

Bathing Water Quality in Ireland
A report for the year 2022

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The majority of bathing waters have Excellent or Good quality.

- ▲ 97% of the 148 identified bathing waters met or exceeded the minimum required standard.
- ▲ 117 bathing waters (79%) were Excellent quality.
- ▲ Two bathing waters have shown significant improvement to Excellent from a Poor classification in recent years – Portrane, The Brook Beach in Fingal and Trá na bhForbacha, Na Forbacha, Galway.
- ▲ 3 bathing waters were Poor (up 1 from 2021) and will have a swimming restriction for the 2023 season. These were Balbriggan (Front Strand Beach), Lady's Bay, Buncrana and Trá na mBan, An Spidéal.

What is impacting bathing waters?

- ▲ In 2022, urban waste water incidents impacted bathing waters most frequently. Agricultural run-off, fouling from dogs on beaches and algal blooms were also reported.
- ▲ Heavy rainfall can lead to run-off from agricultural lands, urban areas and from wastewater overflows, all of which can impact on bathing water quality temporarily.

What needs to be done?

- ▲ Uisce Éireann need to continue to improve the operation, management and maintenance of treatment plants and networks which impact on bathing waters. Wastewater upgrades are planned or in progress to improve water quality at the three Poor bathing waters.
- ▲ Local authorities need to prioritise measures to improve the three Poor bathing waters, and to increase the number of bathing waters at Good or Excellent.
- ▲ We can all help by bringing our rubbish home, cleaning up after our dogs, and reporting pollution on the See It! Say It! Smartphone App.
- ▲ You can suggest new bathing waters to your local authority for identification and monitoring.
- ▲ Always check www.beaches.ie and the signage at the beach for information on the latest water quality and swimming restrictions.

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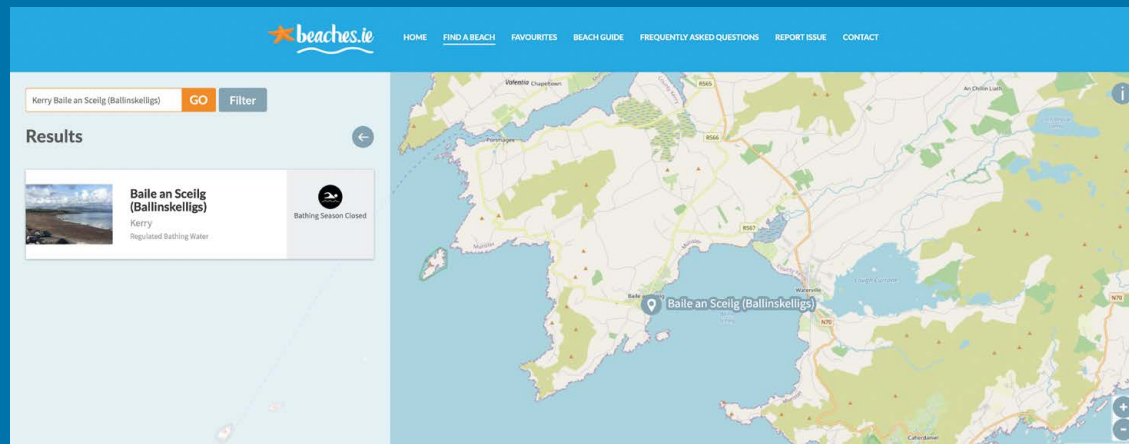
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This is a report about bathing water quality in Ireland during 2022. Local authorities monitor and manage bathing waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assess water quality information provided by local authorities for the beaches that they manage.

Each year, local authorities take samples of bathing waters just before, and during the bathing season. In Ireland, the season runs from 1 June to 15 September each year. We classify water quality at our beaches and lakes as Excellent, Good, Sufficient or Poor.

Our national bathing water website, www.beaches.ie, shares the latest information on more than 200 bathing waters that are monitored during the bathing season. You can also follow us on Twitter [@EPABeaches](https://twitter.com/EPABeaches) for the most up-to-date information on bathing water quality. Swimming in Ireland can be a year-round activity in some locations, however, the classification of bathing water quality relates only to the bathing season.



