



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Water Framework Directive: Governance and Implementation

Ken Bucke
Water Policy Adviser,
Water Advisory Unit, DHLGH

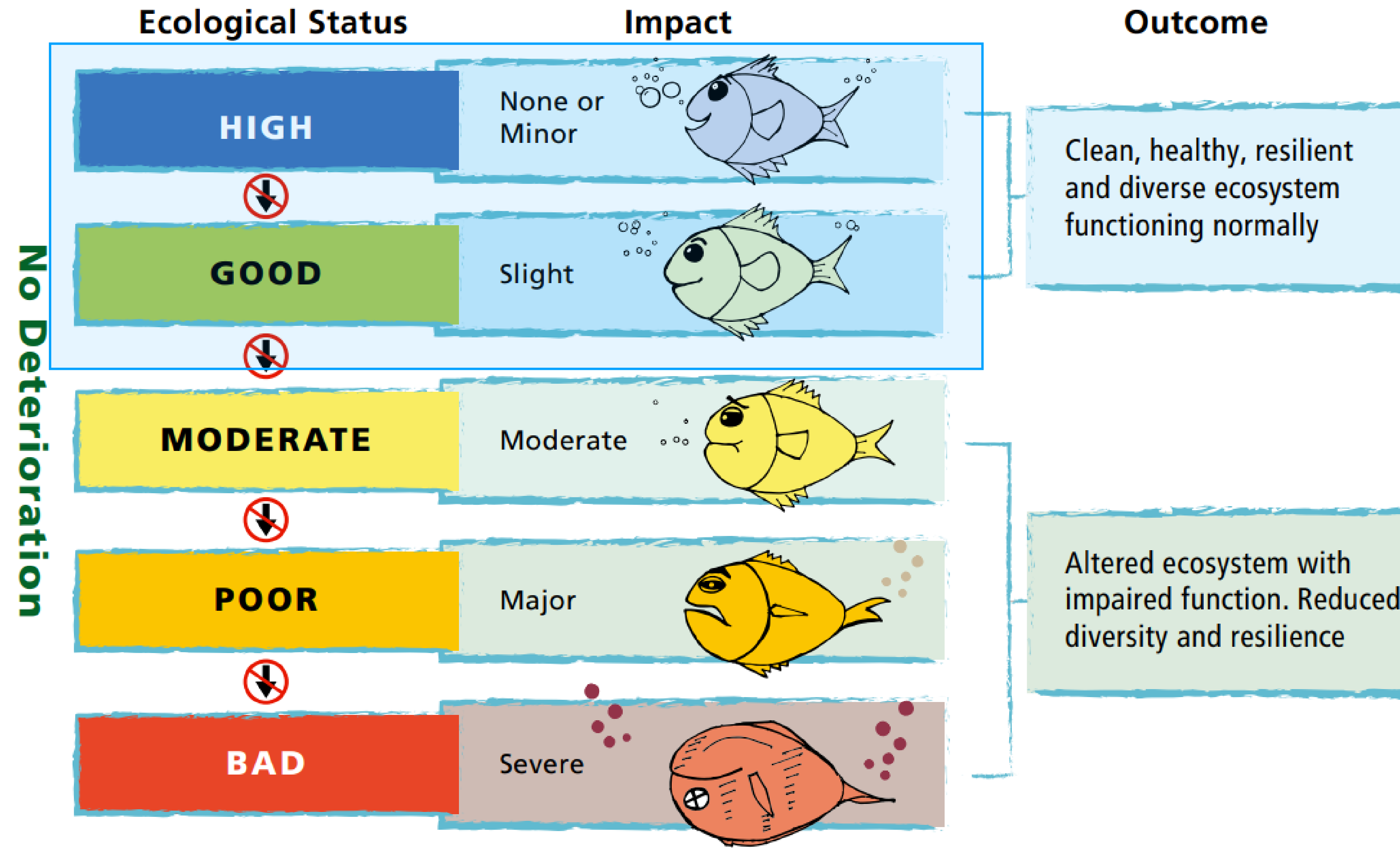
23 June 2026

Overview



- Water Framework Directive
- River Basin Management Planning in Ireland
- Third River Basin Management Plan, the Water Action Plan 2024
- Development of the Water Action Plan for the fourth cycle

WFD Status and Environmental Objectives



Water Framework Directive



Framework approach – applies to all waters and based on natural management units (catchment, sub-catchment and water bodies): protecting aquatic ecology; habitats; drinking water resources; groundwater and bathing waters etc.

