

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY 2016 in Review

Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for protecting and improving the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland. We are committed to protecting people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation and pollution. We play key roles in the provision of environmental knowledge, implementation of environmental regulation and advocacy for the environment.



WHAT WE DO

Knowledge

Provide high quality, targeted and timely environmental data, assessments and evidence to inform decision making by citizens, businesses and Government.

Regulation

Implement effective regulation and environmental compliance systems to deliver good outcomes for people and the environment and target those who don't comply.

Advocacy

Work with others to advocate for a clean, healthy and well protected environment and sustainable environmental behaviour.

HOW WE DO IT



Key Statistics

LICENCES

165

environmental licences issued

152

technical amendments completed

905

radiation licences issued (849 renewals; 56 new)

ENFORCEMENT

281

inspections of urban waste water sites

1,539

visits to industrial and waste facilities

17

prosecution heard

61

drinking water site audits

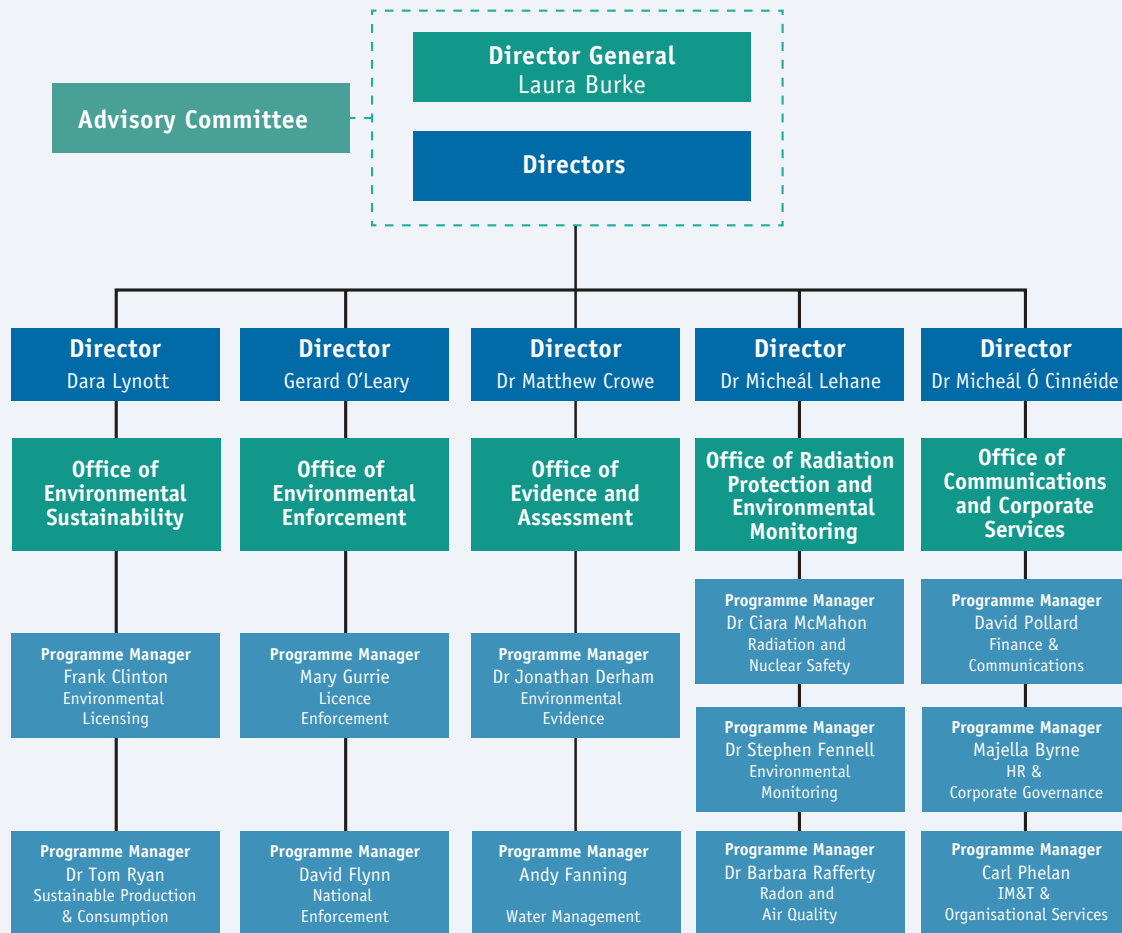
15

drinking water Directions issued to Irish Water

46

research reports published (including 11 on UGEE)

Organisational Structure - February 2017



2016 in Numbers

WASTE
52%

decrease in waste being
landfilled between 2011
and 2015

4

landfills accepting
municipal waste

INFORMATION

22,200

EPA Twitter Followers
across 10 Twitter accounts

819,000

visits to the EPA website
www.epa.ie

89

information requests
(45 AIE & 44 FOI)



2,000

farmers safely disposed
of 200 tonnes of problem
& hazardous wastes.

