

Bathing Water Quality in Ireland

A report for the year

2023

KEY MESSAGES FOR 2023

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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.
- ▲ 114 bathing waters (77%) were Excellent quality, a slight decrease from 117 for 2022.
- ▲ 5 bathing waters were Poor (up 2 from 2022) and will have a swimming restriction for the 2024 season. These were Lady's Bay - Buncrana, Trá na mBan - An Spidéal, Balbriggan (Front Strand Beach), Loughshinny Beach and Sandymount Strand.
- ▲ One bathing water, Aillebrack/Silverhill Beach, Co. Galway 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 2023. Other reported causes included agricultural runoff, 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. Record rainfall levels in July and storms in August led to more bathing water warnings in 2023 than previous years.

Protecting our bathing waters

- ▲ The rainfall events in 2023 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.
- ▲ 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, in progress or completed to improve water quality at Poor bathing waters.
- ▲ Local authorities need to prioritise measures to improve the five 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.

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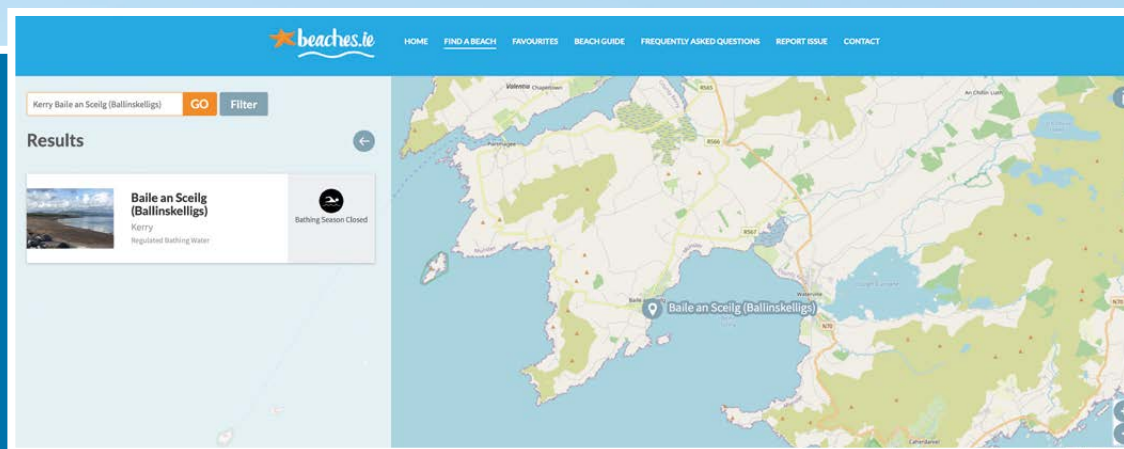
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This is a report about bathing water quality in Ireland during 2023. Local authorities monitor and manage bathing waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assesses bathing water quality information provided by local authorities for the beaches that they manage.

Each year, local authorities take samples of bathing waters just before, and during the bathing season. In Ireland, the season 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 X [@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

In 2023, 148 identified bathing waters were monitored and managed under the Bathing Water Regulations in Ireland. 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 beaches.ie. Aillebrack/Silverhill Beach, Co. Galway was identified in 2021 and classified for the first time for 2023 with Excellent quality. There were no new identified bathing waters for 2023.

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Overall, it was a challenging year for bathing water quality in 2023, with extended periods of heavy rain. 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 2023, of the 148 identified bathing waters assessed, 143 (97%) met or exceeded the minimum required standard of Sufficient. 114 bathing waters (77%) were of Excellent quality, a decrease from 117 (79%) in 2022.