Identification of Bathing Waters

There are currently 148 identified bathing waters that are monitored and managed under the Bathing Water Regulations in Ireland. One bathing water was newly identified in 2021 (Aillebrack/Silverhill Beach Galway) and will be categorized after 2023 when the required number of samples for the assessment will have been taken. The public can suggest new bathing waters to local authorities for identification each year. Factors considered by local authorities for identifying bathing waters include the water quality, the level of use, safety, access and facilities. Contact your local authority to find out how to participate. Further guidance is available on beaches.ie.

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Overall, bathing water quality has continued to improve in 2022. Of the 148 identified bathing waters assessed, 144 (97%) met or exceeded the minimum required standard of Sufficient. One bathing water (Lilliput, Lough Ennell, Westmeath) was classified as Good for 2022 after it had been Poor for some time.

Table 1: Changes in bathing water classification between 2021 and 2022

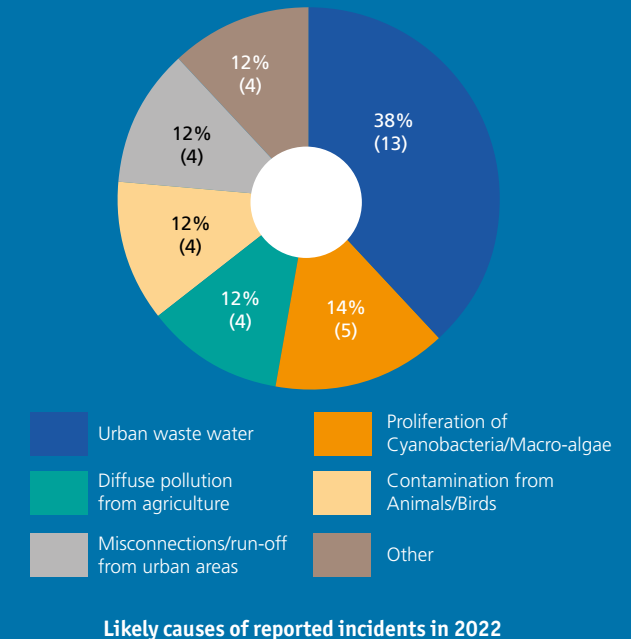
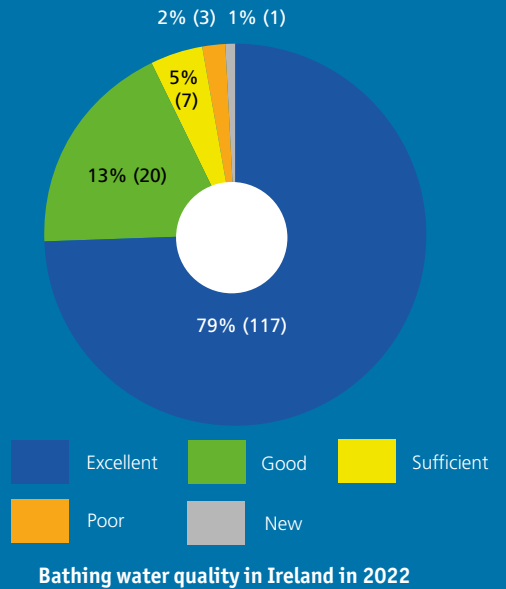
Classification	Number of bathing waters in 2021	Number of bathing waters in 2022
Excellent	115	117
Good	19	20
Sufficient	10	7
Poor	2	3
New/Changes	2	1
Total	148	148

Pollution incidents

In 2022, 34 bathing water pollution incidents resulting in beach closures were reported to the EPA, compared to 42 in 2021. The local authorities take a precautionary approach when managing incidents, meaning that not all incidents result in a deterioration in the bathing water quality. This approach is taken to protect bathers' health.

