

Bathing Water Quality in Ireland

A report for the year 2021

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Bathing water quality has continued to improve.

- ▲ 97% of the 148 identified bathing waters met or exceeded the minimum required standard.
- ▲ 115 bathing waters were Excellent quality, up 4 from 2020.
- ▲ 2 bathing waters were Poor, down 2 from 2020. These were Balbriggan (Front Strand Beach) and Lady's Bay, Buncrana.

There are still some issues impacting bathing water quality to address.

- ▲ Agriculture, urban waste water and fouling from dogs on beaches all impacted on the quality of bathing waters.
- ▲ Irish Water need to improve the operation, management and maintenance of treatment plants and networks which impact on bathing waters.
- ▲ 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.

What can the public do?

- ▲ We can all help by bringing our rubbish home, cleaning up after our dogs, and reporting pollution.
- ▲ Check www.beaches.ie for information on the latest water quality and swimming restrictions.
- ▲ Suggest new bathing waters to your local authority for identification.
- ▲ Watch the weather – bathing water quality can be impacted for 48 hours or longer after heavy rainfall.

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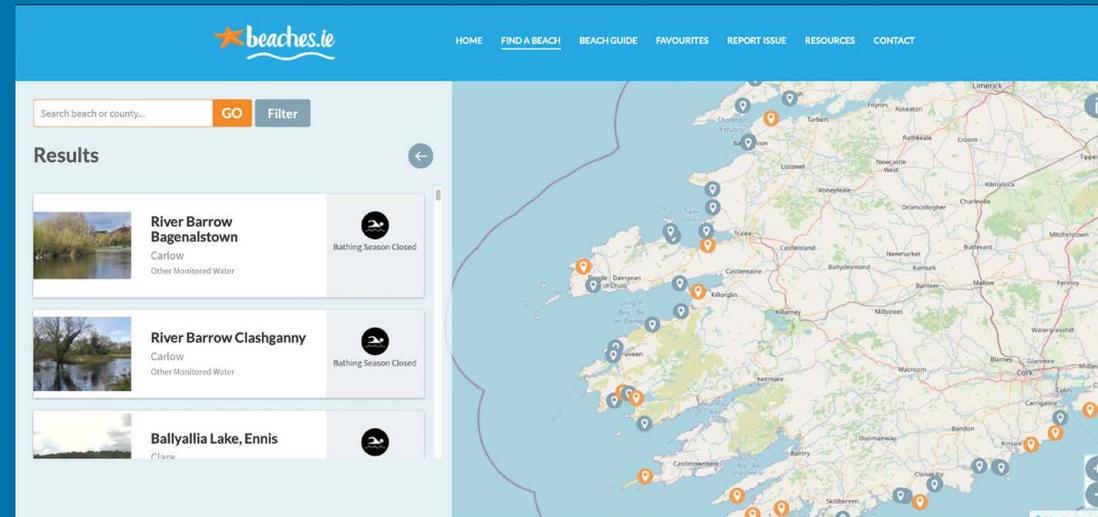
MAP OF OTHER
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INTRODUCTION

This is a report about bathing water quality in Ireland during 2021. Local authorities monitor and manage bathing waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assess 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 sampled during the bathing water season. You can also follow us on Twitter [@EPABeaches](https://twitter.com/EPABeaches). 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.



The screenshot shows the homepage of www.beaches.ie. The navigation bar includes links for HOME, FIND A BEACH, BEACH GUIDE, FAVOURITES, REPORT ISSUE, RESOURCES, and CONTACT. A search bar is present with a 'GO' button and a 'Filter' dropdown. The 'Results' section displays three entries:

- River Barrow Bagenalstown**, Carlow, Other Monitored Water, Bathing Season Closed.
- River Barrow Clashganny**, Carlow, Other Monitored Water, Bathing Season Closed.
- Ballyallia Lake, Ennis**, Clare.

The right side of the page features a map of Ireland with various location markers indicating monitored bathing waters.

There has been an increase in people sea swimming and accessing our beaches outside of the traditional bathing season. The EPA participate in the National Bathing Water Expert Group (BWEG) which is chaired by the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage. This group is considering how best to protect bathers' health outside the bathing season. The EPA are also supporting research to address this question. Dublin City Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council already provide results of water quality samples taken outside the bathing water season for display on www.beaches.ie.

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BATHING WATER QUALITY IN 2021

Overall, bathing water quality has continued to improve in 2021. Of the 148 identified bathing waters assessed, 144 (97%) met or exceeded the minimum required standard of Sufficient. Two bathing waters were classified for the first time in 2021. They were Carrigaholt and Quilty, both in Clare and both have Excellent water quality. One bathing water was newly identified in 2021 (Aillebrack/Silverhill Beach Galway). One bathing water (Lilliput, Lough Ennell Westmeath) had a category of 'Changes' applied for 2021 due to a significant improvement in water quality. These two bathing waters will be classified in 2022.