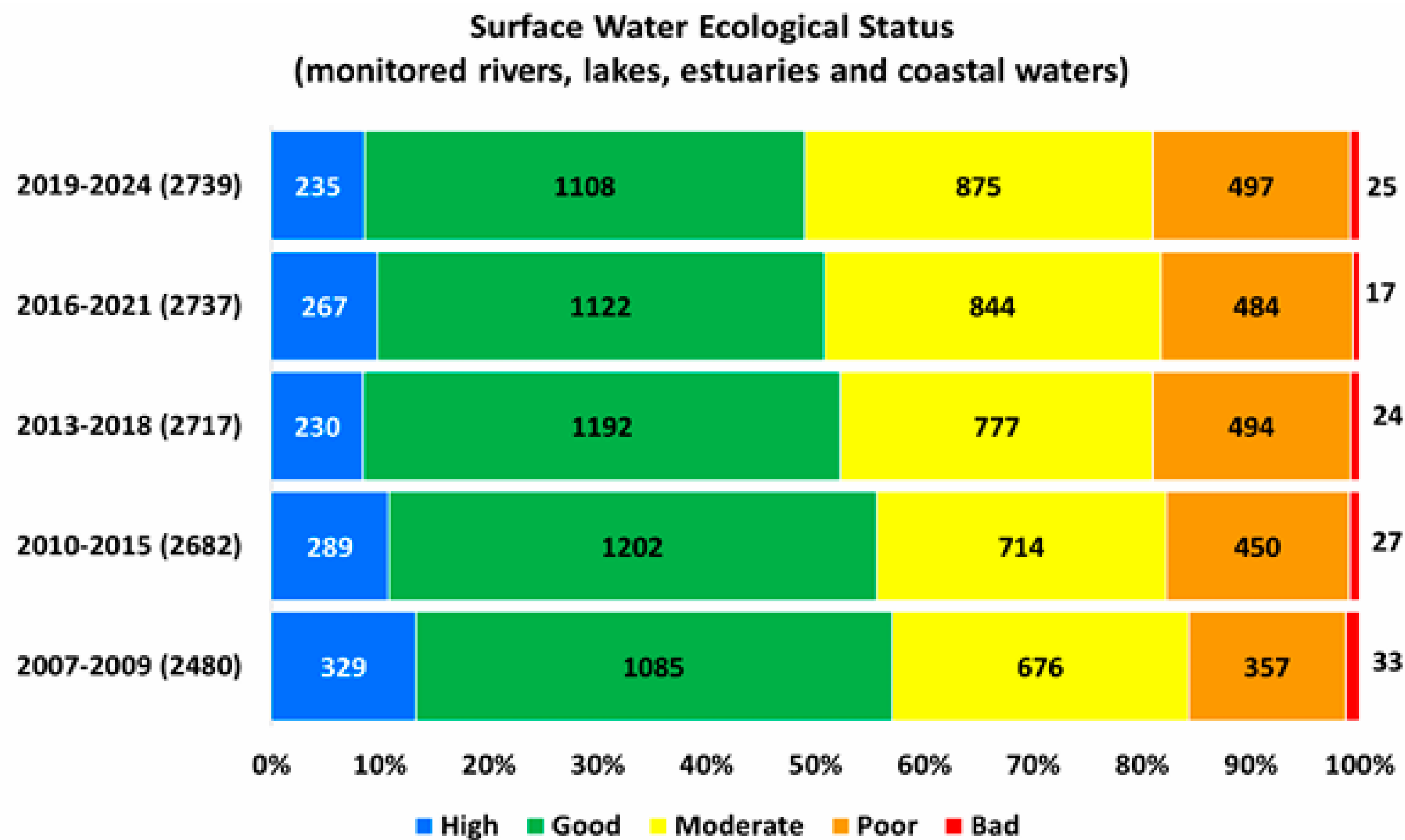
River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) with Programmes of Measures (PoMs) in continuing six year cycles: Current cycle is **2022 to 2027**.

- 
- A large, thick, gold-colored curved arrow pointing from the bottom left towards the list of steps.
- 1. Catchment “characterisation” : what are we dealing with and what is the problem?**
 - 2. Set objectives and programmes of measures in a River Basin Management Plan**
 - 3. Implement measures**
 - 4. Monitor and evaluate**
 - 5. Report**