Prior warnings of potential pollution events

When heavy rainfall is forecast, many local authorities will put up a notice giving a 'Prior warning' of pollution events. In 2022, there were 186 'Prior warning' notices, 82 more than 2021. Seventy seven of these warnings (41%) were reported during the last two weeks of the bathing season (1st to 15th September) when there were very high levels of rainfall.



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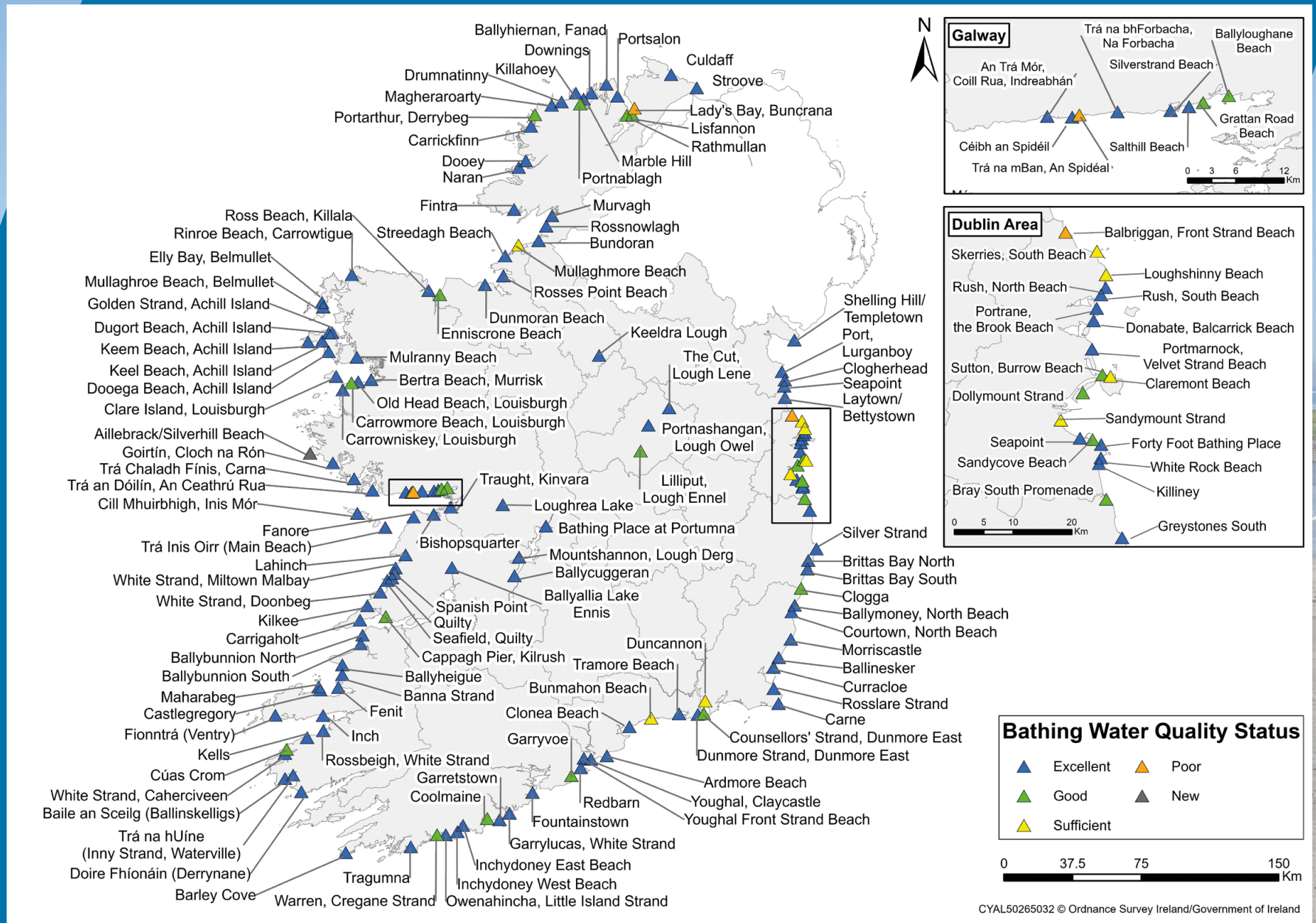
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Three bathing waters were classified as Poor in 2022, one more than in 2021. The local authorities with Poor bathing waters have management plans in place to address the issues.