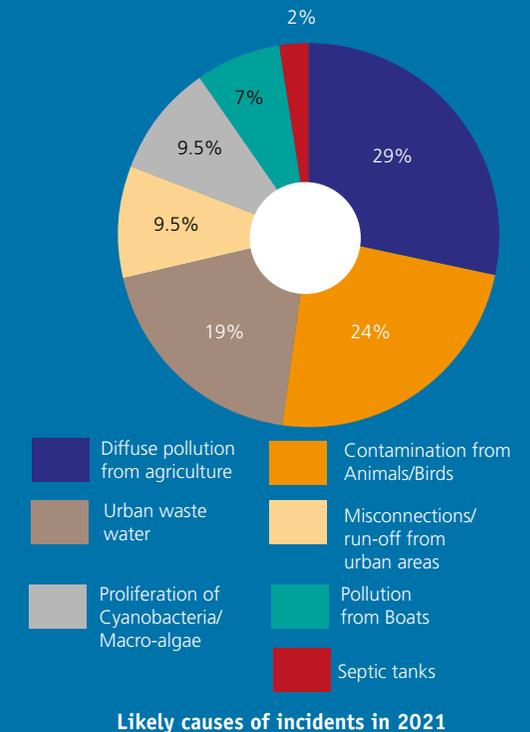
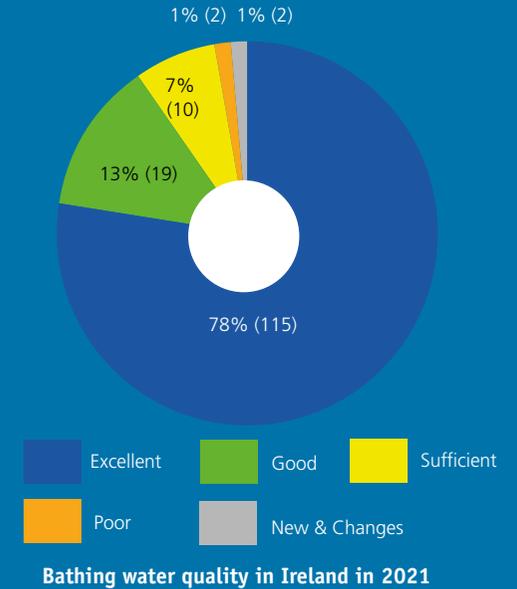
| Classification | Number of bathing waters in 2020 | Number of bathing waters in 2021 |
|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Excellent | 111 | 115 |
| Good | 21 | 19 |
| Sufficient | 10 | 10 |
| Poor | 4 | 2 |
| New/Changes | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 148 | 148 |

Pollution incidents

In 2021, 42 bathing water pollution incidents were reported to the EPA, compared to 57 in 2020. The Local Authorities take a precautionary approach when reporting incidents, meaning that not all incidents result in a deterioration in the bathing water quality. This approach is taken to protect bathers' health.

Prior warnings of potential pollution events

When heavy rainfall is forecast, many local authorities will put up a notice giving a 'Prior warning' of pollution events. In 2021, there were 104 'Prior warning' notices, 31 less than 2020. Most of these warnings (67%) were reported during the month of August. For 6 of the prior warnings reported, samples taken indicated that the bathing water quality was impacted by the heavy rainfall that was forecast.