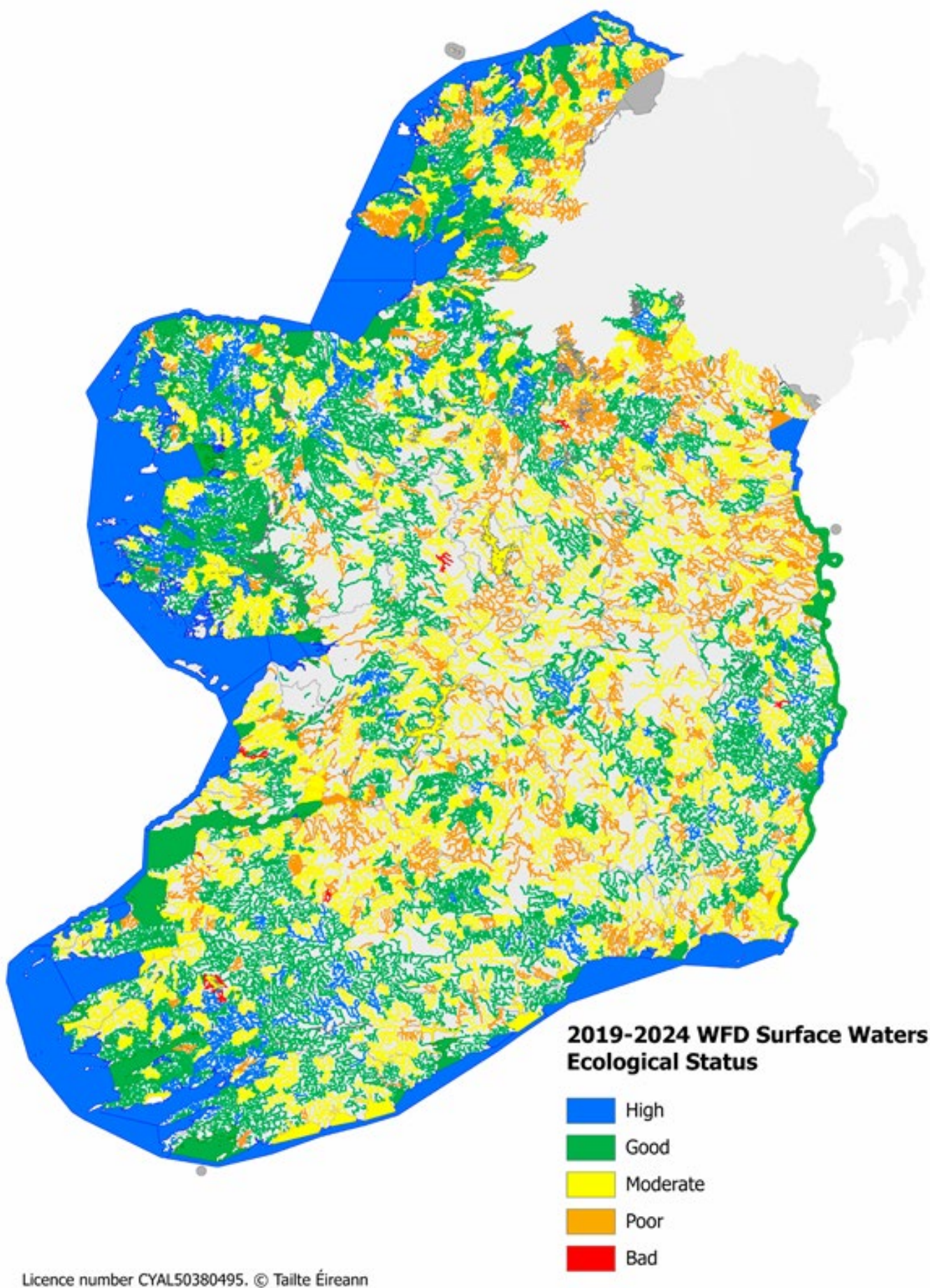
Water Action Plan 2024: Water Quality in Ireland



Water Quality in Ireland report (2019-2024): 52% meeting WFD target, compared to 54% in the 2016-2021 reporting period

