



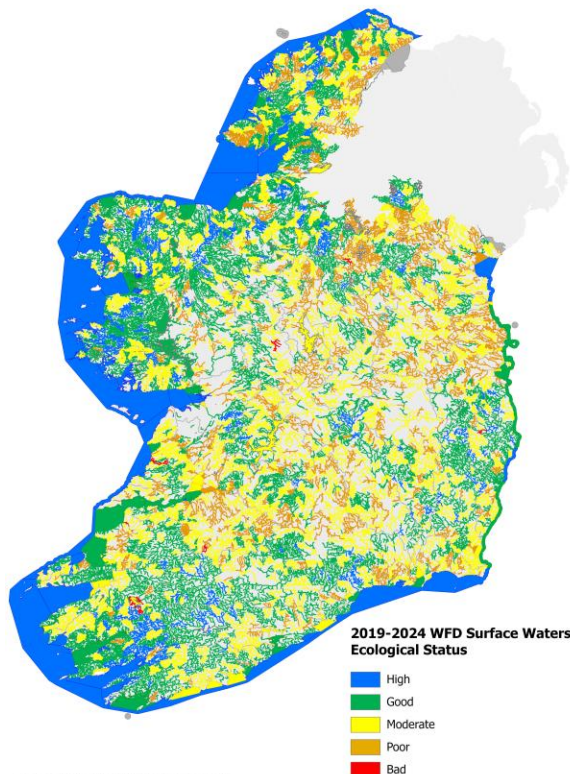
Developments to evidence base to target and track measures

Eoin McAleer

18/06/2026

EPA Water Conference (June 2026)

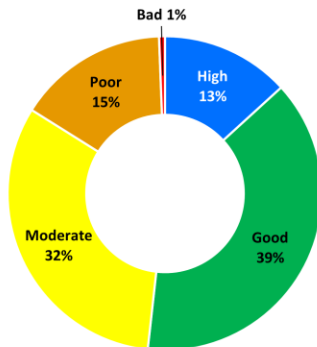
Almost half our waters in unsatisfactory condition (*WQ in Ireland 2019-24*)



Licence number CYAL50380495. © Tailte Éireann

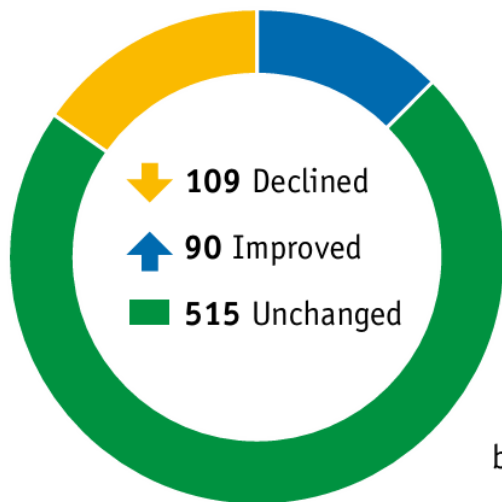
- Latest EPA status assessment (2019-2024) - over half (**52%**) of our surface waters are in either good or high ecological status.
- **48%** of the surface water bodies in Ireland are not as ecologically healthy or resilient as they should be.
- This is a **2% decline** from the previous assessment

Ecological Status in Surface Waters for 2019-2024
(all rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters)



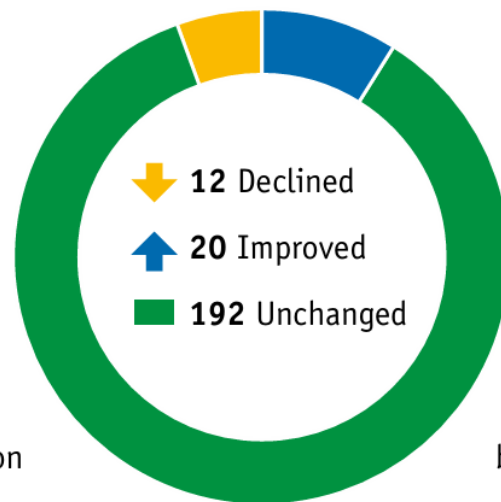
- Rivers (**48%**) – 2% decline ↓
- Lakes (**68%**) – 0.5% decline ↓
- Estuaries (**30%**) – 5% decline ↓
- Coastal Waters (**82%**) – 1% improvement ↑
- Groundwaters (**92%**) – 0.2% improvement ↑

Little change evident in WQ Indicators (2025)



714
River Water Bodies
Biological Indicators

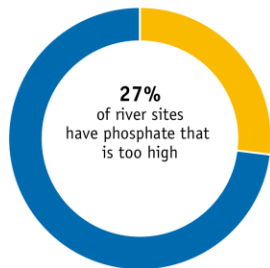
54%
of rivers
monitored were
in high or good
biological condition