Table 2: Poor bathing waters in 2021 and 2022

Local authority	Bathing water	2021	2022
Donegal County Council	Lady's Bay, Buncrana	Poor	Poor
Fingal County Council	Balbriggan, Front Strand Beach	Poor	Poor
Galway County Council	Trá na mBan, An Spidéal	Sufficient	Poor

Balbriggan, Front Strand Beach

The main pollution pressures include urban waste water discharges, misconnections to stormwater, faeces from dogs, birds and other animals, and contaminated surface streams flowing through the town. Discharges from the stormwater overflow at the Quay Street pumping station do not meet national standards and Uisce Éireann has works underway to upgrade them by 2024. Uisce Éireann will also progress works in 2023 to identify problems in the sewer network and fix them where required. Fingal County Council will continue to survey Balbriggan for misconnections, to advise the public on the impacts of dog fouling and the management of litter that attracts birds and to carry out further inspections of domestic wastewater treatment systems and farms in 2023. The 'Our Balbriggan' rejuvenation plan for the harbour also has the potential to improve water quality.

Lady's Bay, Buncrana

One of the main sources of pollution affecting the bathing water is untreated waste water released occasionally from the town's collecting system. Uisce Éireann have just begun a major upgrade of the collecting system to improve its performance and provide more storage to retain the extra wastewater collected during heavy rainfall, which in turn will help towards improving the bathing water quality.

Trá na mBan, An Spidéal

The main sources of pollution are urban waste water, run-off from agriculture, and discharges from septic tanks. Waste water collected in An Spidéal is discharged into Galway Bay without treatment at a discharge point less than 150m from the bathing water. Uisce Éireann is building a new treatment plant to treat the waste water from the village which is due to be completed shortly. Galway County Council will continue to implement the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations and address issues with septic tanks.

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Of the 148 bathing waters, 117 (79%) have Excellent water quality for 2022. Two of these Excellent bathing waters have shown significant improvement from a Poor classification in recent years and are discussed below. These examples demonstrate the wide range of pressures that can impact on bathing waters and the actions that are needed to address them. The significant improvement of these bathing waters to the highest quality classification is an excellent example of effective bathing water management by local authorities.

Portrane, The Brook Beach, Fingal

This bathing water has improved from Poor for 2016 to 2019 inclusive, to Good for 2020 and 2021, and Excellent for 2022. Fingal County Council carried out extensive work to investigate the sources of pollution including septic tank discharges, birds, dog fouling, and leaks, spills and overflows from sewers. This included a drone survey and inspection of sewer overflows and septic tanks within the beach catchment. The Green Dog Walker Scheme was used to highlight the environmental impacts of dog fouling and dog wardens carried out targeted inspections during the bathing season. A major research project (Acclimatize) contributed to understanding the issues and identifying solutions to improve the water quality.

Trá na bhForbacha, Na Forbacha, Galway

This bathing water has improved from Poor in 2016 to Sufficient for 2017 to 2019 inclusive, Good for 2020 and 2021, and Excellent for 2022. Galway County Council investigated potential sources of pollution including waste water treatment plants, septic tanks and run-off from agriculture and put measures in place to reduce the risk to water quality. This included increasing the requirements for waste water discharge, surveying septic tanks and carrying out agricultural inspections in the catchment.



