
Consultation on Timetable and Work Programme for Development of Third Cycle River Basin Management Plans 2021 - 2027

22nd December 2018



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

This document initiates and outlines the consultation process under which the third River Basin Management Plans for Northern Ireland will be produced. NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency) are undertaking this consultation to enable and encourage participation in the river basin management planning process. This consultation offers the opportunity to provide comments on the river basin planning programme and consultations directly to NIEA.

Overview

Water is a valuable resource that we all rely on; from supplying drinking water and supporting fisheries, to providing an essential resource to business and agriculture, and a source of recreation.

Given the importance of our water environment, it is critical that we manage it properly to ensure that water can continue to meet the needs of society, the economy and wildlife over the long-term and help to reduce the costs associated with water pollution and drought.

River basin planning takes an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment. River basin management plans (RBMPs) include the objectives and actions required to protect and improve the water environment and also identify synergies and opportunities for integrating with other strategies, such as flood risk management plans.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The strategic objective of NIEA is to create prosperity and wellbeing through effective environment and heritage management and regulation.

The Agency's key objectives are:

1. a full compliant regulated industry
2. freshwater and marine environment at "good status"
3. a compliant crime free waste sector
4. good habitat and landscape quality with species abundance and diversity
5. promote environmentally sustainable development and infrastructure

The key objectives can assist Northern Ireland in complying with European Directives. Objective 2, *freshwater and marine environment at "good status"* aligns directly with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive. This Directive is transposed in Northern Ireland through the **Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017** and implemented through consecutive RBMPs.

River Basin Management Plans

The current structure of UK RBMPs cover a 6 year cycle. The first cycle of plans were published in 2009 and ran until 2015 when the second cycle, and current plans were published- these can be accessed through the following link (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/water/river-basin-management>). Third cycle plans will be published in 2021 and will run until 2027.

The first cycle plans were developed in co-ordination with the relevant authorities in Republic of Ireland and as a result all the water environments in Northern Ireland plus those shared with the Republic of Ireland were assessed in unison. The second cycle plans for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were produced under differing timelines, however coordination still occurs in terms of the implementation of the plans, specifically with respect to setting objectives and identifying measures. It is expected that coordination will continue during the development and implementation of the third cycle plans.

NIEA have been reviewing the progress of the 2nd cycle plans at their 2018 midway point to assist in the development of the 3rd cycle plans. The 3rd cycle plans, which must be published by December 2021, will outline what measures will be undertaken to protect and improve our water environments, enabling them to reach good status by 2027.



River Basin Districts & Cross Border Cooperation

In Northern Ireland, for each cycle, a set of three distinct river basin district plans are produced which compositely cover Northern Ireland's water environment, with the exception of a small area of the river Shannon covered by Republic of Ireland. Only one of the three Northern Ireland river basin districts (RBDs) is solely within Northern Ireland. The other two are designated as international river basin districts (IRBDs) due to the water catchment being shared between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