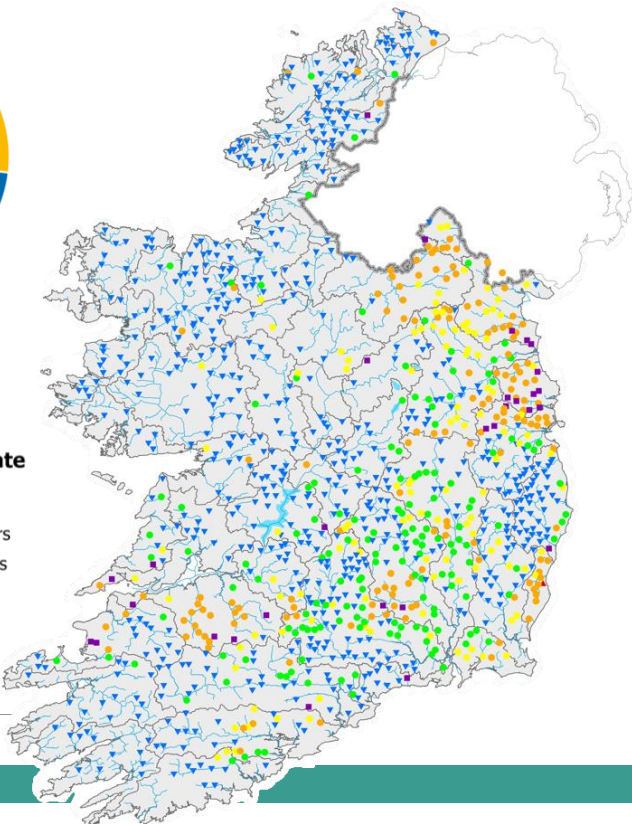
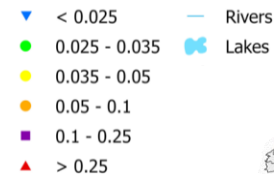
224
Lake Water Bodies
Biological Indicators

54%
of lakes
monitored were
in high or good
biological condition

Improvement in phosphate levels where actions are targeted

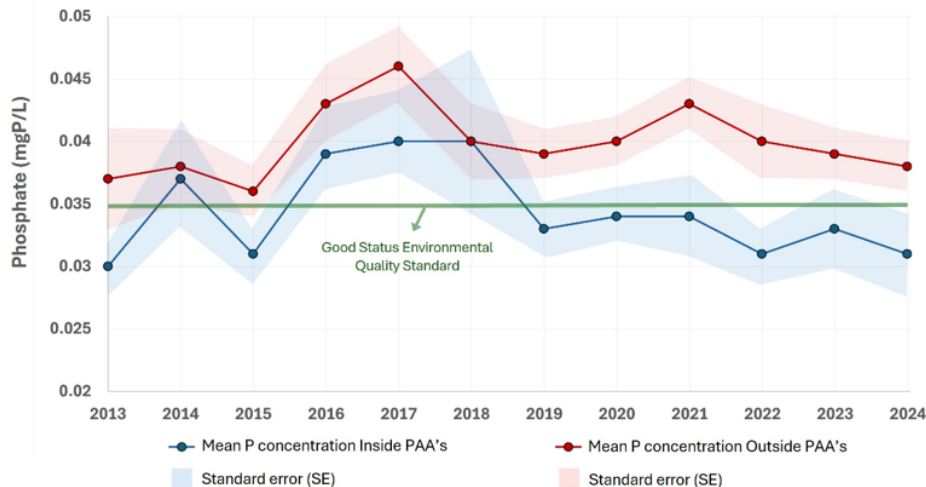


Rivers Average Phosphate
(mg/l P) 2023-2025

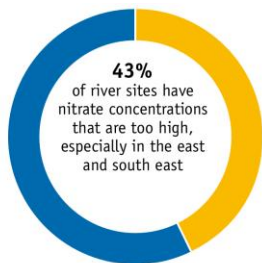


- Levels too high to support ecological health at **27%** of sites (2023-25)
- Highest levels linked to soil type and urban areas