2,200+

environmental complaints
reported via *See it? Say it?*
app

Strategic Goals for the period 2016-2020

Goals	Objectives	Outcomes What we will have achieved by 2020
Trusted Environmental Regulator	<p>Ensure the on-going development of a proportionate and effective regulatory approach.</p> <p>Align EPA resources to target interventions and reduce environmental risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ A risk-based, responsive regulatory approach that engages stakeholders and protects the environment and people. ▲ Reduced environmental risks at EPA regulated facilities through tailored interventions and by ensuring appropriate financial provisions are in place. ▲ Driven the improved delivery and management of water and waste infrastructure.
Leader in Environmental Evidence & Knowledge	<p>Realise the full potential of the EPA's knowledge, skill, expertise and regional presence as key national resources in the protection of the environment and human health.</p> <p>Accelerate the provision of timely and tailored information to meet the specific needs of stakeholder groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ More timely evidence-based environmental assessments to inform policy and decision making at national, regional and local levels. ▲ Better provision of online, up-to-date and accessible information on the environment to stakeholders. ▲ A research programme that addresses knowledge gaps and helps identify solutions to emerging and complex environmental problems.
Effective Advocate and Partner	<p>Strengthen the EPA's capability and capacity to influence, advocate and partner to help achieve a clean, healthy and well protected environment.</p> <p>Engage the public in the protection and improvement of the environment.</p> <p>Promote a greater awareness of the impact of environment quality on human health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Targeted opportunities to integrate environmental priorities and sustainability into sectoral, economic and social policies. ▲ Developed public participation programmes to increase awareness of environmental issues and support the engagement of the public in environmental protection. ▲ Collaborated with health agencies and other bodies to realise the benefits of a good environment for health and wellbeing.
Responding to Key Environmental Challenges	<p>Tackle the challenges to deliver improved water quality in Ireland.</p> <p>Engage with other strategic partners to promote the development of a holistic national response to climate change.</p> <p>Enhance air and radiation protection in Ireland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Effective and resilient structures in place to deliver better outcomes for water quality. ▲ Established a climate change secretariat in the EPA as a centre of excellence that supports the national transition to a low carbon economy. ▲ Strengthened the air quality and radiation protection frameworks to further protect people and the environment.
Organisationally Excellent	<p>Develop our staff and align our organisation to deliver best environmental outcomes.</p> <p>Focus on the development and promotion of organisational health, wellbeing and safety at work.</p> <p>Promote a culture of leadership, reform and innovation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Our functions and resources aligned to be responsive and adaptable to meet emerging challenges. ▲ Engaged all staff to foster a supportive workplace environment. ▲ Enhanced capacity in the area of organisational change and in the use of ICT to support reform and innovation.

2016 in Review



Strategic Plan: 2016 – 2020

The EPA Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2020, '*Our Environment, Our Wellbeing*', identifies five strategic goals that provide a clear focus for our work. Our goals are to be a trusted environmental regulator; a leader in environmental evidence and knowledge; an effective advocate and partner; to respond to key environmental challenges and to be organisationally excellent - see *Strategic Goals* (right). During the lifetime of the plan the EPA intends to further strengthen our core functions - regulation, knowledge and advocacy - while prioritising air and water quality, climate change, and enhancing the radiation protection framework in Ireland. The environmental problems Ireland faces today are increasingly complex. They require a cross-sectoral and societal response and the Agency plans to engage more closely with citizens, communities, and businesses to mobilise sustainable behaviours. The EPA consulted with many people and organisations, including the public, in developing the Strategic Plan.