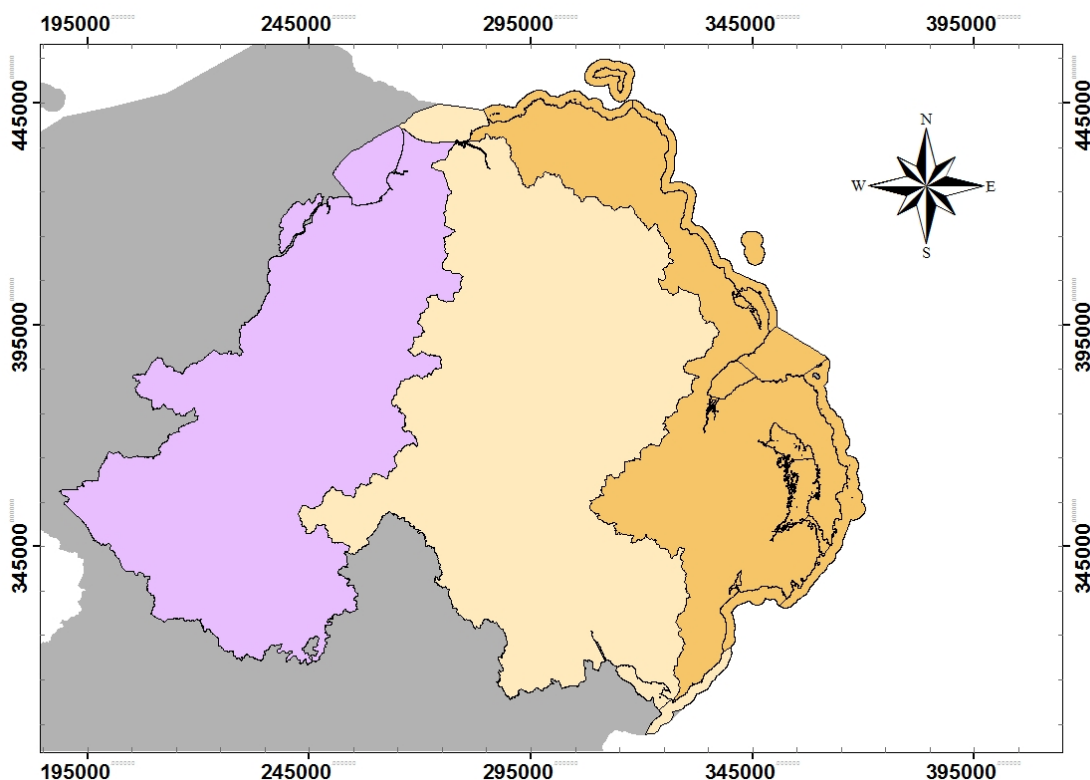
For the second cycle plans, the Republic of Ireland changed from multiple districts to a single district plan which encompassed the area of the two international RBDs which lies on their side of the border with Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland approach to using three RBDs did not change for the second cycle and will not be changed for the third cycle. The three Northern Ireland river basin districts are shown below.

North Western
international RBD
shared with Ireland

Neagh Bann
international RBD
shared with Ireland

North Eastern RBD
which lies solely
within Northern
Ireland

Republic of Ireland River Basin Management Plan (Grey Areas)



Online Map Viewer

To find your river basin district and obtain details on the condition of your local water bodies visit the interactive river basin map viewer (<https://apps.d.aera-ni.gov.uk/RiverBasinViewer/>) to search for it.

Implications of EU Exit for river basin management plans

The UK will be leaving the European Union (EU) on 29 March 2019. The EU Withdrawal Bill will carry over existing EU law, including the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), into domestic law. Technical changes will be made to the legislation relating to river basin planning so the law remains operable after EU Exit.

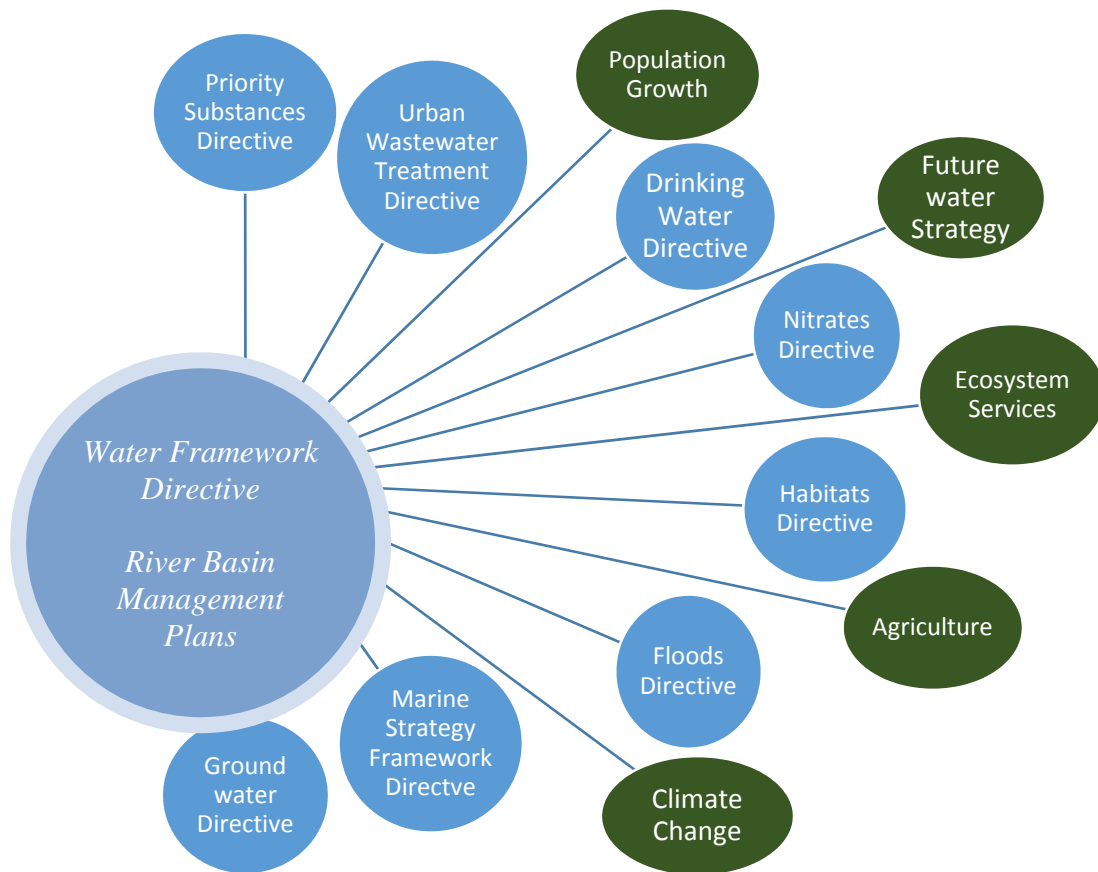
The obligation to review and update the RBMPs is set out in our domestic law, the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2017 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2017/81/contents/made>) and these obligations will continue to apply. We will therefore complete the review and update to the plans in 2021 as required by these Regulations.