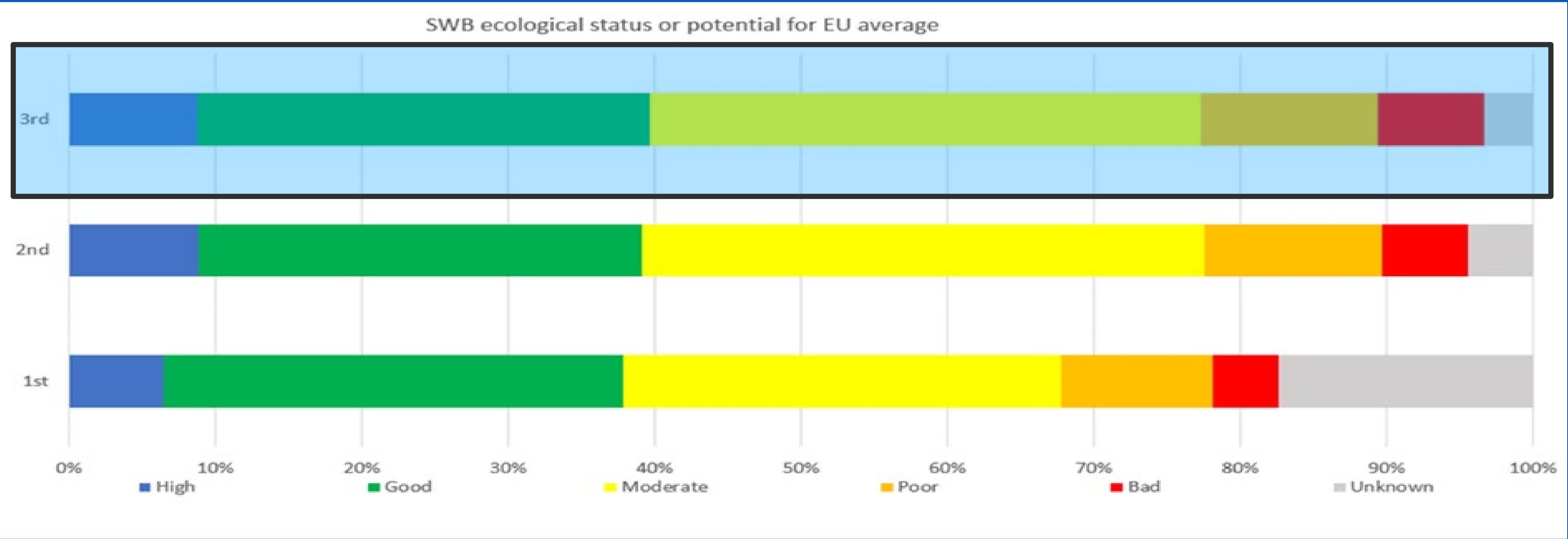


Source: EPA





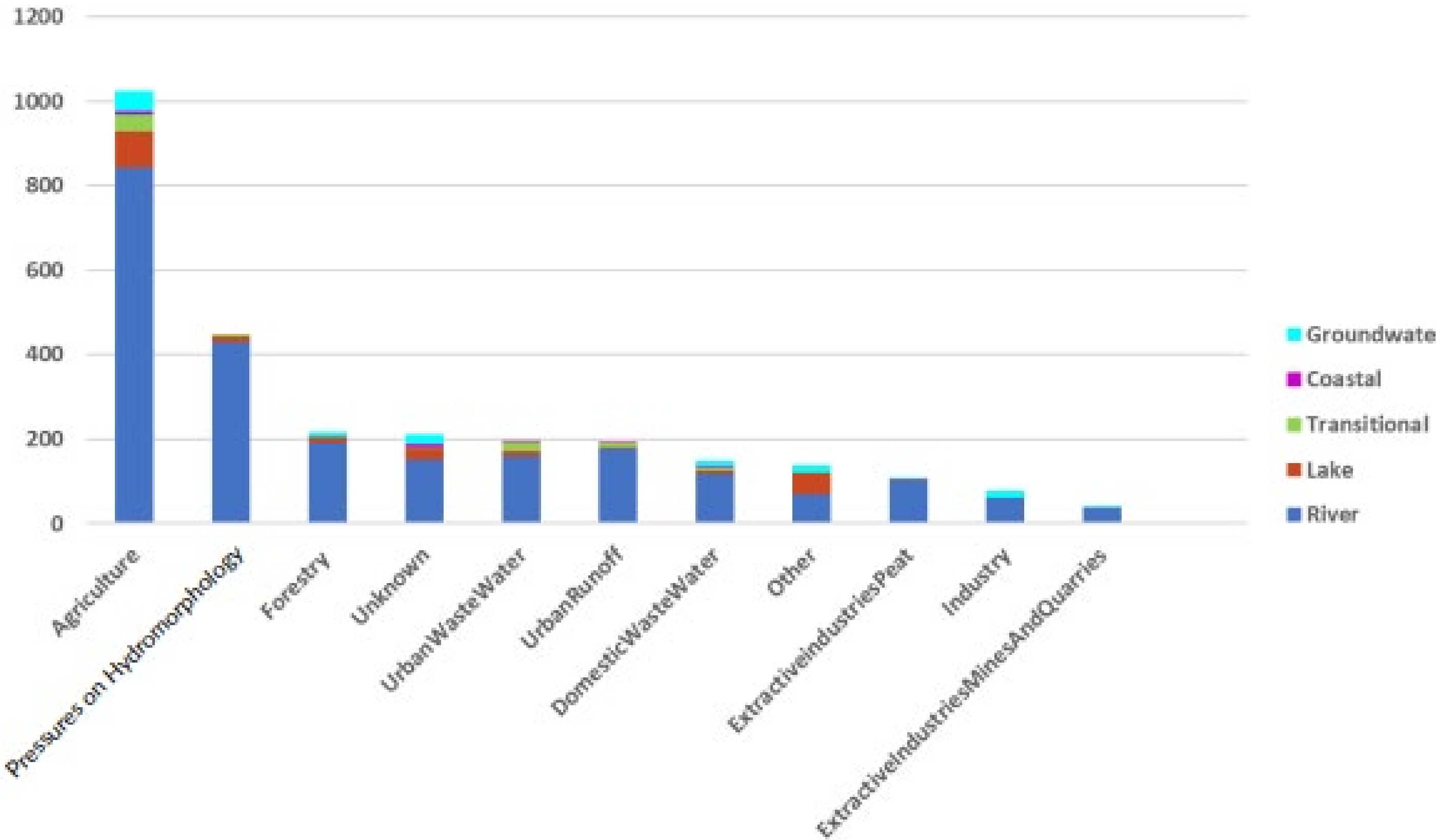
Ireland



Water Action Plan 2024: Water Quality in Ireland



Water Body Type	Risk Categories			Total
	Not at Risk	Review	At Risk	
River	1,072	783	1,337	3,192
Canal	7	9	-	16
Lake	393	277	142	812
Transitional	34	102	60	196
Coastal	48	48	16	112
Groundwater	409	11	94	514
Grand Total	1,963	1,230	1,649	4,842



Risk based approach,
targeting action

Evolution of river basin management planning



Cycle 1
2009-2015

- Multiple River Basin Management Plans
- Local Authority-led with consultancy support
- Significant step forward in technical assessments

“Increasing
Clarity”

Cycle 2
2016-2021

- National Plan with Areas for Action
- Integrated catchment science and management
- Risk-based approach promoting targeted action
- New Governance structures developed

Cycle 3
2022-2027

- Building on Cycle 2
- Data, evidence-base and tracking implementation – transparency on what is being done.
- A place in the plan for everyone

“The right
measure in
the right
place”

What will Cycle 4 (2028 - 2033) look like ?

Water Action Plan 2024 (3rd River Basin Management Plan)



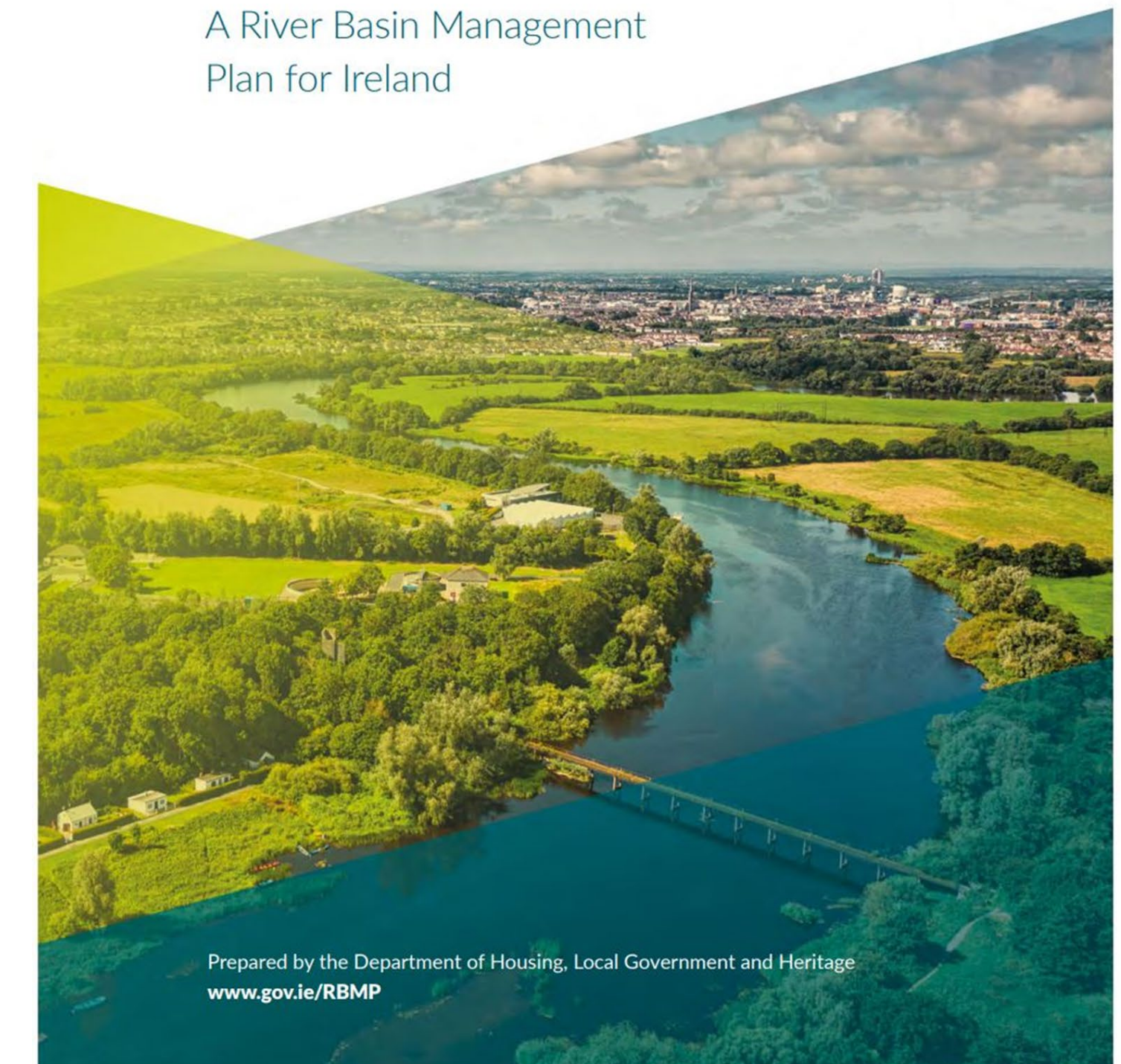
- Launched September 2024
- Government commitment to protecting & restoring Ireland's natural waters by complying with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive
- Accelerates the identification and implementation of the **right measures in the right places** to both **restore** and **protect** all water bodies
- Approx. 150 high level actions, 40 lead organisations



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

WaterAction Plan 2024

A River Basin Management
Plan for Ireland

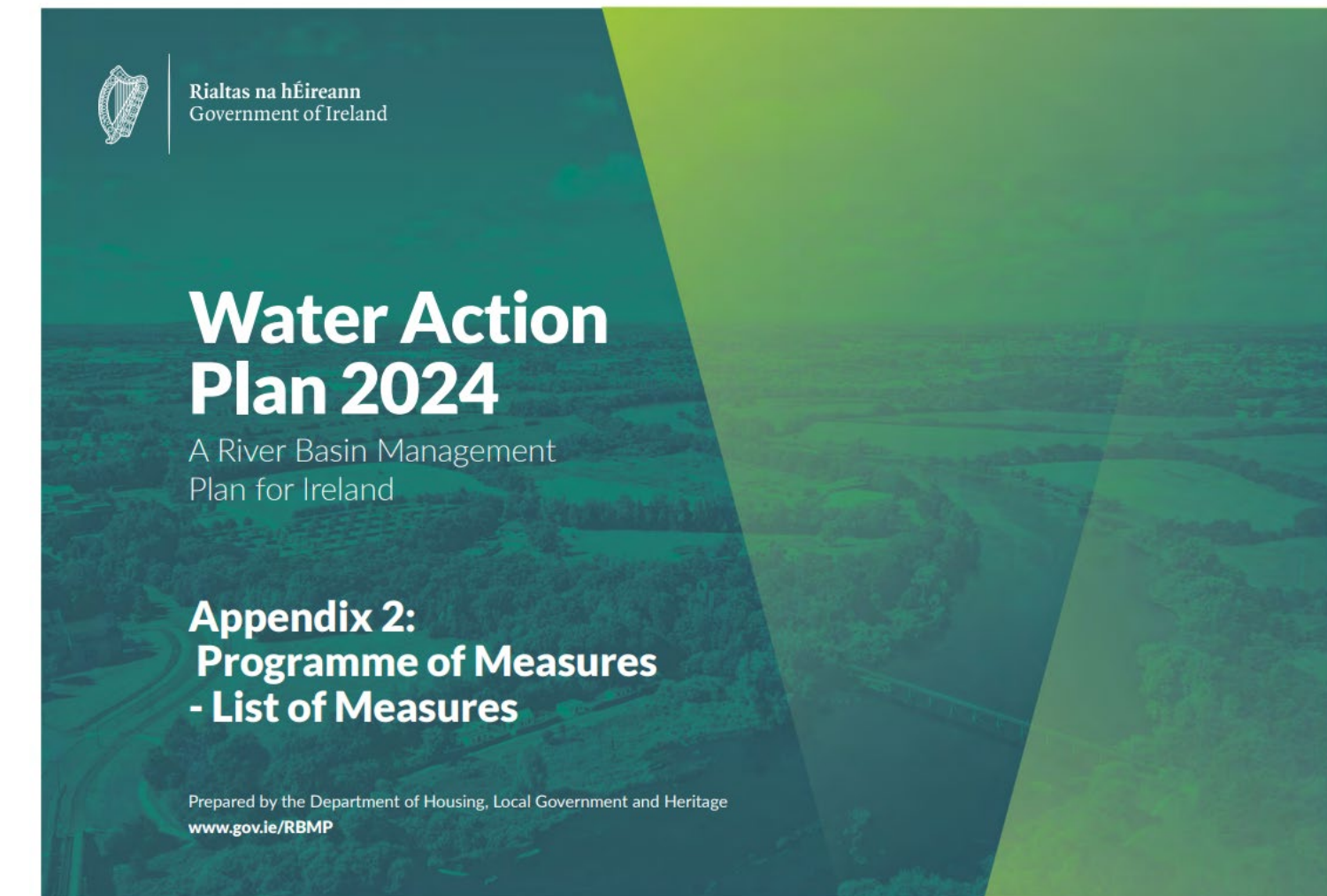


Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
www.gov.ie/RBMP

Summary of Programme of Measures



- Focused attention in 517 Areas for Action
- Sectoral Action Work Plans
- Catchment Management Work Plans
- Full capacity in the “Farming for Water” EIP Project – €60m
- 4,500 farms inspected per year under National Agriculture Inspection Programme
- Mitigation of barriers under the National Barriers Mitigation Programme
- Uisce Éireann investment in 108 WWTPs, 77 collection networks and 92 related national programmes – €2.3bn
- Establish the Programme Delivery Office to track implementation