Portrane, The Brook Beach, Fingal



Trá na bhForbacha, Na Forbacha, Galway

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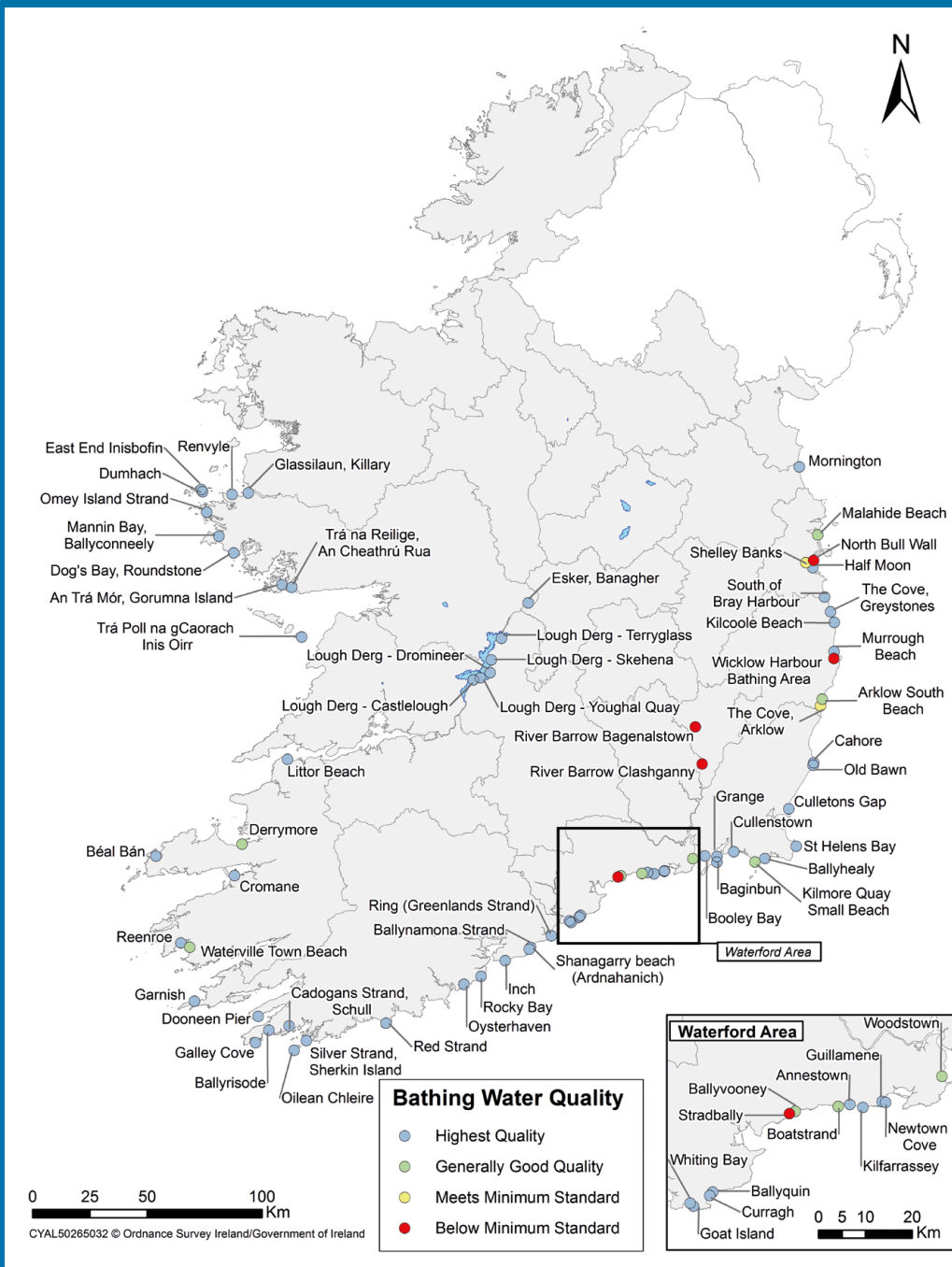
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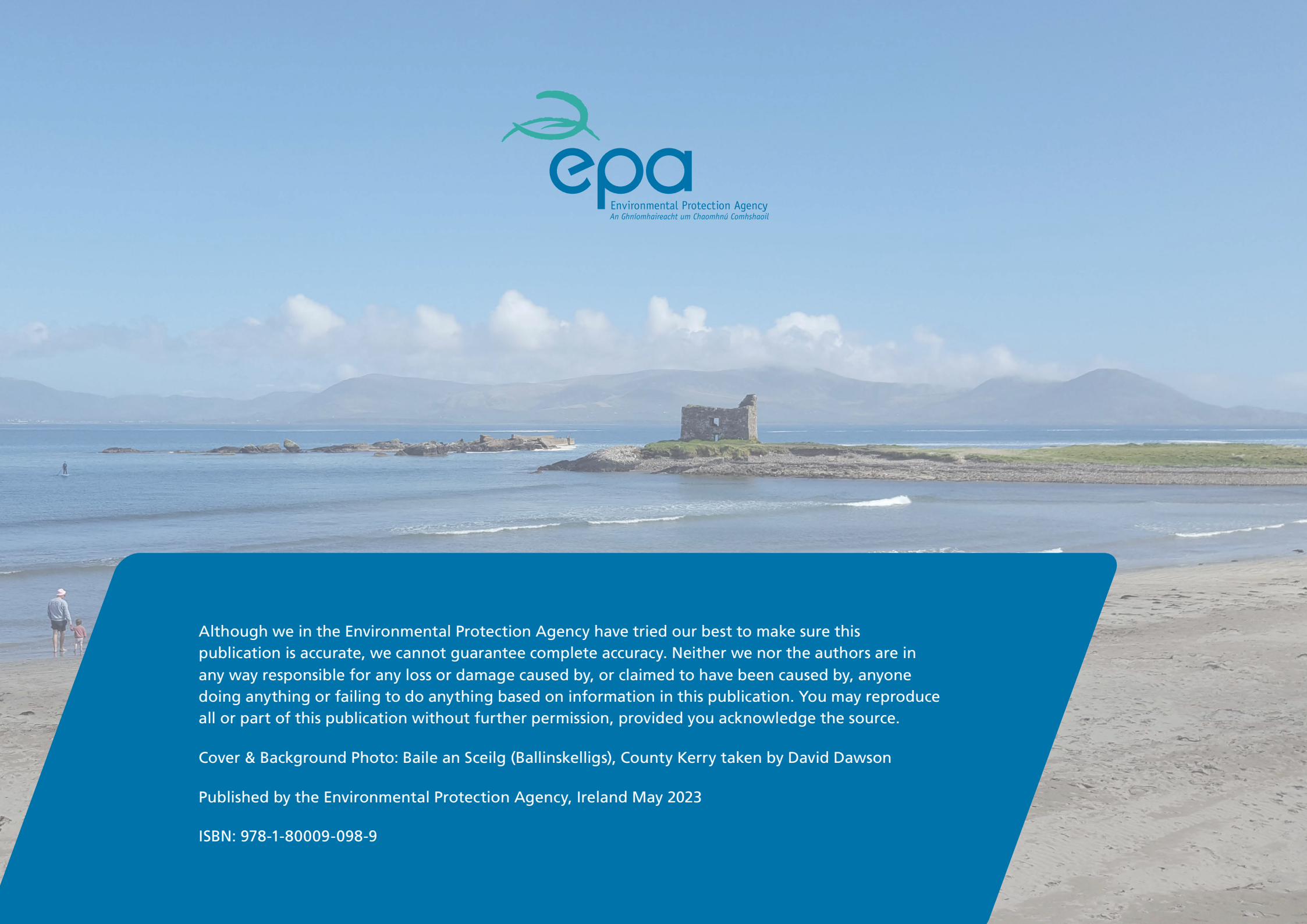
Other monitored waters is a term which generally applies to smaller and less popular beaches that are monitored by local authorities as a public health measure. These beaches are not formally managed under the Bathing Water Regulations. We classify the bathing water quality for other monitored waters where information is available. Water quality information for most of these can be found on www.beaches.ie.



Ballyhealy, Wexford



Oileán Chléire, Cork



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