Other relevant plans and strategies

RBMPs address how we can best protect and improve the water environment and the benefits that water in all its forms provides people and society. To achieve this, the plans draw together the aims, objectives and actions from a number of other water related plans and strategies. This integrated approach helps those responsible for completing the actions to see the opportunities for linking up and achieving better outcomes for all.

The WFD relies on various interlinkages and the fulfillment of requirements of other European Directives which have been transposed into domestic law to achieve its objectives.

The infographic below indicates some of the key interactions and considerations within river basin management planning, however it is not exhaustive. A focus on such interactions will be vital during the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI) consultation period (Dec 2019-Jun 2020). This will determine what water environment issues need to be addressed through the implementation of the third cycle RBMPs.



Some of the most significant water related current and long term plans that the Department will be seeking to ensure join up with the third cycle RBMPs include:

- **Flood risk management plans** (<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/flood-risk-management-plans>) explain the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, surface run-off, groundwater and reservoirs. They explain how flood and coastal erosion risk management teams will work with communities to manage flood risk over the next 6 years. Updated flood risk management plans will be published in 2021. Aligning flood risk and river basin management plans provides an integrated approach to catchment planning and an opportunity to examine how working with natural processes can better protect ourselves from flooding. We will be aligning our engagement in terms of flood risk management plans and RBMPs wherever possible during their development.
- **The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010** transpose the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to UK regulations (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/marine-strategy-framework-directive>). The regulations aim to ensure marine waters achieve and maintain 11 Good Environmental Status indicators ensuring both protection and

sustainable use of resources. Although good environmental status is broader than the more specific status indicators for RBMPs there is crossover both in terms of the objectives and physical area covered by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the WFD. A coherent and integrated approach is vital to ensure that the statutory requirements of the legislation transposing both Directives are met. A draft marine plan for Northern Ireland was undertaken, the plan awaits ministerial approval; it has been developed to support and compliment River Basin Management Plans.

- **NI Water – Water Resource Plan (2010-2035)** (<https://www.niwater.com/managing-northern-irelands-water-resources.aspx>). The plan explains how NI Water intend to meet the drinking water needs of the population of Northern Ireland over the period 2010 to 2035. The WRMP takes into account forecast changes in population, housing and water usage and incorporates predicted changes to our climate. The plan includes a range of options to manage demand by improving water efficiency and reducing leakage, as well as options to increase supply through the development of new resources.
- **Price Control process** - Price Control is the process through which NI Water reaches agreement with the Utility Regulator on the organisation's priorities and plans for the period of the Price Control. It also determines the financial framework for the period, setting limits on the levels of non-domestic customer charges. The next price control process will cover the period 2021 to 2027- the same period as the third cycle RBMPs will cover. DAERA and DFI will work with the Utility Regulator and NI Water to ensure that investment is made which maximizes the potential benefits in terms of achieving the objectives of the third cycle RBMPs.
- **Sustainable Water – A Long Term Water Strategy for Northern Ireland (2015-2040)** (<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/long-term-water-strategy-northern-ireland>). This strategy aims to encourage a sustainable and integrated approach to managing the different water needs within a catchment while promoting regional development without compromising the environment or increasing flood risk.
- **Climate Change Projections**- Climate change adaptation is an integral part of the river basin management plans and the revised plans will be based on the latest 2018 UK climate change projections (<http://ukclimateprojections.metoffice.gov.uk/24125>)

