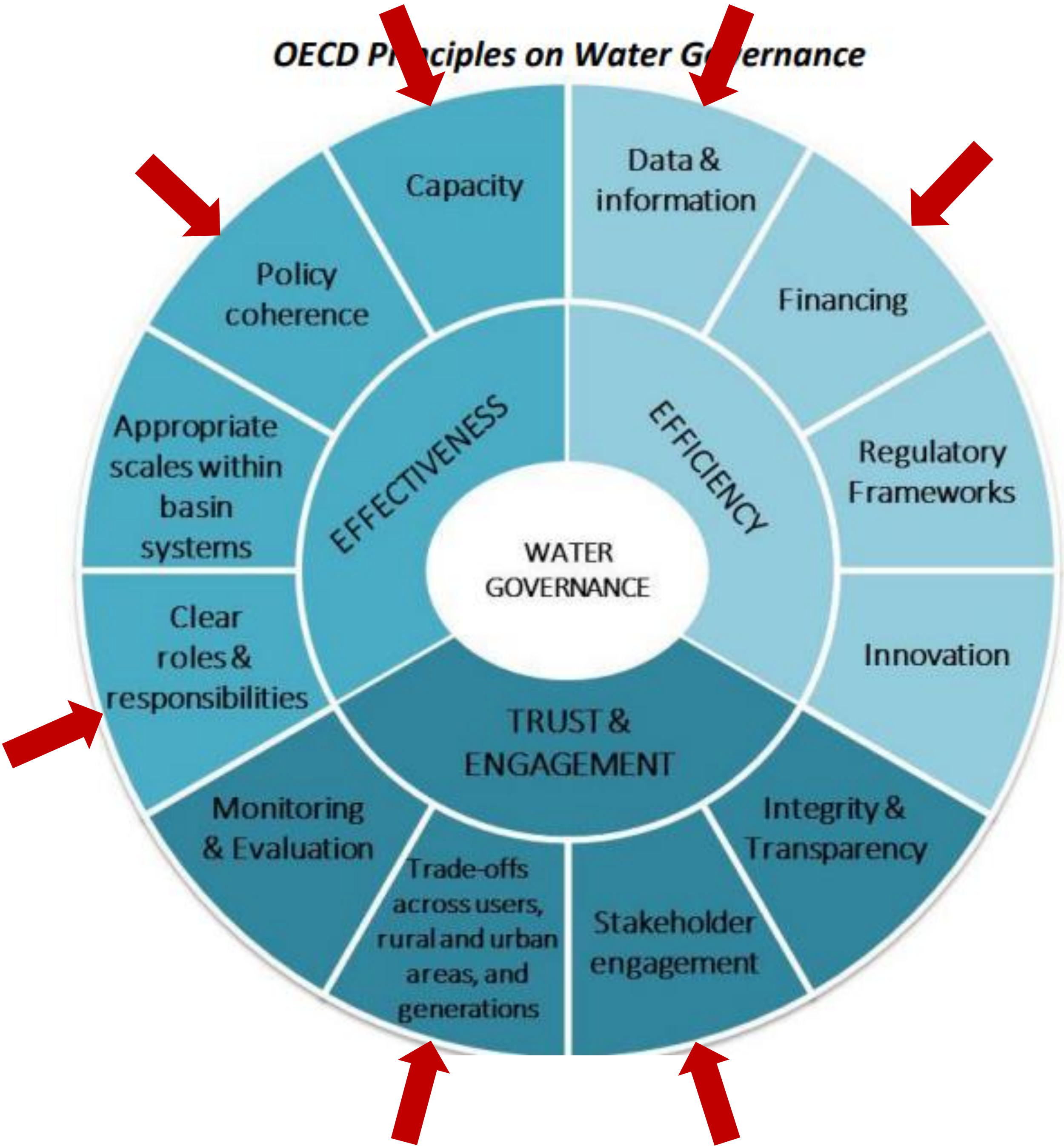
Surface Water Quality for 2019-2024
(all rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters)



OECD WATER GOVERNANCE
INDICATOR FRAMEWORK



Source: OECD (2018), Implementing the OECD Principles on Water Governance: Indicator Framework and Evolving Practices, OECD Publishing, Paris.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264292659-en>