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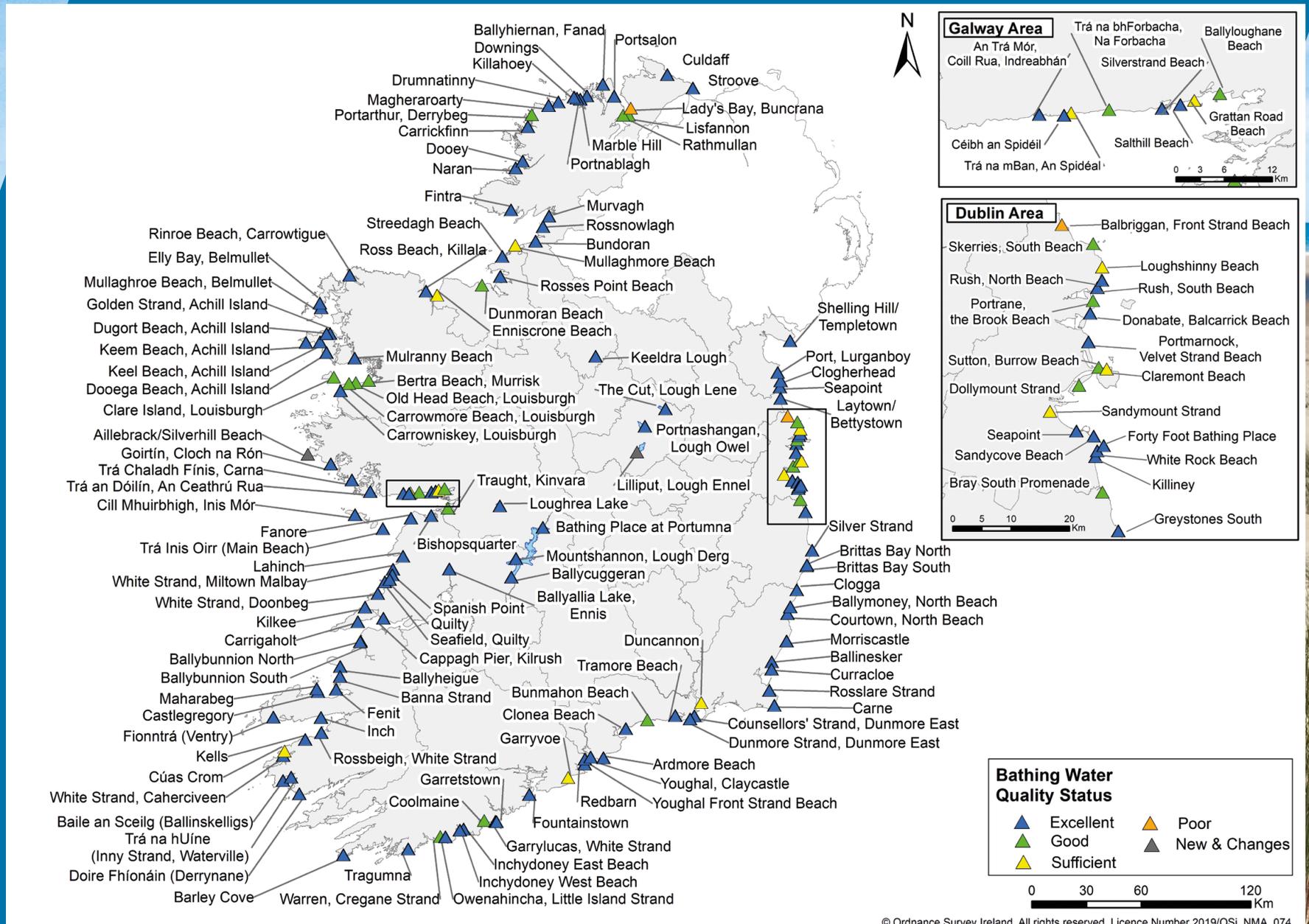
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Two bathing waters were classified as Poor in 2021, two fewer than in 2020. The Local Authorities with Poor bathing waters have management plans in place to address the issues.

Table 1: Poor bathing waters in 2020 and 2021

| Local authority | Bathing water | 2020 | 2021 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Donegal County Council | Lady's Bay, Buncrana | Sufficient | Poor |
| Fingal County Council | Balbriggan, Front Strand Beach | Poor | Poor |
| Galway County Council | Clifden Beach | Poor | Declassified |
| Westmeath County Council | Lilliput, Lough Ennell | Poor | Not Classified (Changes) |
| Kerry County Council | Cúas Crom | Poor | Sufficient |

Balbriggan, Front Strand Beach

The main sources of pollution are sewage discharges and misconnections; faeces from dogs, birds and other animals; and contaminated surface streams flowing through the town. Fingal County Council are addressing misconnections and working with the assistance of UCD to identify pollution sources. Irish Water plan an upgrade of the Quay Street pumping station and a drainage action plan for Balbriggan in 2022. The 'Our Balbriggan' rejuvenation plan for the harbour, currently in the design phase, also has potential to improve water quality. Fingal County Council's dog wardens are targeting inspections and the Green Dog Walker Scheme is promoted to encourage responsible dog ownership as dog fouling is a risk to bathing waters. These initiatives will be continued in 2022.

Lady's Bay, Buncrana

The main sources of pollution affecting the bathing water are Buncrana waste water treatment plant, combined stormwater overflows, and surface run-off, which are made worse by heavy rainfall. Irish Water is due to begin upgrade works at Westbrook pumping station and the sewer network during the summer of 2022 and a new larger capacity storm tank is also due to be constructed at Buncrana waste water treatment plant.

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IMPROVING WATER QUALITY AT LILLIPUT, LOUGH ENNELL



Lilliput, Lough Ennell was classified as Poor for 2018, 2019 and 2020. During 2020 and 2021, the bathing water quality improved significantly due to actions being taken in the surrounding catchment. A category of 'Changes' is applied for 2021 and the restriction on swimming can be removed. The bathing water quality will be classified again in 2022.