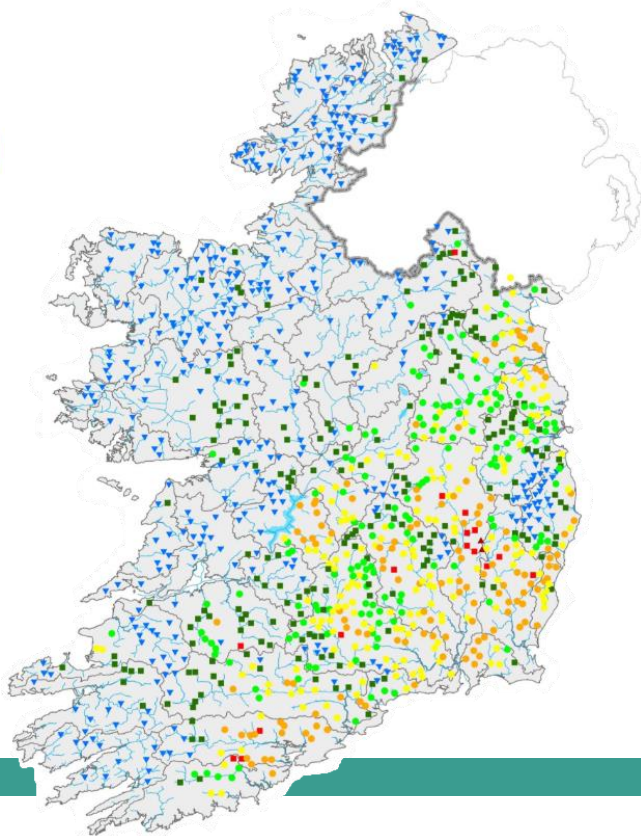
Phosphate levels inside versus outside Priority Areas for Action



Nitrate too high in the south-east



**Rivers Average Nitrate
(mg/l NO₃) 2023-2025**

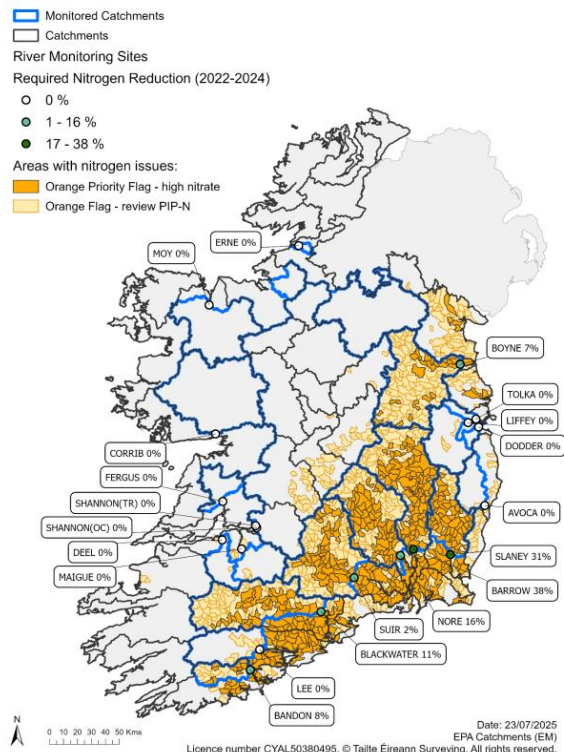


- Levels too high to support good ecological health at **43%** of sites
- Nitrogen levels are markedly higher in the east, south and southeast, compared to catchments in the west and northwest
- Reflects differences in farm practices, soil types and climate conditions.
- No long term trend of improvement

Setting expectations for Nitrogen: Scale of improvement needed



Nitrogen Load Reductions and Waterbodies with Nitrate Issues from the Farm and Landscape measures for Agriculture (FLAG) Map



Evidence-based targeting of agricultural measures to reduce nitrogen in catchments to achieve water quality objectives (Published Q4 2025)

- Nitrogen load reductions (tonnes) needed to achieve the nitrogen standard in the estuaries to protect ecological health (2.6 mg/l as N, or 11.5 mg/l as NO₃) estimated for each catchment (using data from 2022-2024)
- Range of nitrogen load reduction required: 2% - 38%
- Indication of the relative scale of effort needed in different catchments to achieve water quality targets

Right Measure Right Place

Farm and Landscape measure for Agriculture (updated 2025)



Navy Flag: Waterbody with measures to reduce phosphorus, sediment, and chemical loss

- 'Break the pathway'

Red Flag: Waterbody with Measures to reduce ammonium losses / potential impacts from point sources

- Target Farmyard

Orange Flag: Waterbody in areas with Measures to reduce nitrogen losses

- 'Control losses at source'