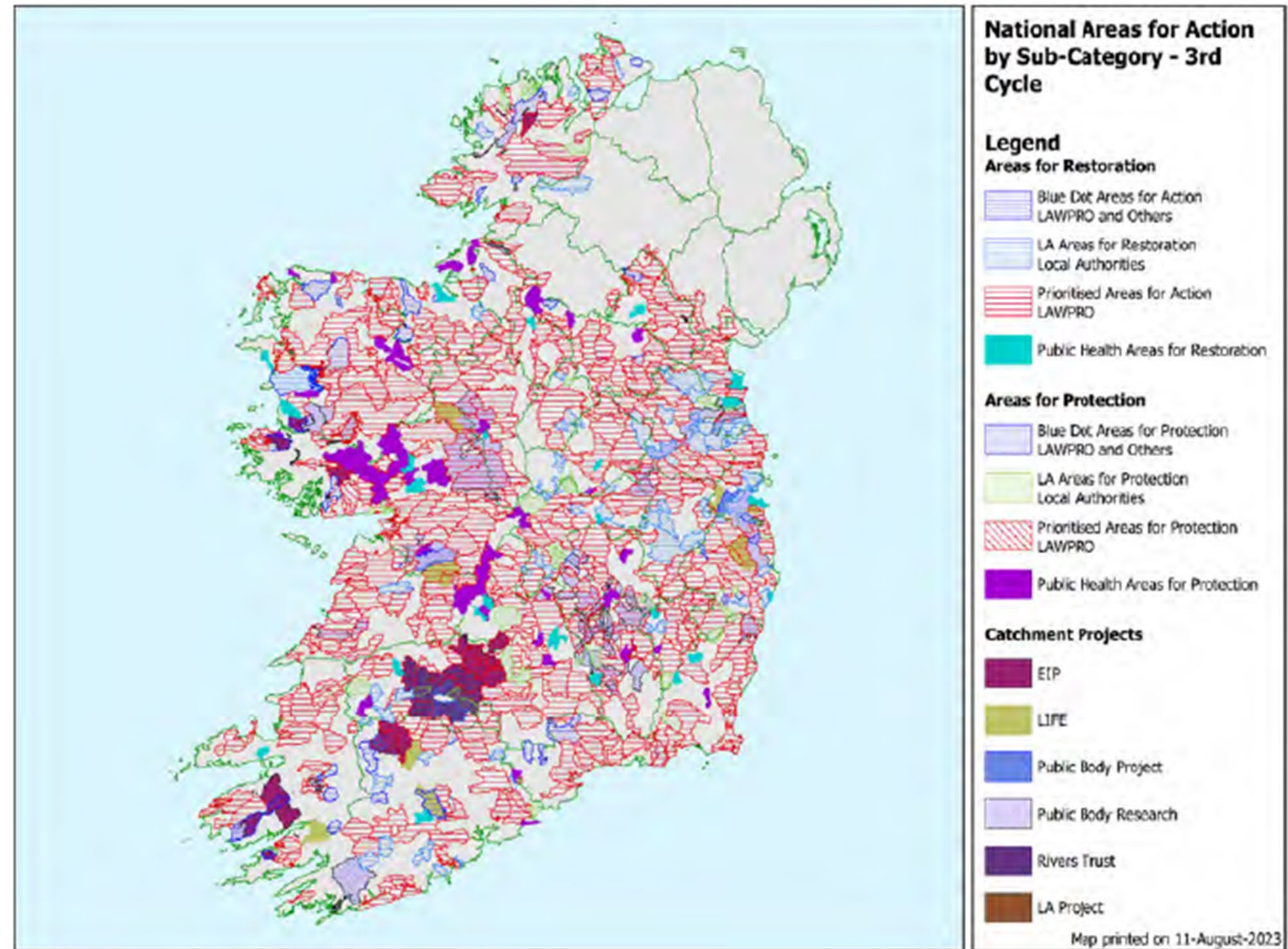


www.gov.ie/rbmp

Water Action Plan 2024: Areas for Action (517 no.)

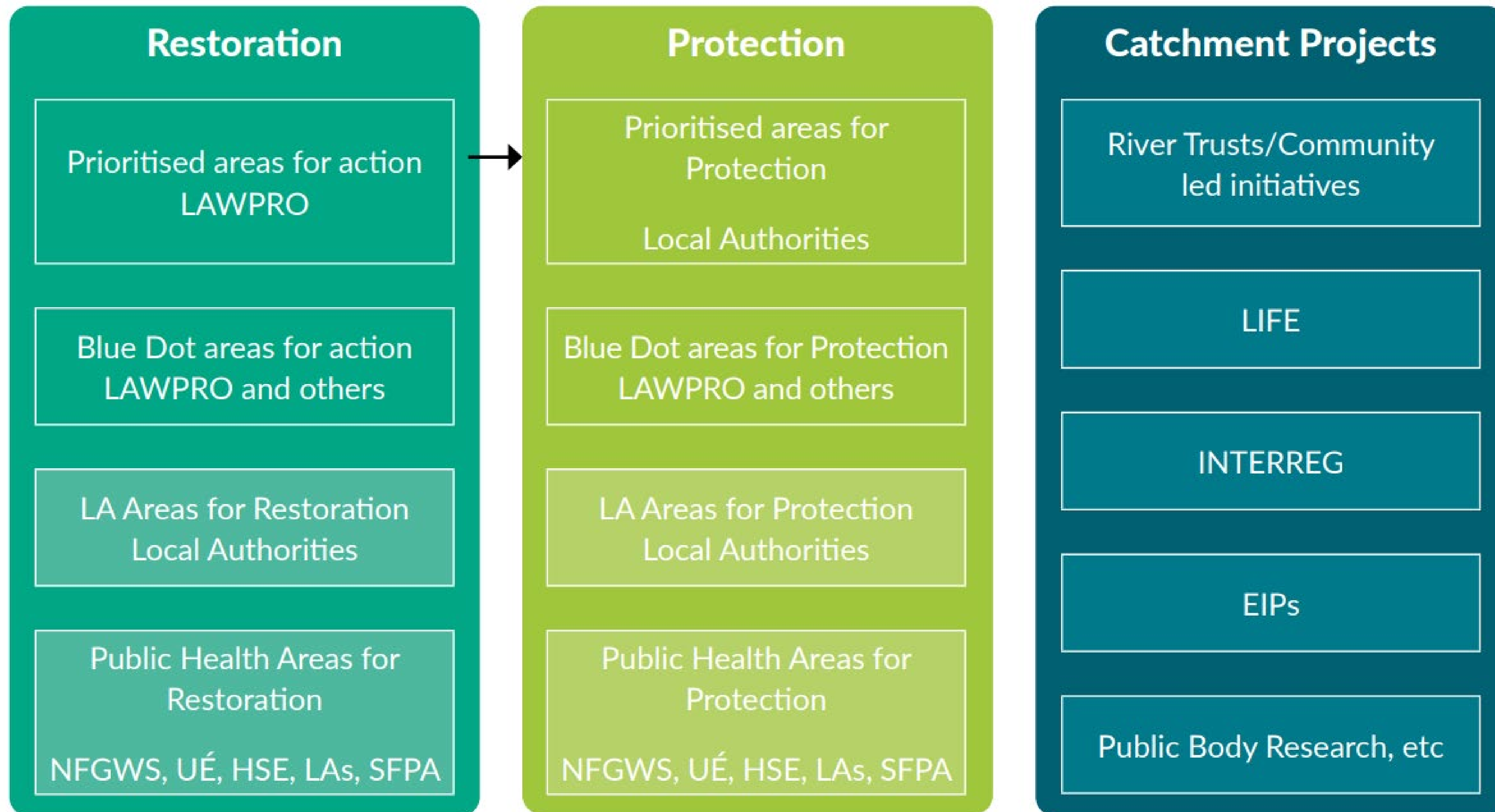
- 428 not meeting their environmental objectives require restoration.
- 89 are meeting their environmental objectives but require dedicated protection measures to ensure their water quality does not deteriorate from identified risks.
- 17 are subject to initiatives / projects.