Westmeath County Council and the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) carried out investigations around the lake to identify the sources of pollution. Runoff from farming activities when it rained was identified as the main problem. The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) engaged with the farming community on how best to address the issues. The willingness of the landowners to put the measures in place, for example by changing their landspreading practices, was key.

This approach has led to significant improvement in the quality of bathing water with all samples for 2021 being of excellent quality. These positive outcomes are an excellent example of how working together can improve water quality.

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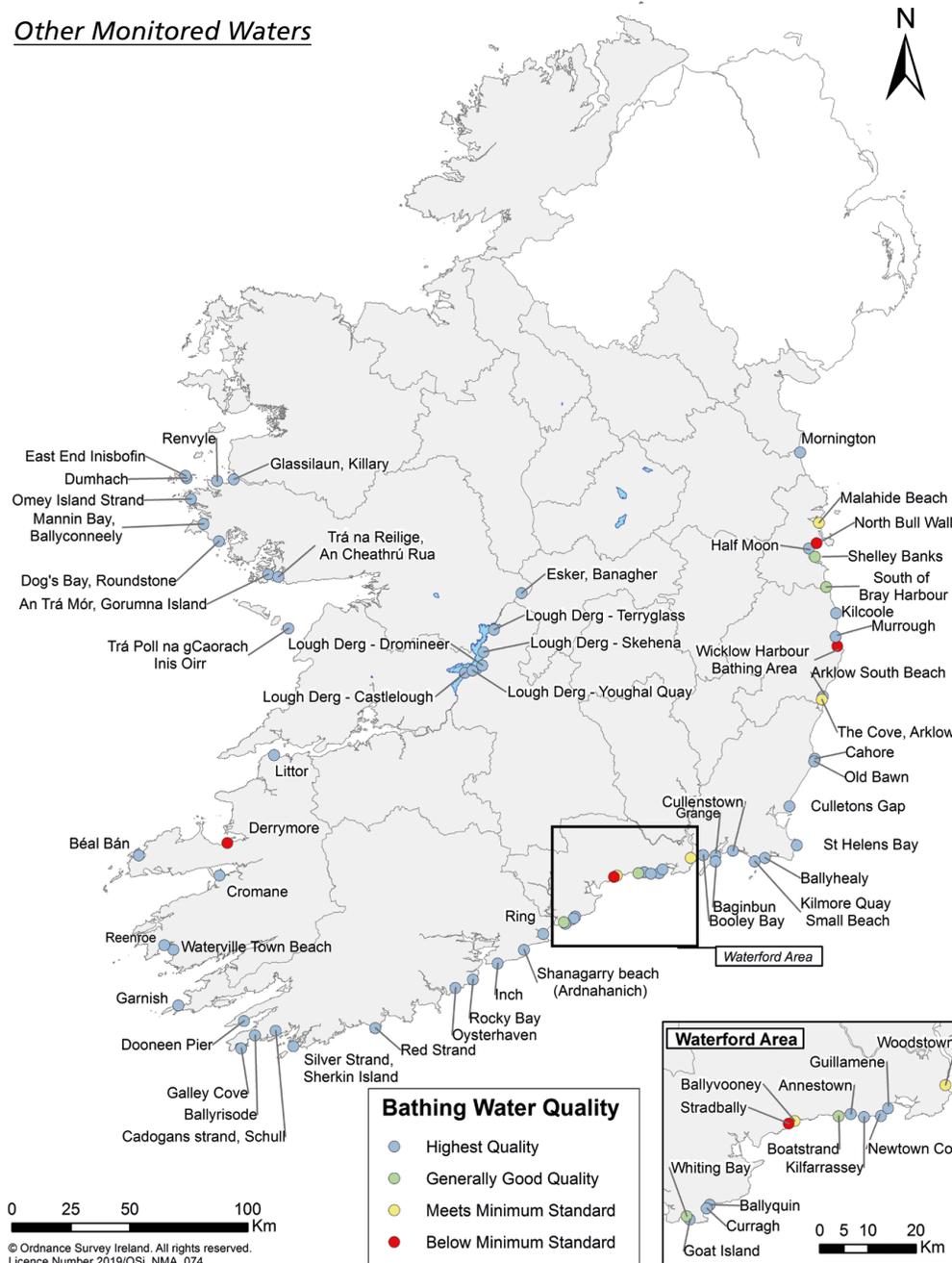
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Other Monitored Waters



Other monitored waters is a term which generally applies to 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.



Trá Poll na gCaorach Inis Oirr, Galway



Rocky Bay, Cork

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Cover & Background Photo: Curracloe Beach, County Wexford taken by Paddy Morris

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