Timetable and Consultation arrangements for the development of the third cycle RBMPs (2021- 2027)

The review and update of RBMPs involve three public consultation steps. In addition to these steps and in line with the requirements of the WFD, the Department will undertake a risk assessment and characterisation process in order to provide the evidence base for reviewing and updating the water quality objectives and the programme of measures for the third cycle plans. The Department will also undertake the relevant screening exercises and impact assessments in respect of the 3rd cycle RBMPs.

The following table specifies the consultations which will enable wider involvement in the development of the third cycle plans. The successful implementation of river basin planning requires not only NIEA as the competent authority to be involved but also requires the public, voluntary groups and NGOs to be involved along with the private sector, NI Water, local authorities and Government Departments. This engagement will help NIEA to identify and meet the challenges facing the water environment reaching good status.

The evaluation of all responses received will be undertaken after each consultation. This will enable NIEA to utilise the responses in the development of the third cycle RBMPs.

<p>Timetable and consultation arrangements for development of the 3rd cycle RBMPs</p>	<p>22 December 2018 to 22 June 2019</p>	<p>This timeline consultation outlines the 3rd cycle work programme timeframe and identifies the key consultation stages you can engage in developing 3rd cycle plans</p>
<p>Significant water management issues (SWMI) consultation for 3rd cycle RBMPs</p>	<p>22 December 2019 to 22 June 2020</p>	<p>The SWMI consultation will ask for your views on our approach to dealing with the most significant issues affecting water quality for each of the three river basin districts within Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>Draft 3rd cycle river basin management plans consultation</p>	<p>22 December 2020 to 22 June 2021</p>	<p>The draft third cycle RBMPs will be published for consultation asking you to consider the identified issues, measures and delivery plan proposed to enable good status to be reached by 2027</p>

Following the consultation on the draft plans the final 3rd cycle river basin management plans will be published in December 2021 incorporating relevant changes and considerations which have arisen from the three consultation stages.

Working together to improve the river basin planning process

The river basin planning process seeks to involve everyone who is interested in, or may be affected by, the water environment and the way it is managed. If you are concerned about the water environment and its sustainable use for future generations then we would welcome your input into the development of the third cycle RBMPs for 2021 to 2027. During the development of the third cycle plans we will continue to engage with stakeholders, using the following groups:

WFD Strategic Planning and Resources Group (SPAR) coordinates the delivery of the National Programme of Measures for DAERA, and reports annually to the WFD Interdepartmental Board on progress. The SPAR group also provides the forum for programme coordination for catchment improvement projects across DAERA and DfI. Key NI WFD stakeholders are invited to join the SPAR group once a year to share progress and plans for the coming year.

River Basin District Stakeholder Groups provide the main forum for interaction with stakeholders through the development of catchment improvement projects. Formal meetings are held annually each autumn, alternating between three District events one year, and a one-day stakeholder conference covering all of Northern Ireland. In November 2018 three catchment stakeholder events were held; one for each River Basin District in Northern Ireland. The events were attended by over 100 participants including environmental NGOs, conservation groups, anglers, local councils, rivers trusts, farmers and academic researchers.

Producing a Plan that is effective and integrated in its management

The development of third cycle RBMPs provides an opportunity to learn from experience and to build on what has been achieved through the first and second cycles. The mid cycle status update from the second cycle will highlight the areas where current actions and measures are working or where quality is declining. Understanding this information and its drivers will be vital when designing the third cycle plans. There is the potential to increase integration with other plans and policies to make RBMPs more useful to water users, landscape planners, public bodies and water managers.

We have identified some key areas where we may seek to improve delivery.

- Sharing information on projects and data.
- Working together at the local catchment scale.
- Identifying benefits from improving the water environment.
- Increased interactions with the agriculture sector and integration with agricultural policies.

