

Did you know?

Ireland has more than 12,000 lakes, some are large and some are small.

Lough Corrib is the largest lake in the Republic of Ireland and contains around 800 billion litres of water, enough to fill more than 300,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Lakes and reservoirs are the main source of drinking water for two million people in Ireland.

The Environmental Protection Agency currently reports on the ecological health of over 200 lakes. This information helps us understand and manage this freshwater resource.

Lake water quality in Ireland is better than the European average, but there is no room for complacency as more than half of our monitored lakes are failing to:

- meet their environmental objectives to achieve good ecological status; or
- maintain good ecological status or higher if it already exists.

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European Union Water Framework Directive

Lakes are assessed under the European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD) which came into effect in December 2000. Having a single European framework to assess water quality allows us to compare our results across Europe. Lakes are classified into five quality classes (status) under the WFD. 'High' is when the water is not polluted at all, and 'bad' is when the water is most polluted.

1. High

2. Good

3. Moderate

4. Poor

5. Bad

Human activities and demands on our waters can cause problems in the land areas that drain into lakes (catchment areas). We must deal with these issues to ensure that more of our lakes are at 'high' and 'good' status.

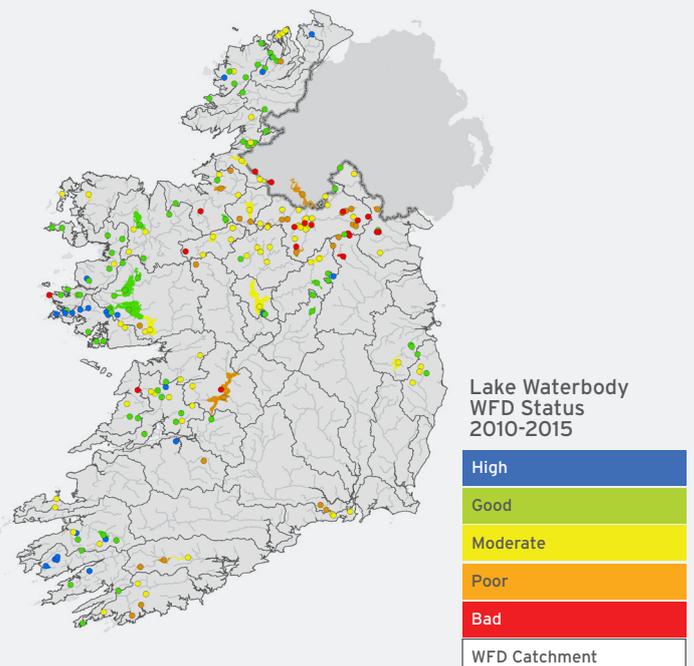
National lake monitoring programme

A total of 225 lakes are currently included as part of the national surface waters monitoring programme run by the EPA, this covers around 80% of the surface area of all lakes in Ireland.

This includes:

- all lakes greater than 50 hectares;
- lakes that are used for supplying drinking water; and
- lakes that are of regional, local or scientific interest.

In the map on the right, the location and number of lakes on the monitoring programme reflects the distribution of lakes nationally. Most lakes are in the west and north-east.



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What is monitored?

Each lake is monitored for a range of different plants and animals, including:

- phytoplankton (tiny, free-floating plants),
- diatoms (type of algae),
- aquatic plants,
- invertebrates, and
- fish (monitored by Inland Fisheries Ireland).

The lakes are also monitored for chemical and physical parameters. The chemical and physical parameters measured include:

- nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus,
- dissolved oxygen,
- temperature,
- water clarity,
- cloudiness, and
- colour.

The plants and animals are monitored once every three years while the physical and chemical parameters are measured several times a year. Changes are also recorded like:

- any change in the physical structure of the lake shore,
- changes in lake water level, or
- changes in how much water is flowing in to or out of the lake.

Lake water assessment

Ecologically healthy lakes are an important natural resource. Healthy lakes are important:

- for plants and animals that live in or on the water,
- as a source of clean water for domestic, agricultural and industrial use, and
- for tourism and recreational activities.

In recent years, the water quality of lakes has largely been maintained due to:

- improvements in wastewater treatment systems, and
- better water quality management practices.

However, there are still significant challenges. Less than half (46%) of monitored lakes in Ireland are at 'good' and 'high' ecological status, while the remainder are at less than good (54%). We need to take action so that lakes at less than good status improve in a timely manner.

Twenty-five (11%) of the monitored lakes are at 'high' status. This means these lakes show no, or only very minor, signs of human disturbance. At the other end of the spectrum, 19 (8%) monitored lakes are at 'bad' status, which means human activity is affecting them badly.

You can get more information about lake water quality in Ireland, and the environmental pressures on these waters at www.lakes.ie and www.catchments.ie



The ecological status of lakes in Ireland

2010-2015 (number=225)

Ecological status	High	Good	Moderate	Poor	Bad
Percentage of lakes at each ecological status	11%	35%	33%	12%	8%

46% of lakes reach 'good' or 'high ecological status'. 54% of lakes are at less than 'good' status.

For the latest information go to www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment