Environmental Protection Agency
An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Bathing Water Quality in Ireland

A report for the year

2024

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MAP OF BATHING WATER QUALITY
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The majority of bathing waters have Excellent or Good quality

- 96% of the 151 identified bathing waters met or exceeded the minimum required standard of Sufficient.
- 122 bathing waters (81%) were Excellent quality, the highest number since 2014 when the Excellent classification was introduced, an increase of 8 since 2023.
- 2 bathing waters were Poor (down from 5 in 2023) and will have swimming restrictions for the 2025 season. These were Lady's Bay - Buncrana, and Sandymount Strand - Dublin.
- 3 new bathing waters were officially identified, one of these, Half-Moon Co. Dublin, had sufficient samples and was classified for the first time with Excellent quality.

What is impacting bathing waters?

- Urban waste water was most frequently reported as the likely cause of incidents in 2024. Other reported causes included agricultural runoff, contamination from animals/birds and pollution entering the surface water collection system through misconnections or runoff from urban areas.
- Heavy rainfall can result in wastewater overflows and in runoff from agricultural lands and urban areas, which can cause short-term deterioration in water quality. A drier year than 2023 led to less than half of the bathing water warnings in 2024 (113) compared to 2023 (275). However, in 2024, higher rainfall amounts in August meant this was the month with most warnings (77).

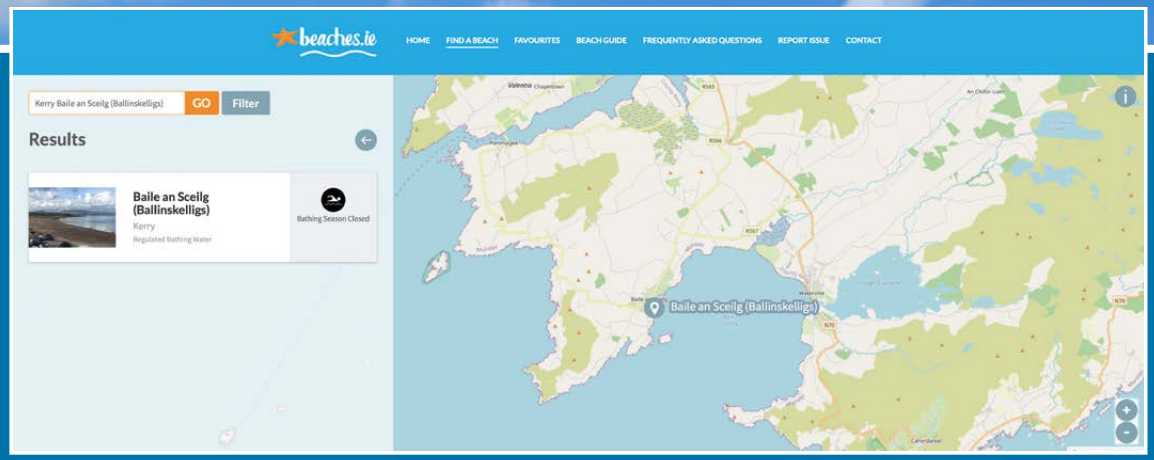
Protecting our bathing waters

- Uisce Éireann need to continue to improve the operation, management and maintenance of treatment plants and networks which impact on bathing waters. Works are planned, in progress or completed to improve water quality at Poor bathing waters.
- The higher than average rainfall events in August 2024 along the west and north-west coast again highlighted the need to build climate resilience into the management of the pressures impacting on bathing waters.
- Measures like sustainable urban drainage can help reduce the pressure on surface water collection systems, potentially reducing the need for stormwater overflows.
- Measures in agricultural catchments to reduce runoff bringing pollutants into our rivers and lakes can help protect bathing water quality.
- Local authorities need to prioritise measures to improve the two Poor bathing waters, and to increase the number of bathing waters at Good or Excellent.

Before you swim

- Always check *www.beaches.ie* and the signage at the beach for information on the latest water quality and swimming restrictions.

INTRODUCTION



This is a report about bathing water quality in Ireland during 2024. Local authorities monitor and manage bathing waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assesses bathing 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 currently runs from 1 June to 15 September at a minimum each year. Each local authority determines the season length for the beaches in their area. 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 *X @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

In 2024, 151 identified bathing waters were monitored and managed under the Bathing Water Regulations in Ireland, an increase of 3 from 2023. The public can propose new bathing waters to local authorities for identification each year. Local authorities consider a number of factors when identifying bathing waters including 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 *www.beaches.ie*.

Half Moon (Dublin City), Dromineer Lake (Co. Tipperary) and The Cove, Greystones (Co. Wicklow) were identified in 2024. Half Moon had sufficient qualifying samples to be classified for the first time in 2024 with Excellent quality.

BATHING WATER QUALITY IN 2024

Overall, there was less rainfall in summer 2024, compared to 2023, however, there were periods of heavy rain in August which resulted in increased incident reporting along the west coast.
This highlights the need to build climate resilience into the management of pollution from pressures driven by heavy rainfall, including overflows from urban wastewater systems, and runoff from agricultural land and urban areas.

In 2024, of the 151 identified bathing waters assessed, 145 (96%) met or exceeded the minimum required standard of Sufficient. 122 bathing waters (81%) were of Excellent quality, an increase from 114 (77%) in 2023.

Table 1: Changes in bathing water classification between 2023 and 2024

Classification	Number of bathing waters in 2023	Number of bathing waters in 2024
Excellent	114	122
Good	24	19
Sufficient	5	4
Poor	5	2
New/Changes	0	4
Total	**148**	**151**

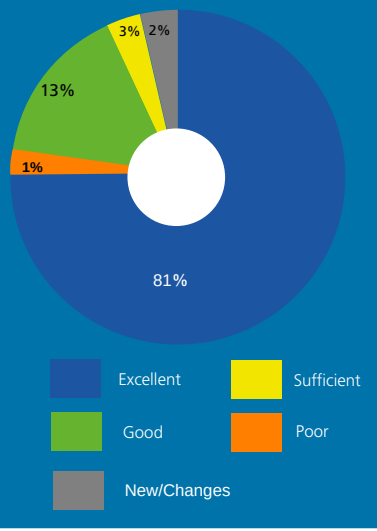
Pollution incidents

In 2024 the EPA was notified of 34 pollution incidents which resulted in the closure of bathing waters, down from 45 in 2023. The majority were due to the presence of pollution in sample results (18 incidents) and due to algal blooms (1 incident). Bathing waters were also closed as a precaution after overflows in the sewer network (15 incidents).

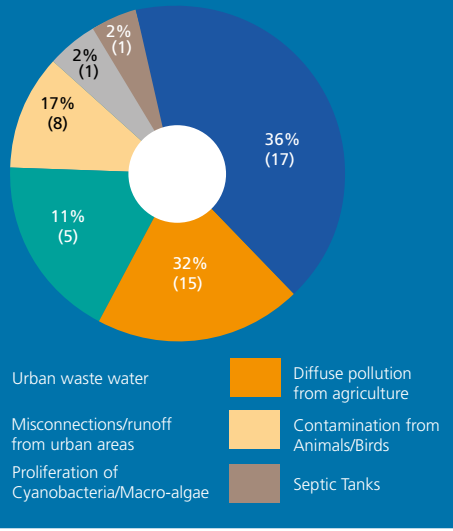
Prior warnings of potential pollution events

When heavy rainfall is forecast, many local authorities will put up a notice giving a 'prior warning' of potential pollution events to protect bathers' health. In 2024, there were 79 'prior warning' notices, 149 less than 2023. 81% of these were reported during August, which was the wettest month of the 2024 bathing season.

Bathing water quality in Ireland in 2024



Likely causes of reported incidents in 2024



BATHING WATER QUALITY MAP OF IRELAND 2024

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POOR BATHING WATERS

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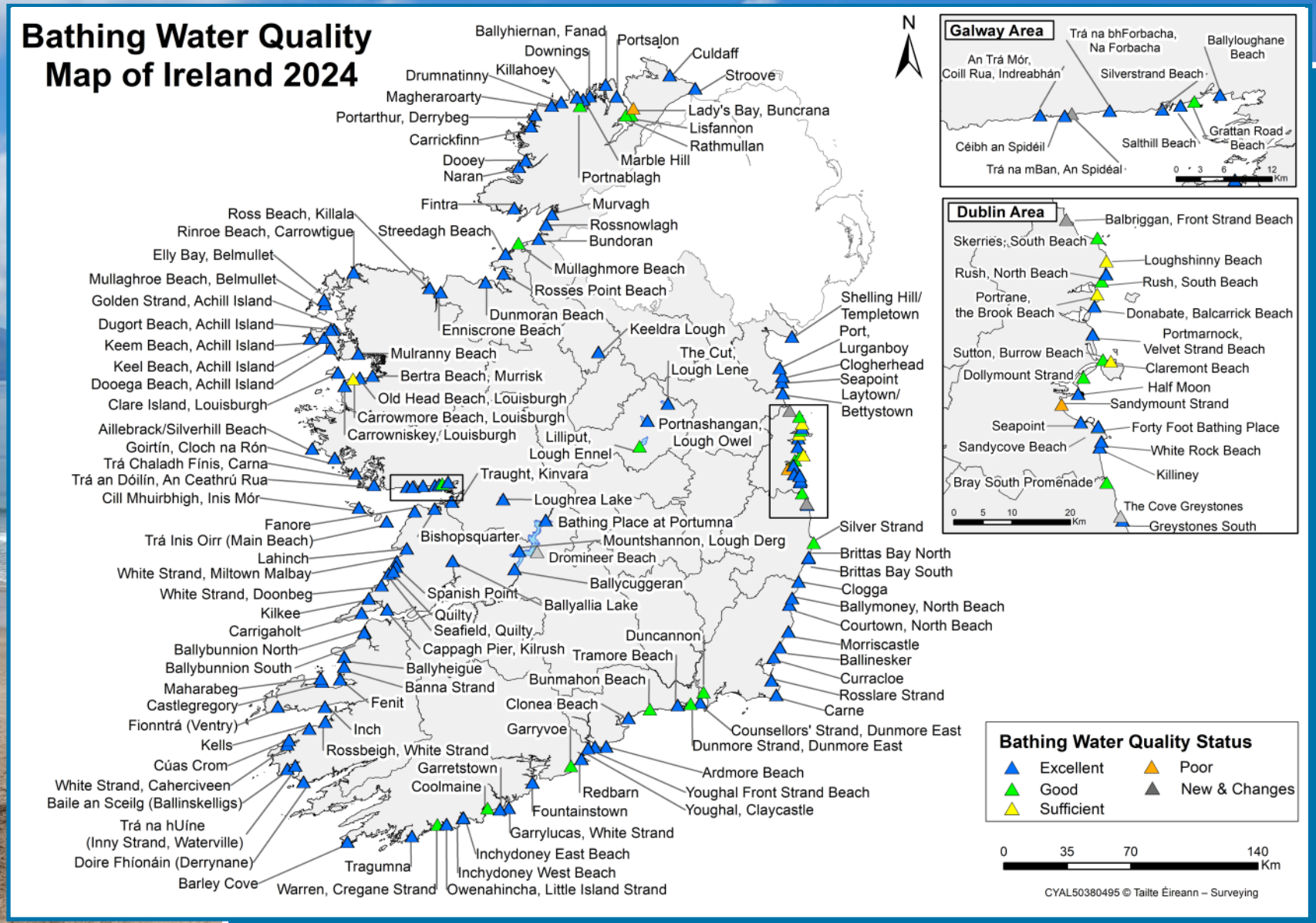
Interactive maps with details on individual beaches can be viewed at beaches.ie



Bathing Water Classifications for 2021 to 2024

BATHING WATERS WITH POOR WATER QUALITY

Two bathing waters were classified as having Poor water quality in 2024, three less than in 2023. Local authorities have ongoing management plans in place to address the issues at these bathing waters. More information can be found on the relevant bathing water page at *www.beaches.ie*.

Sandymount Strand
(Dublin City Council)

The main sources of pollution are misconnections and sewage overflows which contaminate streams flowing to the bathing water,dog fouling left on the beach, and marine birds. The *Dublin Bay Bathing Water Taskforce* (chaired by Dublin City Council) was established in 2019 to help identify and fix pollution sources impacting on bathing water quality in Dublin Bay, including Sandymount Strand.

The second phase of the Acclimatize (II) project has commenced, focussing on identifying pollution hotspots, assessing their respective loading to guide corrective measures.

The 'Leave only Paw Prints' and subsequent social media campaign continue to raise awareness of the impact of dog fouling on bathing water quality. Programmes to identify and fix misconnections are ongoing by the local authority. Uisce Éireann has made significant improvements to the wastewater network and work is still ongoing to address urban wastewater pressures.

Lady's Bay Buncrana
(Donegal County Council)

The main source of pollution affecting the bathing water is untreated wastewater released occasionally from the town's collecting system. Uisce Éireann is progressing a major upgrade of the collecting system to improve its performance and provide more storage for waste water collected during heavy rainfall.

Improvements to Poor Bathing waters

Two beaches, Balbriggan, Front Strand (Fingal County Council) and Trá na mBan, An Spidéal (Galway County Council) previously had poor water quality. Special Management Plans were put in place to find and fix pollution problems. The local authorities now believe these efforts carried out in 2023 have been successful, as in both cases there was an improvement in sample results.

In the case of Trá na mBan, An Spidéal a new wastewater treatment plant has been commissioned and all samples taken in the 2024 season were Excellent quality.