Sharing information on projects and data

We will seek to support projects at a local level that will improve the water environment and would encourage stakeholders to advise us of projects and monitoring that they are carrying out that may assist in improving or add to our understanding of the water environment.

We will seek to improve and make available online the information on status classifications, failing elements, monitoring work and the programme of measures. The provision online of interactive maps available as web viewers enables the public and any interested stakeholder to obtain the most recent classifications for their local rivers, lakes and coastal water bodies. Our ambition is to increase the information which is available online beyond classification data to more site specific monitoring data.

Working together at the local catchment scale

Over the period of the first and second cycle RBMPs staff have been working with a number of local stakeholders and interest groups.

We greatly value the cooperation and the contribution it has made to the development of actions for these areas and the issues that have been highlighted. We want to continue to invest time and effort in developing these partnerships and strengthen working together to deliver improvements in the water environment at the catchment scale. This will not only assist in delivering existing actions but also as we develop the third cycle plans.

The Environment Fund continues to support catchment scale projects in partnership with our stakeholders to help deliver improvements in water quality. The cross border INTERREG projects currently underway also promote stakeholder engagement within NI and ROI.

Identifying benefits from improving the water environment

The river basin planning process seeks to involve everyone who is interested in, or may be affected by, the water environment and the way it is managed. The plans provide the primary means of coordinating and integrating the management and protection of the water environment. In the production of the first and second cycle plans a wide range of organisations that have an interest in the water environment have been involved. The plans link with other relevant plans and programmes and will inform other public bodies when carrying out their duties and functions within the RBDs.

This integrated approach should deliver benefits for all those involved in the protection and enhancement of the water environment and provide a clean, healthy environment for all the people of Northern Ireland to enjoy for the 21st century and beyond.

The aim is to:

- improve the ecological health of our waters and prevent any further deterioration;
- support more sustainable use of water as a natural resource;
- create better habitats for wildlife in and around water;
- reduce or phase out discharges and emissions of hazardous substances;
- reduce the pollution of groundwater;
- contribute to mitigating the effects of floods and drought.

While aiming to provide cleaner and healthier waters, we cannot ignore economic realities. Implementing the WFD will improve our understanding of the water environment and how it is managed, enabling us to take a balanced and cost-effective approach to water protection and improvement that should provide long term benefits and increase the value of our water environment.

Increased interactions with the agricultural sector and agriculture policies.

DAERA engaged with the wider farming, food and environmental sectors on a possible future agricultural policy framework for Northern Ireland (NI) published on 1st August 2018.

Following any agreed transition period, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will no longer apply to NI once the UK leaves the European Union, and therefore the views of stakeholders were sought on a 'Future Agricultural Policy Framework' document to help shape the debate on future support arrangements for NI. The document sets out four key desired outcomes:

1. Increased productivity in international terms;
2. Resilience to external shocks;
3. An agricultural industry that is environmentally sustainable; and
4. An industry which operates within an integrated, efficient, sustainable, competitive and responsive supply chain.

Consultation questions

- Does the programme of consultation set out in this document adequately meet the consultation requirements for developing the third cycle river basin management plans?
- What additional information or considerations would you like added to the consultation programme?
- How can we improve partnership working at the catchment-scale to develop a more efficient and effective process in creating the third cycle plans?
- Do you wish for your details to be retained by the Department to contact you regarding future River Basin Management Plan consultations? Y/N

Thank you for your involvement and assistance in this consultation exercise.

Please forward your comments in relation to the consultation to the email address provided, or in writing, to the enclosed address.

How can you respond to this consultation?

You can respond by:

- Sending a response by email to wfdconsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk or
- Send a written response to:

WFD River Basin Planning – consultation
DAERA NIEA
Water Management Unit,
17 Antrim Road, Tonagh,
Lisburn, BT28 3AL

If you wish your comments to remain confidential, please mark this clearly on your response.

Your consultation response should be returned by **22nd June 2019**.

To facilitate consultation we will:

- Post accessible consultation documents on our website;
- Provide hard copies free of charge;
- Inform statutory consultees of the consultation;
- Advertise the consultation through local newspapers;
- Provide a list of questions to guide consultation responses;
- Provide facilities to receive both electronic and paper-based responses