Table 1: Changes in bathing water classification between 2022 and 2023

Classification	Number of bathing waters in 2022	Number of bathing waters in 2023
Excellent	117	114
Good	20	24
Sufficient	7	5
Poor	3	5
New/Changes	1	0
Total	148	148

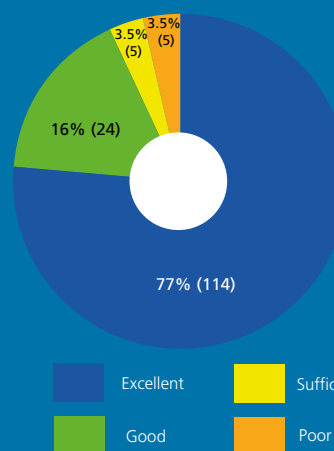
Pollution incidents

In 2023 the EPA was notified of 45 pollution incidents which resulted in the closure of bathing waters, up from 34 in 2022. The majority were due to the presence of pollution in sample results (29 incidents). Bathing waters were also closed as a precaution after overflows in the sewer network (12 incidents) and due to algal blooms (4 incidents).

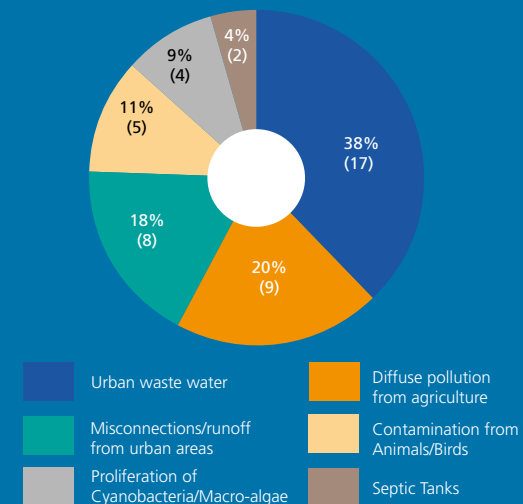
Prior warnings of potential pollution events

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 2023, there were 228 'Prior warning' notices, 42 more than 2022. 173 of these (76%) were reported during July, which was the wettest month on record, and August which had two named storms (*Met Éireann*).