White Flag: Waterbody in the White areas that need measures to protect

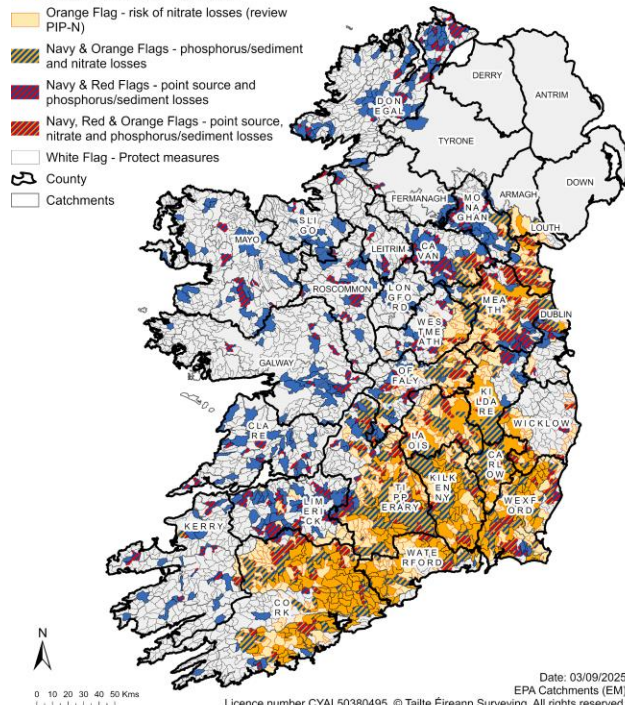
- These areas may be At Risk from other pressures

'The right measure in the right place'

Farm and Landscape measures for Agriculture (FLAG) Map

FLAG Map 2025 R1

- Navy Flag - phosphorus/sediment losses
- Orange Priority Flag - high nitrate
- Orange Flag - risk of nitrate losses (review PIP-N)
- Navy & Orange Flags - phosphorus/sediment and nitrate losses
- Navy & Red Flags - point source and phosphorus/sediment losses
- Navy, Red & Orange Flags - point source, nitrate and phosphorus/sediment losses
- White Flag - Protect measures
- County
- Catchments



Date: 03/09/2025

EPA Catchments (EM)

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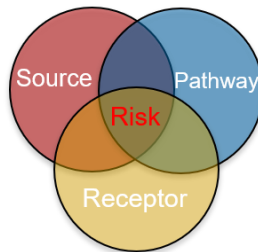
Use of the evidence base to drive action on the ground



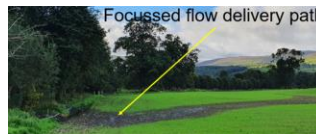
Over 600 Water Quality Practitioners Trained in Integrated Catchment Management



Integrated Catchment Management



(Photos Paul O'Callaghan - LAWPRO)



Evidence Base Focusing Action

- National Ag. Inspection Programme (NAIP)
- Local Authority Waters Programme
- Farming for Water EIP
- Waters of Life
- Better Farming for Water Programme
- ACRES

Catchment Management Workplans

(Catchment Action's Tracker)



Water Action Plan 2024– development of Catchment Management Workplans

Purpose

- Show where nationally agreed actions will happen locally - *complementing Sectoral Action Work Plans*
- Track the actions taken in each water body within a catchment - *focusing on the significant pressures and issues affecting water quality*
- Support coordination and accountability across agencies and sectors at catchment scale - *overseen through regional governance structures. **At a shared scale***
- Support transparency and enable informed public participation
- Enable tracking of progress and assessment of effectiveness - *enabling us to see whether measures are delivering real water-quality improvements.*
- Highlight co-benefits arising from water-focused measures - *biodiversity, drinking water protection, recreation, climate resilience etc.*

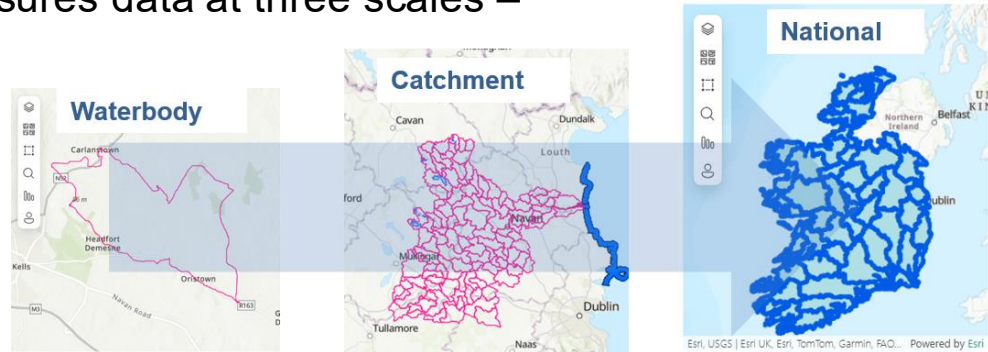
Catchment Action's Tracker

To Protect and Restore Water Quality



Catchment Action's Tracker

- Interactive PowerBI Dashboard – Allows use to interact with, visualise and download water quality, pressures and measures data at three scales – national/catchment/waterbody.
- Project group led by DHLGH, LAWPRO and EPA
- Consultant contract – 50% resource used, 50% remaining to take on feedback from consultation (**5 x Catchment Community Fora & An Forum Uisce**).

