

Water quality in Galway City: EPA national Water Quality Report 2013 to 2018
A short report for
Council Meeting 9th November 2020

Galway City Natural Waters

WATER is essential for life, vital to our environment, central to communities and critical to our economy.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently published its Water Quality in Ireland Report 2015 - 2018. This report evaluates the water quality or ecological health of Irelands surface waters, (rivers, lakes, canals), groundwaters, estuaries, and coastal waters, against the standards and objectives set out in the EU Water Framework Directive and the National River Basin Management Plan (RBMP 2018-2021) for all EU member states. Nationally Ireland’s river water quality declined by 5.5%. Only 53% of river water bodies are now at good or high ecological status. Full details are available in that report.

Water Quality in Galway City experienced a slight improvement

Galway City Council is working to protect this valuable natural resource which is fundamental for the development of the City. Fortunately, river water quality in Galway City improved slightly in the period from 2015 to 2018. 67% of our waters are at “good” status and 33% at “moderate” status in quality. There has been an increase of 33% in moderate status and maintenance of 67% in good status in absolute terms compared to the end of the last sampling period (i.e., 2015). This equates to a relative improvement to 67%. However the experience of other Counties illustrates the speed at which this can drop and the highlights the necessity for vigilance in maintaining and improving our standards.

Action is needed to protect our status, however to take action we need to know what significant changes are possible in our environment which potentially could create a dramatic change in water quality.



Period	High	Good	Moderate	Poor	Bad
SW 2007-2009	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
SW 2010-2012	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
SW 2010-2015	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
SW 2013-2018	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%

Graph: Showing slight Improvement in water quality in Galway City– source Catchments.ie

What we are doing

To try and maintain this improvement and prevent future deterioration, Galway City Council is working closely with *The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)*, the EPA and other agencies to identify the specific issues that are impacting on our rivers and to implement solutions as required. There are no identified Priority Areas for Action for Galway City at this time.

Therefore the focus for Galway City is to maintain and improve our current status. The evidence base for additional measures, if required, is being collected by Galway City Council with the support of the EPA. These measures will be incorporated into the next River Basin Management Plan (2022-2027). The Department of Housing Planning and Local Government have conducted a consultation on the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI: closing Date was June 20th 2020) and interested parties have already engaged in this process so we can better understand what are the potential areas to monitor to protect water quality.

Ongoing action by Galway City Council

Enforcement actions to protect and improve water quality: Galway City Council also continues to license effluent discharges to waters, inspect septic tanks, farming (minimum issue) and business activities, respond to complaints from the public and monitor the quality of our waters.

Policy, education and engagement actions to protect and improve water quality: Galway City Council are very pro-active in monitoring and managing our bathing water quality particularly to try to maintain blue flag status for Silverstrand and Salthill and to improve the status of bathing waters at Grattan Beach and Balyloughane. Our Climate Adaptation Implementation Plans strive to protect water supplies and identify risks from Climate Change and flooding events. In addition our Schools education programme aims to stress the importance of protecting our water ways. We work very closely with our colleagues in Irish Water to enhance where possible the water quality in our surface water system.

Below are some tips that apply nationally on how you can help to improve our water quality

How the public can help:

- Do not pour waste oil, grease, chemicals, paints etc. down drains. Many are piped directly to the local stream.
- Never flush baby wipes, nappies, cotton buds or other items that will clog up the sewer network and treatment plants. Avoid pouring chemicals down the sink or toilet.
- Avoid using pesticides and fertilisers in the garden and pay particular attention if you have a private well.
- Maintain your septic tank regularly.
- Ensure your drains are connected to the correct underground pipe network. Check with your plumber or builder if you are getting work done around the house.
- Install a water butt to collect roof water for use in the garden.
- Subscribe to the *Catchments Newsletter* at www.catchments.ie

How landowners can help:

- Ensure that only clean water runs-off from your land to any nearby stream or river.

- Use Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) such as permeable paving, ponds, swales and wetlands to manage surface water on your land. SuDS mimics nature by retaining water where it lands instead of shedding it quickly through drains to rivers, where it contributes to flooding.
- Plant native trees and encourage native biodiversity especially along riverbanks and in floodplains. Retain and create wetlands and ponds. All of this is good for wildlife and helps reduce CO₂ loss.

How farmers can help:

- Comply with the requirements of the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations, these are only the minimum measures required to protect water quality.
- Retain hedgerows and maintain suitably planted margins along rivers and streams to protect water quality, to improve biodiversity and store greenhouse gases.
- Avoid spreading slurry or fertiliser when rain is forecast, or ground is waterlogged or frozen.
- Only use the nutrients you need. Work out your nutrient management plan and only use enough chemical and organic fertiliser that your grass needs. Ensure that soiled water doesn't have a direct pathway (eg. a drain) to a watercourse.
- Prevent livestock access to streams and rivers.
- Use pesticides responsibly. Follow Teagasc advice on use and container disposal.
- If your farm is in one of the priority areas, free confidential advice is available from your local **Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP)** advisor. Further details are available from your local Teagasc office or dairy co-op.

How communities can help:

- Contact your local **LAWPRO Community Water Officer X (Add Phone number)** if you wish to raise awareness about your local river or commence a water themed project. Ann can also advise on grant funding options.
- Contact your local Community Water Officer to plan an event to mark **Water Heritage Day** on Sunday 23rd August 2020, during Heritage Week. This year's theme is "Heritage and Education: Learning from our Heritage".
- Follow **Local Authority Waters Programme** on Facebook and **@WatersProgramme** on Twitter

*Engage in the SWMI *public consultation for the next River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027*, see *here*

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/water-framework-directive/public-consultation-significant-water-management>