State of Environment report 2016



There were many positives in the EPA's sixth State of the Environment report, published in November. Ireland has clearly made progress in many areas over the last 20 years and the overall state of the Irish environment is good - but a highly qualified good. Produced every four years, these reports provide the national evidence base about the condition of our natural environment and the challenges and opportunities associated with its protection and management. They chart both the successes and failures of national environmental policy and are a critical resource for the State in planning for the next quarter of a century.

The report points to worrying signals at a local level about parts of our natural environment; localised problems such as poor air quality and water pollution are masked by composite national figures. The State and all its citizens need to act with a much greater sense of urgency if we are to protect what we now have. Transformational change is needed to deal with climate change and other risks to our health and natural environment.

Developing a much stronger appreciation of the link between a clean and well-protected environment and our health and wellbeing is identified in the report as the first of three systemic issues to be tackled. The other two are climate change and ensuring that the suite of environmental legislation already in place is properly implemented.

Climate Change

One year after the world adopted the Paris Climate Change Agreement, climate action continues to grow in ambition across governments, business and societies. The Paris Agreement had been ratified by 127 countries, representing 80 per cent of global emissions and marking a critical turning point toward a low-carbon, resilient world. The UN makes clear that the challenge now for all nations is to take action with a speed and an urgency that reflects the scientific reality. This includes Ireland, however, national greenhouse gas emission



projections, released by the EPA in March, cast doubts over Ireland's efforts to transition to a low carbon economy in the long term. They indicate that Ireland is unlikely to meet its 2020 EU target of 20 per cent below 2005 levels, instead projecting that emissions from the non-Emissions Trading Scheme sector would only reach 6-11 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020. Increases in emissions are expected to come predominately from the agriculture and transport sectors, whose emissions are projected to increase in line with economic growth. Preliminary emissions figures for 2015, released in November, confirmed the projected growth as Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions increased significantly. Increases were recorded across all the main sectors with significant increases in the energy industries (5.4%), transport (4.2%), agriculture (1.5%) and residential (5.1%) sectors. Greenhouse gas emissions from Irish companies in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme also increased in 2015.



Water Infrastructure

EPA water quality reports during the year consistently highlighted that substantial and sustained capital investment is required to deliver the improved water infrastructure Ireland needs. More investment would protect the environment and public health from the adverse effects of waste water discharges, eliminate the threat of long-term drinking water restrictions and enable Ireland to comply with European Union treatment standards. The 2015 *Drinking Water report* indicated that the majority of the country's 962 drinking water supplies are safe but that over 100 "at risk" supplies, serving 830,000 consumers, require urgent improvement works to ensure they are safe and secure. The 2015 *Urban Waste Water report* meanwhile showed that raw sewage was still being discharged in 43 areas. While 142 large towns and cities complied with the mandatory EU waste water treatment standards during 2015, 29 failed. As water quality regulator the EPA finds it unacceptable that the planned delivery of more than 20 treatment plants has been delayed, by an average of almost two years, and has taken appropriate enforcement action.

Industrial and Waste Licence Enforcement

The EPA currently regulates over 800 large industrial and waste sites. During 2016, the EPA conducted 1,539 site visits including detailed inspections and air, water and noise monitoring.

Queries and complaints from the public are a valuable source of information for EPA enforcement activity. Close to 1,100 complaints about licensed facilities were received in 2016. Most of the complaints (66%) related to odour nuisance. A small number of sites (10) accounted for two thirds (64%) of all complaints received. Sites causing odour nuisance face further enforcement action, including legal proceedings. Of the 17 EPA prosecution cases heard in 2016, 11 related to industrial or waste licensed sites. The most common charges related to breach of emission limit values, odour nuisance and failures relating to monitoring. The *Industrial and Waste Licence Enforcement Report 2015*, released in December, noted that the waste and food and drink sectors have work to do to improve their environmental compliance. These sectors accounted for the majority of prosecutions taken in 2015 and a small number of sites accounted for most complaints and non-compliances, mainly due to poor operational procedures and inadequate infrastructure.

Research

The EPA's Research Programme 2014-2020 is designed to identify pressures, inform policy and develop solutions to environmental challenges through providing strong evidence-based scientific knowledge. In 2016 the EPA provided €7.9 million to fund 45 new projects on the following topics: Water (11), Climate (14), Green Enterprise (10) and Sustainability (10). Furthermore, the EPA has supported Irish environmental researchers in securing over €11 million in funding for environmental research during the first three years of the EU's Horizon 2020 research programme.