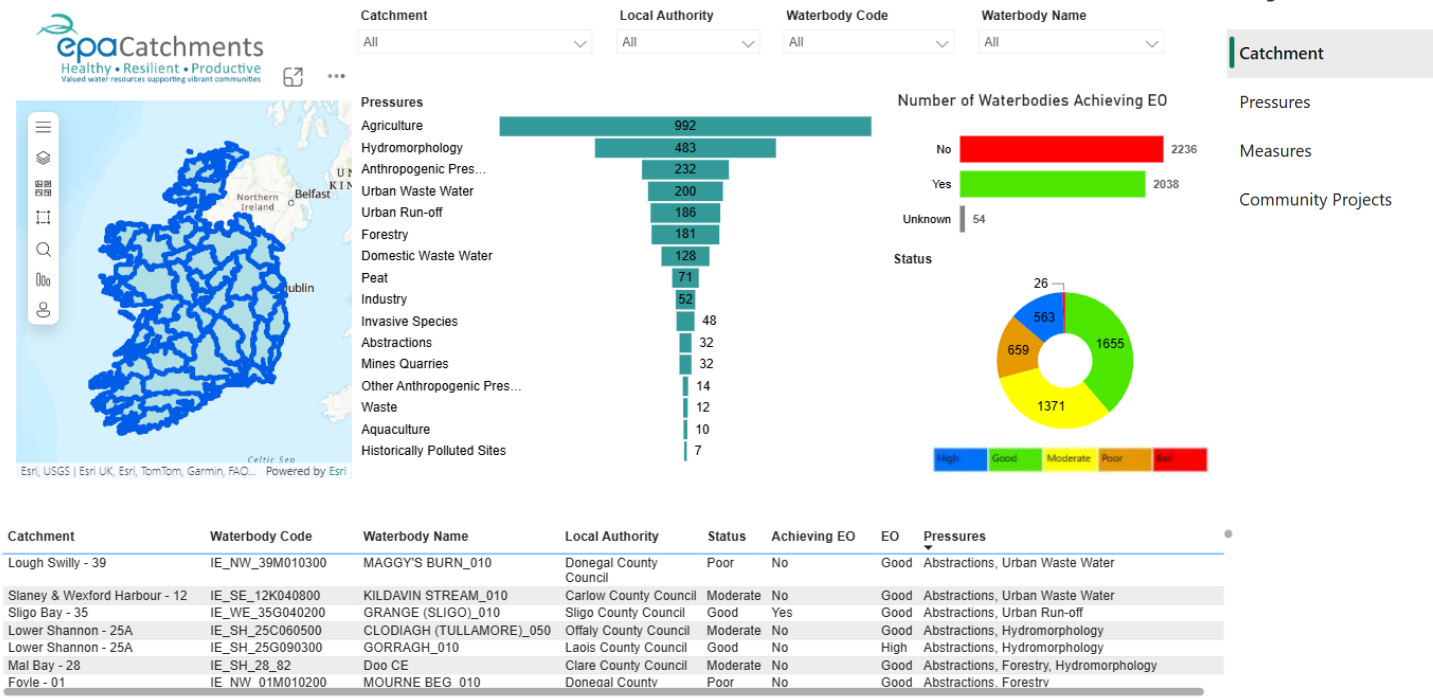


Interactive dashboard (multiple scales)



