

Northern Ireland
Environment Agency

River Basin Management Plans (2015 - 2021)

Programme of Measures

Key Sectors: The Physical Condition of the Water Environment
Pressure Type: Morphology

Pressure Type – Freshwater Morphology

The Physical Condition of the Water Environment

Some of the water bodies in Northern Ireland have been modified to provide benefits such as the provision of drinking water, land drainage, reducing flood risk to communities, production of hydro electric power or improving transport networks.

Why is this a significant issue?

Aquatic wildlife is affected not only by the quantity and quality of water but also the physical habitat of the water environment. Modifications such as straightening rivers, building weirs and reinforcing banks with concrete can constrain and stabilise the physical nature of water bodies, reducing the development and diversity of physical habitats. This can reduce the number and diversity of animals and plants present. In addition, the way land is managed can adversely affect habitats, for example by changing the amount of sediment that runs off both agricultural land and urban areas. These hydrological and morphological features are collectively known as the water body's hydromorphology.

What are we already doing about this?

An inter-agency River Restoration and Continuity Group has been established for a number of years. In future, the work of this group will be incorporated in to that of an inter-agency Catchment Oversight Group. The new group will oversee operational delivery of catchment improvement projects where multiple benefits can be derived by inter-agency working and stakeholder involvement.

A guide, 'River Alterations - A Hydromorphology Handbook' has been produced. This is a user friendly guide for landowners and others who are considering making changes to watercourses. A number of habitat restoration projects have been carried out in Northern Ireland and many of these projects have been completed by DARD Rivers Agency and DCAL. The DOE Water Quality Improvement Grant has funded a number of projects to improve the hydromorphology across Northern Ireland. For example river restoration projects to improve hydromorphology by adding gravel and boulders to the river.

For a full list of measures already in place in the first cycle please see our website.

What further actions will deliver environmental improvements?

RBMP 1 (2009-2015)

Table 1 summarises the progress we have made against the existing and planned measures.

RBMP 2 (2015-2021)

The measures which we will take forward in the second cycle are summarised in Table 2.

These are measures which will improve our understanding of the pressures, enable us to improve the evidence base to target actions, and build on actions already complete.

In the current economic climate there is no certainty at this stage around future funding and budgets that will be available throughout the lifetime of this plan. However DOE will in collaboration with other departments and agencies continue to make a strong case for additional funding through the standard government bidding processes.

Key Sector: Historical engineering, urban development, public water supply, hydropower, agriculture, forestry

Pressure Type: Freshwater Morphology

Table 1 Summary of existing and planned measures 2009-2015

Improvement Required	Actions	Delivery mechanism	Lead Department / Agency	Support Provider	Deadline for delivery of action (year end)
Control modifications to surface waters	Produce appropriate guidance to supplement legislation offering control over physical modifications	Interdepartmental Working Group	DOE	NIEA, DCAL, DARD Rivers Agency	Complete
Implementation of restoration measures	Assess technical feasibility and cost effectiveness of restoration measures	River Restoration Centre paper on costing aspects of restoration	DARD Rivers Agency	NIEA, DCAL	In Place/ Ongoing
	Develop and implement restoration measures on selected water bodies driven by partnership working or through routine Rivers Agency works.	Guidance on hydromorphology legislative controls	DARD Rivers Agency	NIEA, DCAL	In Place/ Ongoing

Table 2 Summary of supplementary measures for 2015 to 2021.

Improvement Required	Actions	Delivery mechanism	Lead Department / Agency	Support Provider	Deadline for delivery of action (year end)
Control modifications to surface waters	Develop the methodology for including river continuity in Water Framework Directive classification	Inter-agency Catchment Oversight Group	NIEA/ DCAL/ LA		In Place
	Improve liaison with DRD Transport NI re potential road bridges inhibiting fish passage.	Liaison with DRD Transport NI through RR&C group or relevant sub group	DRD TransportNI/ DCAL		2017
River and Lake restoration	Inter-Agency Catchment Oversight Group to prioritise issues (e.g. potential barriers to fish movement) and co-ordinate river restoration and continuity work	Inter-agency Catchment Oversight Group	NIEA/ DCAL/ DARD RA/LA		2020
	Continue to support local stakeholder restoration projects through the Environmental Challenge Fund and Fisheries Habitat works	Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) Challenge fund and similar schemes	NIEA/ DCAL		2021
	Continue with Environmental Liaison Groups as part of DRD Transport NI consultation process for each major road scheme	Environmental liaison group	DRD TransportNI		2021
	Develop guidance on management of in channel woody debris	Working in conjunction with Rivers Agency to take account of any flood risk issues as an extension/sub group of Inter-agency Catchment Oversight Group	DARD RA/ DARD FS	NIEA/ DCAL/ LA	2017
Control Modifications to surface waters	Marine Environment Division to work with DRD Ports, DARD and NIEA to develop a Ports and Harbours Guidance document, outlining good environmental management within ports	Drafting in progress with DRD, DARD and Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)	Marine Environment Division	NIEA/ DRD PORTS/MCA/ DARD	2016
Control removal of substrate from rivers	Ensure proper protection and compliance with gravel removal legislation	Compliance with fisheries legislation	DCAL/LA		2021

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Control modifications to transitional and coastal waters	A new marine licensing system	New UK-wide primary legislation - the Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009 and sub-ordinate legislation.	Department for Environment Foods and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	DOE	In Place
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