Bathing Water

The overall quality of Ireland's bathing waters continues to be extremely good with stricter standards, introduced in recent years, providing a high level of protection for bathers. Identified bathing waters are those coastal or inland waters that local authorities consider to be widely used by the public for bathing and manage as such. Of the 137 such waters, 93 per cent (128) met minimum EU standards in 2015. Furthermore, around three quarters (101) were classified as being of 'excellent' quality, with just 6 being classed as 'poor' quality. The *Bathing Water Quality in Ireland - 2015* report, released in April, noted that management plans have been drawn up by the relevant local authorities, in conjunction with Irish Water, to improve infrastructure and tackle the main pollution risks at these beaches. The EPA is keen to see new bathing waters being identified, managed and monitored by local authorities under Bathing Water Quality Regulations and provided advice to the public about making submissions to local authorities for the identification of new bathing areas. The EPA provides public information throughout the bathing water season via the national bathing water website, www.splash.epa and [@EPABathingWater](https://twitter.com/EPABathingWater) on Twitter.

JANUARY



EPA Strategic Plan, 2016 – 2020, 'Our Environment, Our Wellbeing'

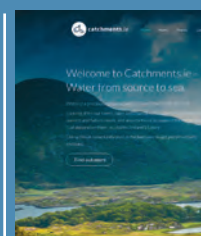
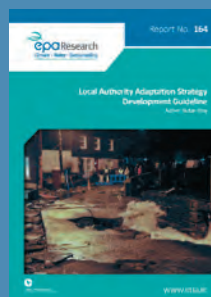


Livegreen.ie

MARCH

MAY

EPA guidance for local authorities on planning for climate change



Catchments.ie

JUNE



12th Annual Environment Ireland Conference

SEPTEMBER

Clean Air



In general, air quality in Ireland is good and compares favourably with other EU member states, many of whom exceed EU limit values for certain pollutants. The 2015 *Air Quality Monitoring report* showed that burning of solid fuel and emissions from vehicle exhausts remain the main threats to our air quality. While Ireland did not exceed any legal EU limit values for ambient air quality, concentrations for some air pollutants were above the World Health Organisation guideline values (for particulate matter and ozone) and European Environment Agency reference levels (for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons). EU standards to improve air quality are still not in line with the tighter World Health Organisation air quality guidelines. The EPA again called for movement towards the adoption of these stricter guidelines, especially for particulates and ozone, as legal and enforceable standards across Europe and in Ireland.

In November, the EPA invited comment on the proposed National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme, 2017-2022. It provides for: a greatly expanded national monitoring network; more comprehensive, localised air quality information linked to public health advice; air quality forecasting and increased public engagement. The EPA plans to finalise the programme and begin implementation in 2017.

Accessible Information



The EPA has an important role in providing current and accessible environmental information to stakeholders. Since December, the public can now access key enforcement information about licensed sites online. Enforcement documents are available on www.epa.ie/licensing for each licensed facility. These include site visit reports and monitoring reports for air and water emissions.

Other recent additions to the EPA's public information offering includes catchments.ie, an award-winning website that gives people easy access to information about their local water catchment and how they can get involved in its protection; radon.ie, a new national resource providing practical advice and information to help protect people from the effects of radon, the carcinogenic gas linked to up to 250 cases of lung cancer each year in Ireland; and Livegreen.ie, the online resource for householders and families providing trusted and reliable advice and guidance on a range of environmental and health matters. Each of these websites was developed by the EPA with the expert knowledge and assistance of other public bodies.

OCTOBER

radon.ie

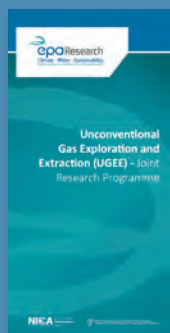


Farmers participate in 10 nationwide farm hazardous waste collections



State of the Environment report 2016

Joint Research Programme on Environmental Impacts of Unconventional Gas Exploration & Extraction concludes



NOVEMBER



Reports on Air Quality, Drinking Water, Urban Waste Water



Proposed National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme, 2017-2022 consultation

DECEMBER

Industrial and Waste License Enforcement report



EPA research report: Potential radiological impact of a severe accident at Sellafield



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