Catchment Dashboard

- Env. Objectives
- Ecological Status
- Significant Pressures

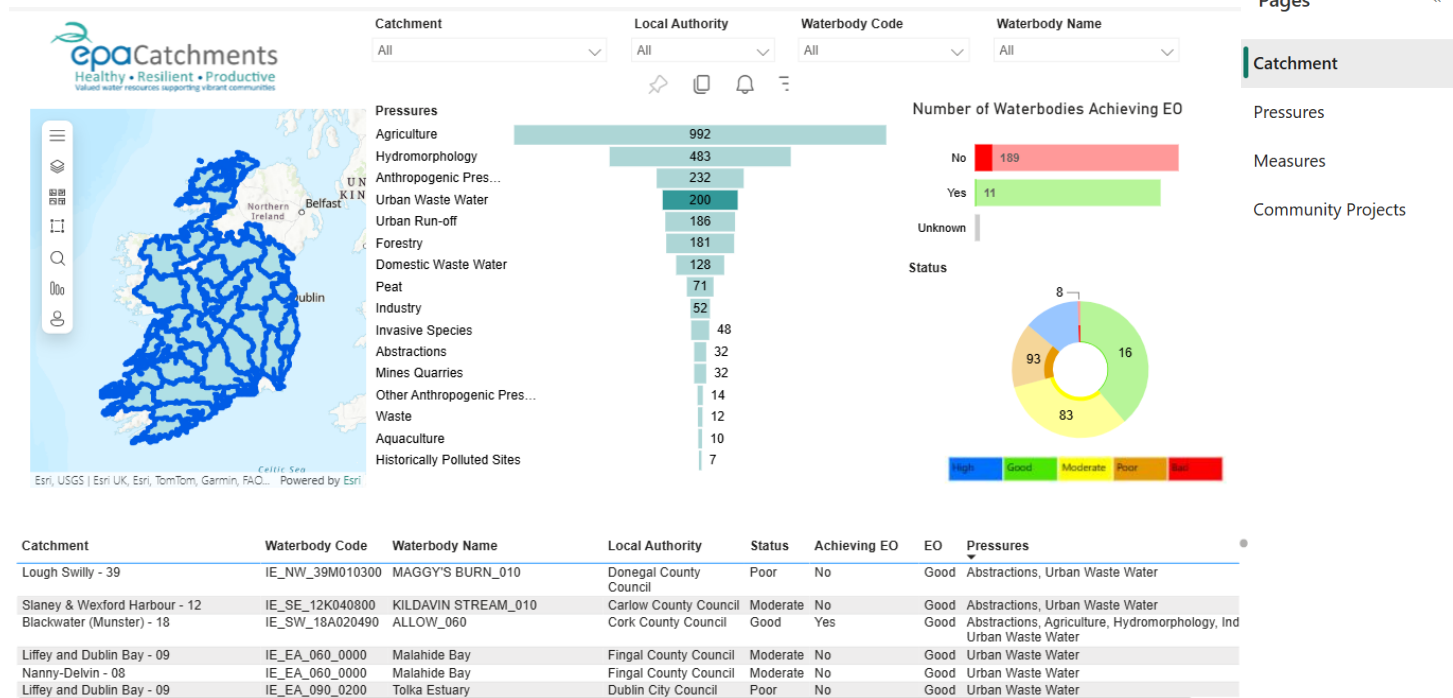


Interactive dashboard (multiple scales)



Catchment Dashboard

- Env. Objectives
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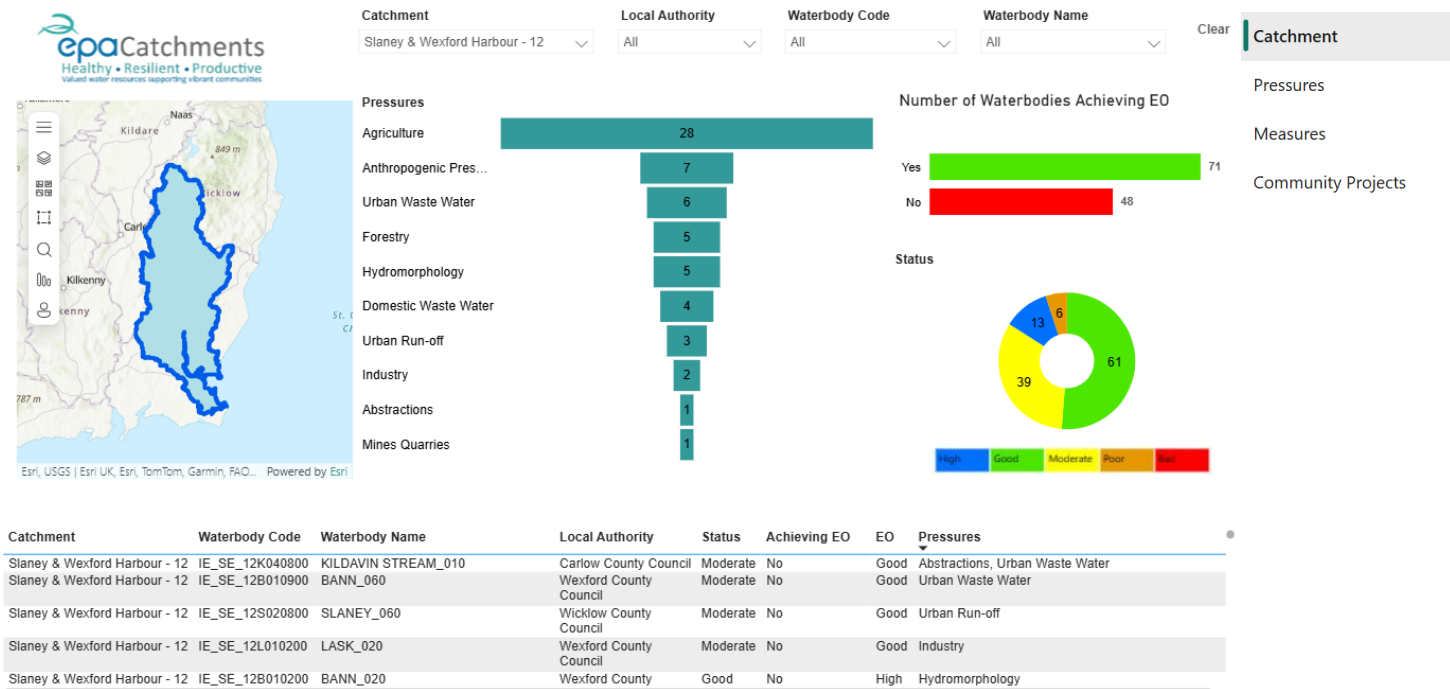