Bathing water quality in Ireland in 2023



Likely causes of reported incidents in 2023



BATHING WATER QUALITY MAP OF IRELAND 2023

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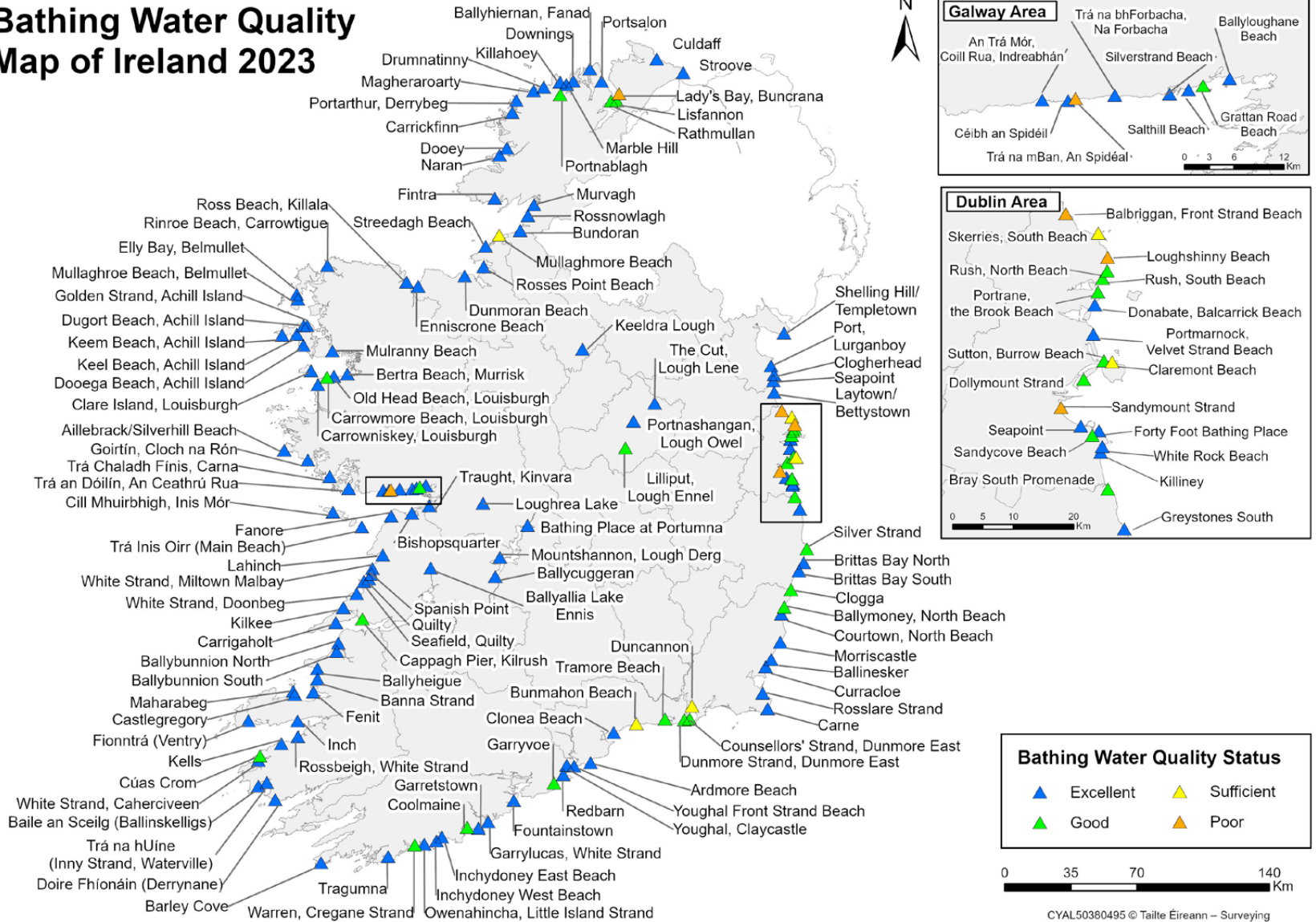
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BATHING WATERS WITH POOR WATER QUALITY

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Five bathing waters were classified as having Poor water quality in 2023, two more than in 2022. Local authorities have 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 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 '*Leave only Paw Prints*' campaign raises awareness of the impact of dog fouling. Programs to identify and fix misconnections are ongoing by the local authority. Uisce Éireann has made significant improvements to the wastewater network and work is ongoing to address urban wastewater pressures.

Balbriggan, Front Strand Beach (Fingal County Council)

The main sources of pollution are misconnections into stormwater networks and sewage overflows which contaminate streams flowing to the bathing water, dog fouling left on the beach, birds and other animals. Uisce Éireann is completing a pumping station upgrade and is continuing to identify and fix problems in the sewer network. Programs to address misconnections, dog and bird fouling, and inspections of domestic wastewater treatment systems and farms, are planned by Fingal County Council.

Loughshinny Beach (Fingal County Council)

The main sources of pollution are sewage overflows, misconnections into stormwater networks, septic tanks, and fouling from dogs and other animals. Programs to address dog fouling, domestic septic tanks and to identify pollution sources from streams are planned by the local authority.

Lady's Bay, Buncrana (Donegal County Council)

The main source of pollution affecting the bathing water is untreated waste water 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 wastewater collected during heavy rainfall.

Trá na mBan, An Spidéal (Galway County Council)

The main sources of pollution are urban waste water, runoff from agriculture, and septic tanks. A new wastewater treatment plant at Spiddal has been constructed by Uisce Éireann and was officially opened in November 2023. Galway County Council will continue to carry out farm inspections and address issues with septic tanks.