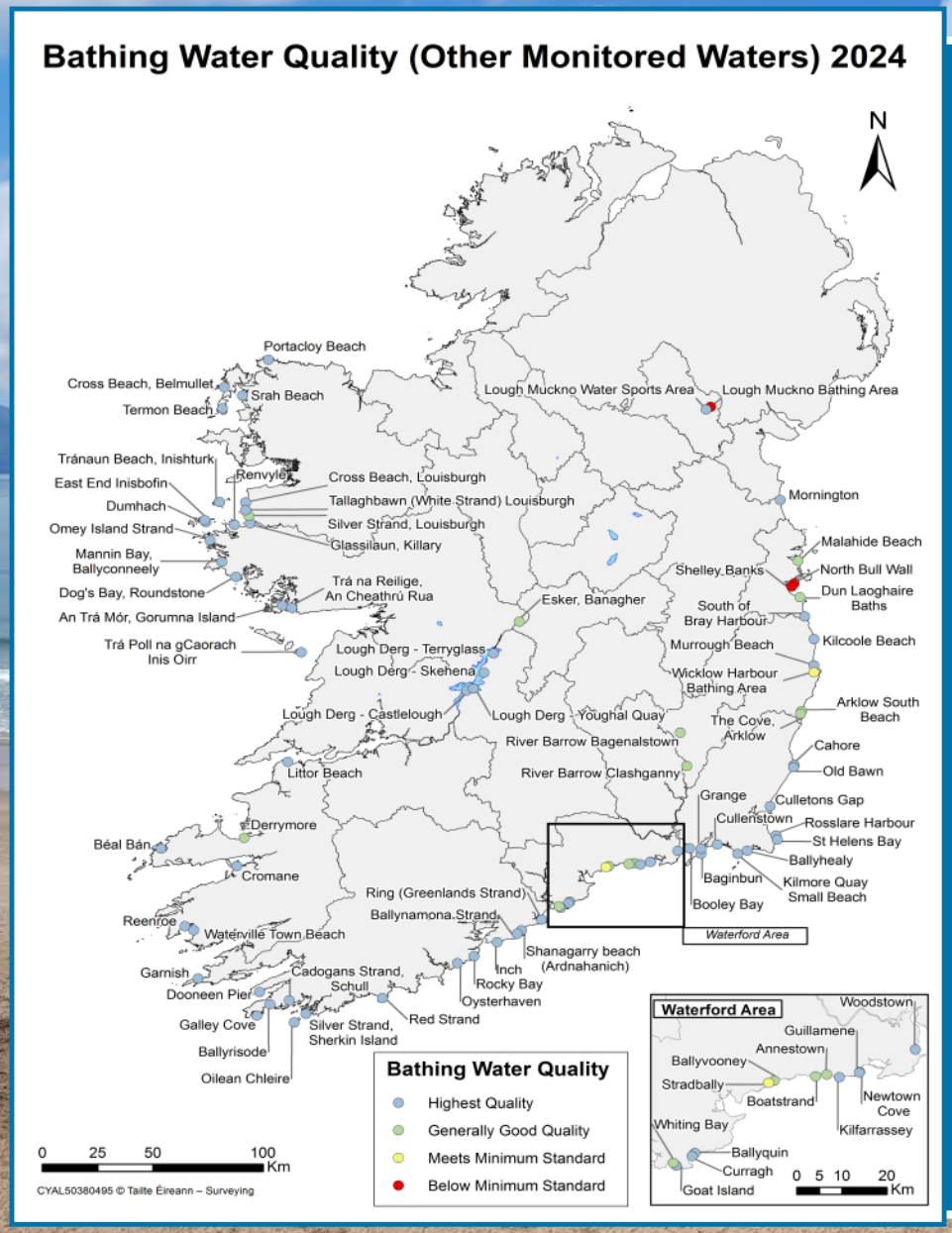
In the case of Balbriggan, significant effort was made to identify and resolve misconnections and as a result there were no Poor quality sample results in 2024.

The beaches are in a temporary category while water quality improvements are monitored. Swimming restrictions have been lifted, and regular testing is being done. A water quality classification will be given after the 2025 season.

Loughshinny Beach, (Fingal County Council) water quality has improved from Poor to Sufficient in 2024.

BATHING WATER QUALITY OTHER MONITORED WATERS 2024

Interactive maps with details on individual beaches can be viewed at beaches.ie



Other Monitored Waters

Other monitored waters is a term which applies to generally 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*.

Whiting Bay, Waterford

Dogs Bay, Galway

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