Interactive dashboard (multiple scales)



Catchment Dashboard

- Env. Objectives
- Ecological Status
- Significant Pressures



Measures Dashboard (in development)



Measures Dashboard

- Dashboard development paused in May 2026 to allow consultation with stakeholders
- Consultation meetings held with An Forum Uisce, LAWPRO and five Catchment Community Fora (Boyne, Slaney, Galway Bay SE, May Bay & Oriel)

Measures information at WB scale:

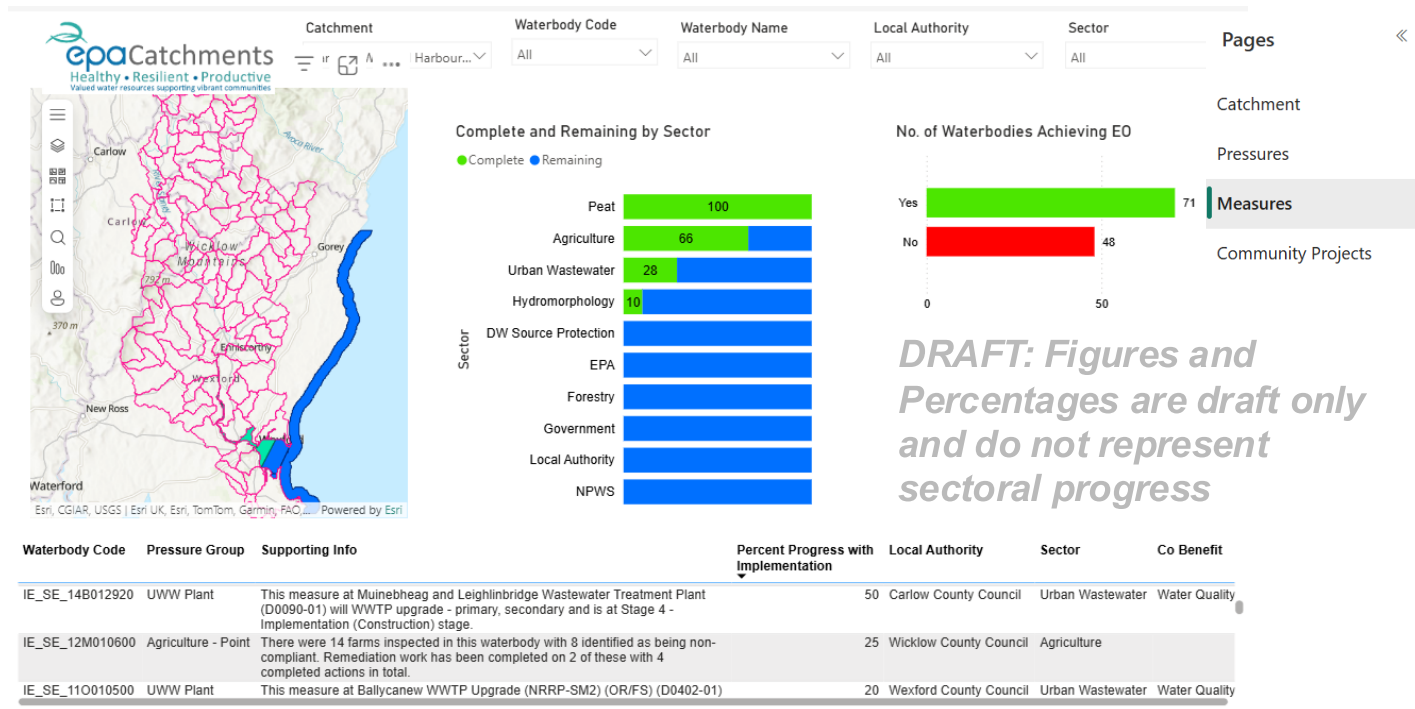
- National agricultural inspection programme (NAIP)
- Uisce Eireann progress on WWTP upgrades
- Farming for Water EIP measures information
- NPWS actions on peatland
- IFI Barriers Programme
- Information exchange progressed & aimed be included prior to publication (Q3/4 2026) – ASSAP, Forest Service, DAFM, NIP OPW, Bord na Mona, LAWPRO.