BATHING WATER QUALITY OTHER MONITORED WATERS 2023

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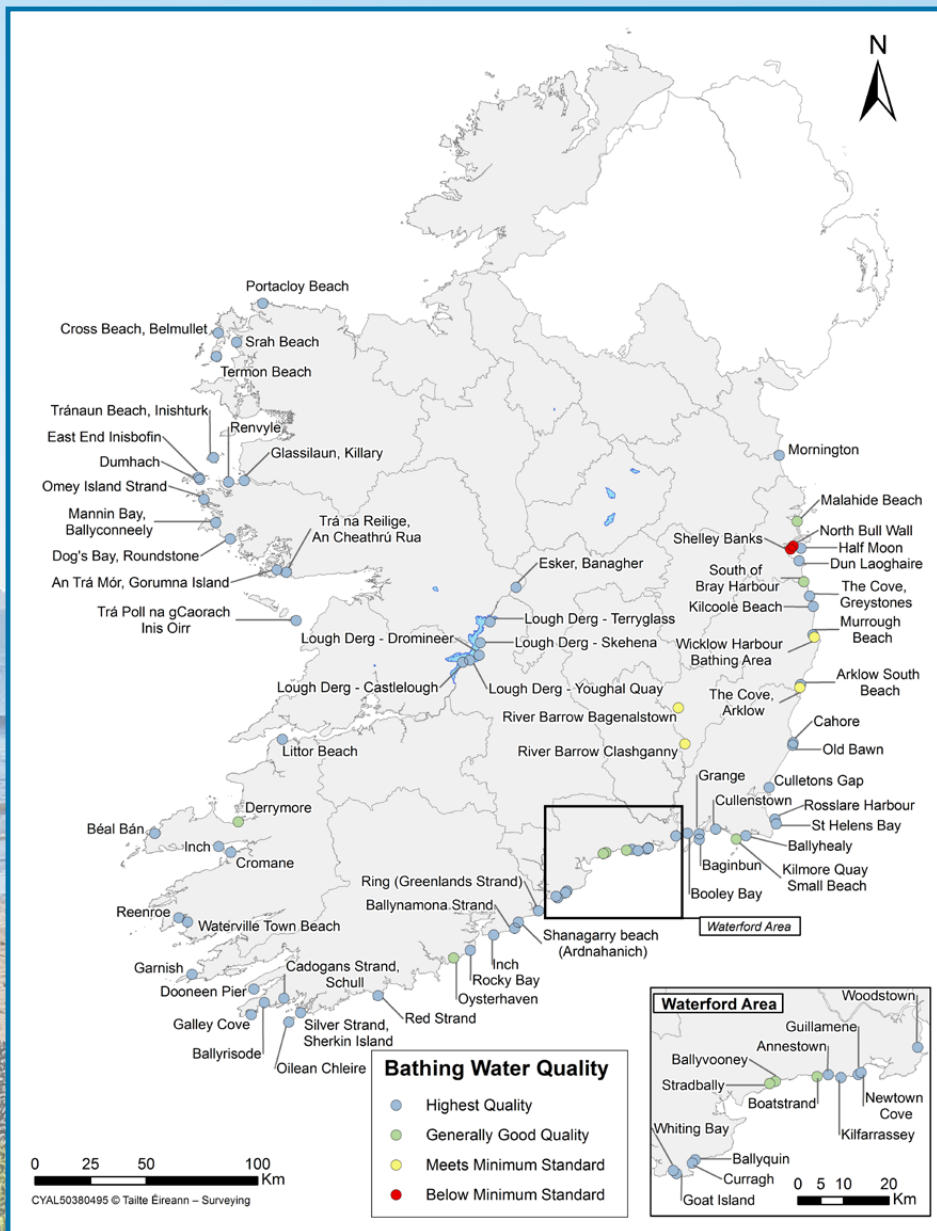
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Other Monitored Waters

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.



Portacloy, Mayo



Old Bawn, Wexford

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Cover & Background Photo: Donabate, Balcarrick Beach, County Dublin taken by Jenny Deakin

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