Communicating action

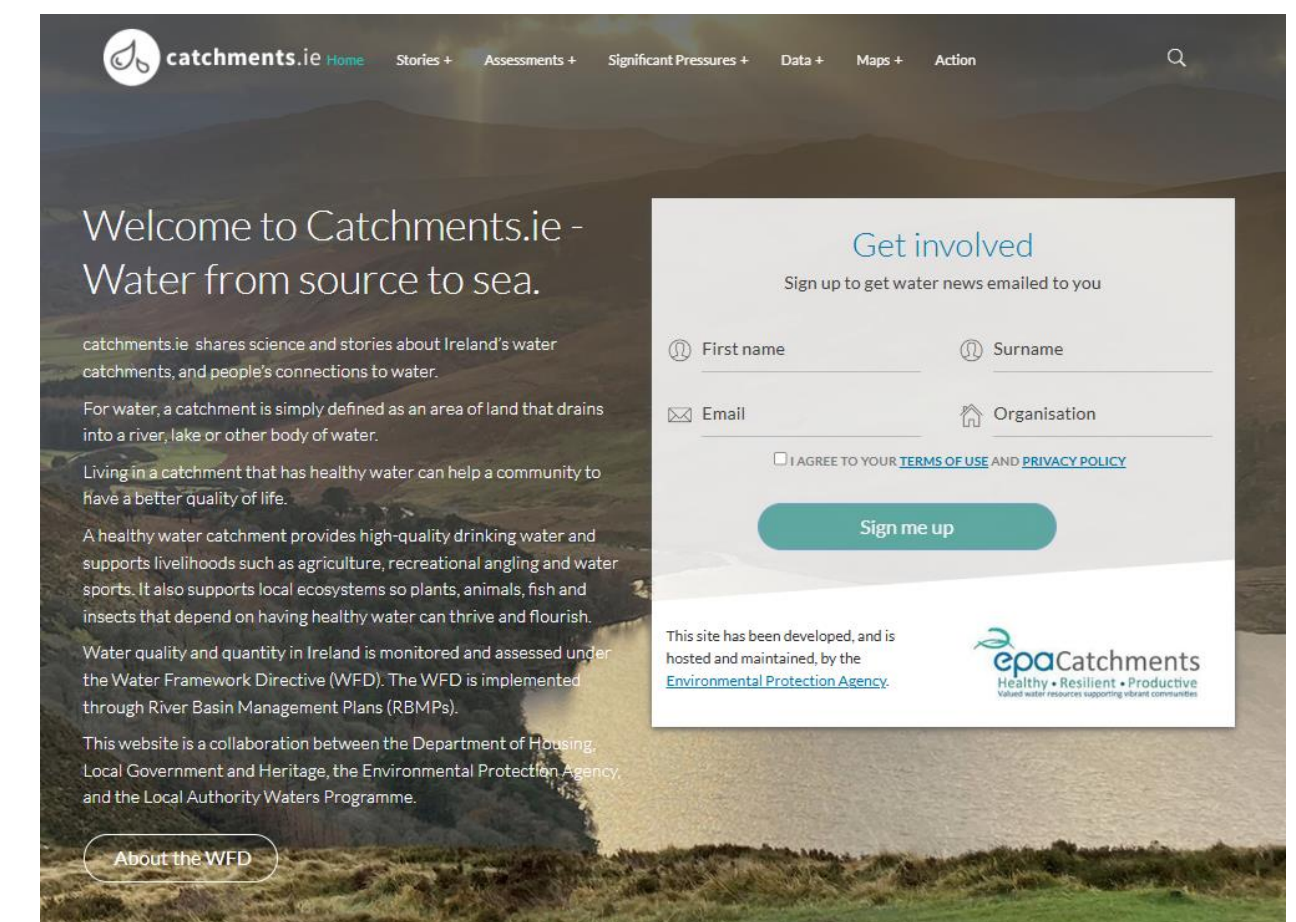
- Implementation at multiple scales - multiple audiences
- Sectoral Action Work Plans under the Water Action Plan 2024 (www.gov.ie/RBMP)
- Process for the development of Catchment Management Work Plans and Local Authority Water Action Work Plans
 - What measures exists (action trackers) > where are the gaps > inform work plans, programmes, future river basin management planning
- Need to strengthen communication in the fourth cycle
 - Availability and accessibility of information has improved
 - What channel for what audience



River Basin Management Plan

Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2022 – 2027 sets out the actions that Ireland will take to protect, improve and restore water quality in our waterbodies (rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters) up to 2027. The plan focuses on protecting and restoring water quality by preventing and reducing pollution, by restoring natural ecosystem functions and by continuing to invest in water infrastructure. Ireland is required to produce a river basin management plan under the Water Framework Directive

The Right Measure in the Right Place: The River Basin Management Plan and Actions



www.catchments.ie

Have your say!

- Open from 12th December 2025 to 19th June 2026
- <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/consultations/public-consultation-on-the-significant-water-management-issues-for-the-fourth-cycle-water-action-plan-2028-2033/>



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Government of Ireland

Significant Water Management Issues for the Fourth Cycle Water Action Plan 2028 – 2033

Public Consultation Document

2025

Prepared by the Department of
Housing, Local Government and Heritage
[gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie)



Thank you for listening