Measures Dashboard (in development)



Measures Dashboard

- **Measures** implementation at WB scale
- **Progress** at catchment/national scale
- **WB objectives**



Waterbody Code **Pressure Group** **Supporting Info**

Waterbody Code	Pressure Group	Supporting Info
EA_10R010300	Agriculture - Point	There were 4 farms inspected in this waterbody with 4 identified as being non-compliant. Remediation work has been completed on 2 of these with 2 completed actions in total.
EA_10R010300	Agriculture - Point	There were 2 farms inspected in this waterbody with 2 identified as being non-compliant. Remediation work has been completed on 1 of these with 1 completed actions in total.
EA_10R010300	Agriculture - Point	There were 14 farms inspected in this waterbody with 8 identified as being non-compliant. Remediation work has been completed on 2 of these with 2 completed actions in total.

Ballyjamesduff Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade

Location: Co. Cavan

Status: In progress

Type: Wastewater

100% Wicklow County Council

100% Wicklow County Council

100% Wicklow County Council

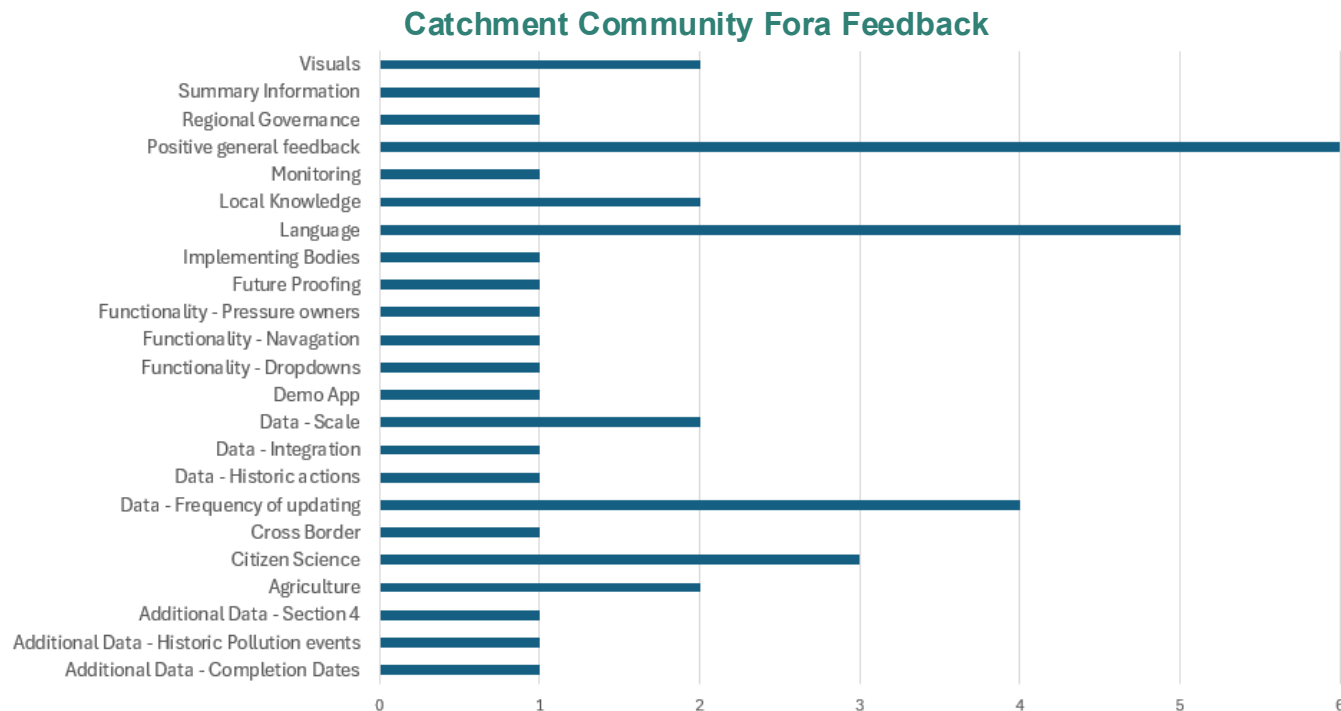
Consultation and Feedback



- Overwhelmingly Positive

Key Themes

- User Experience
- Language
- Accountability
- Data



Take home



- Strong evidence base to target actions and track WQ outcomes
- Shared language and understanding across agencies, stakeholders and public
- Skilled national workforce, trained in Integrated Catchment Management to deliver results
- Key next step: Translate Catchment Actions Tracker into Catchment Management Workplans.
- Understand the gaps – measures, effectiveness, evidence