Figure 27: Map of third-cycle Areas for Action



Third-Cycle Areas for Action:

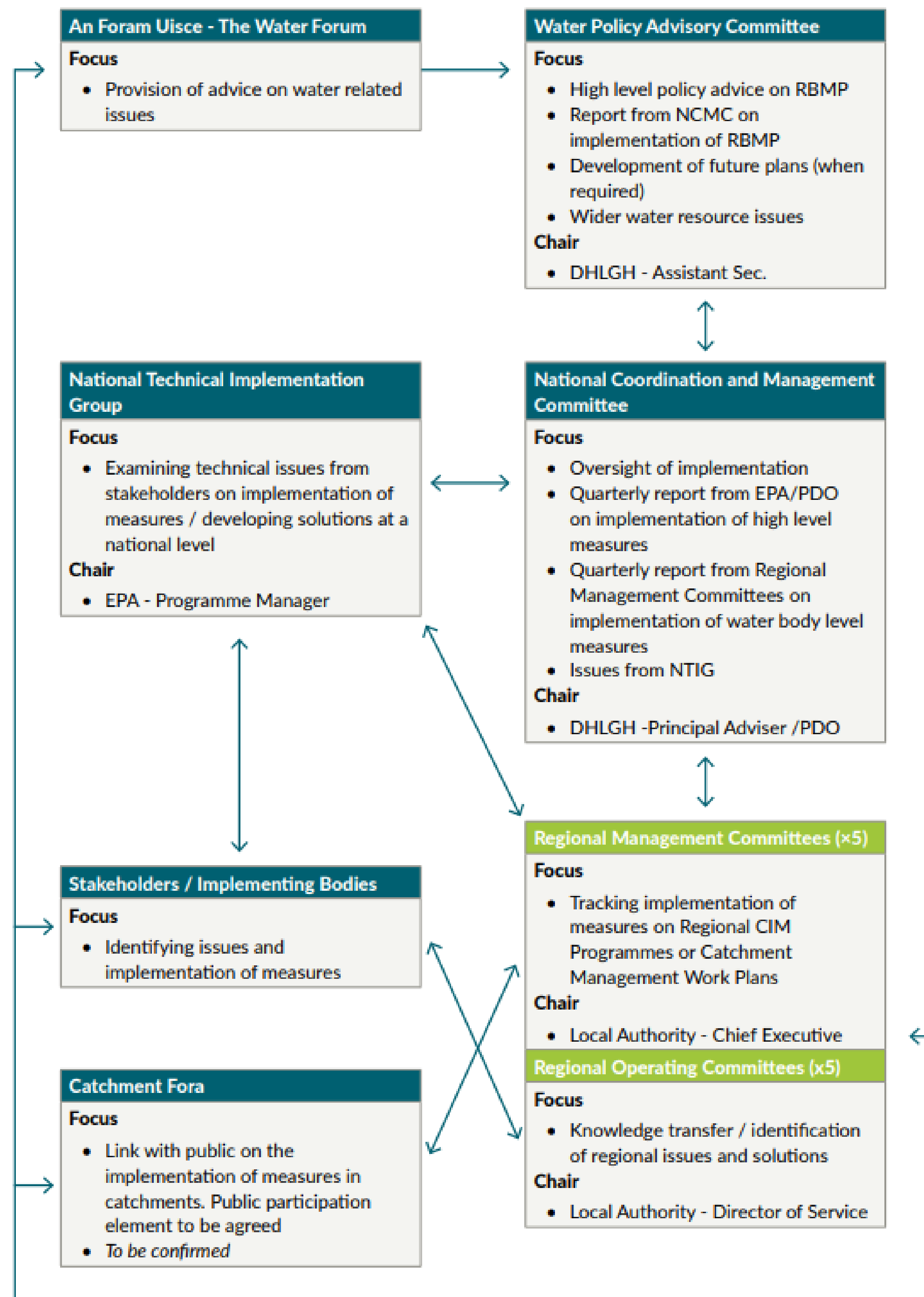
Process evolved to also capture on-going work that's not in the second-cycle RBMP



WFD Governance



Tier 1 National Management and Oversight	Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Policy, necessary legislation and ensuring appropriate resourcing of the Plan across Government Departments. Supported by the cross-government Water Policy Advisory Committee established to advise the Minister.
Tier 2 Technical implementation and reporting	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	The catchment characterisation process, overseeing the national monitoring programme, chairing the National Technical Implementation Group and assisting and advising the Minister.
Tier 3 Regional Implementation	Local authorities	Each local authority with the support of the LAWPRO shared service is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of measures within its functional area. This includes the direction of implementing bodies.

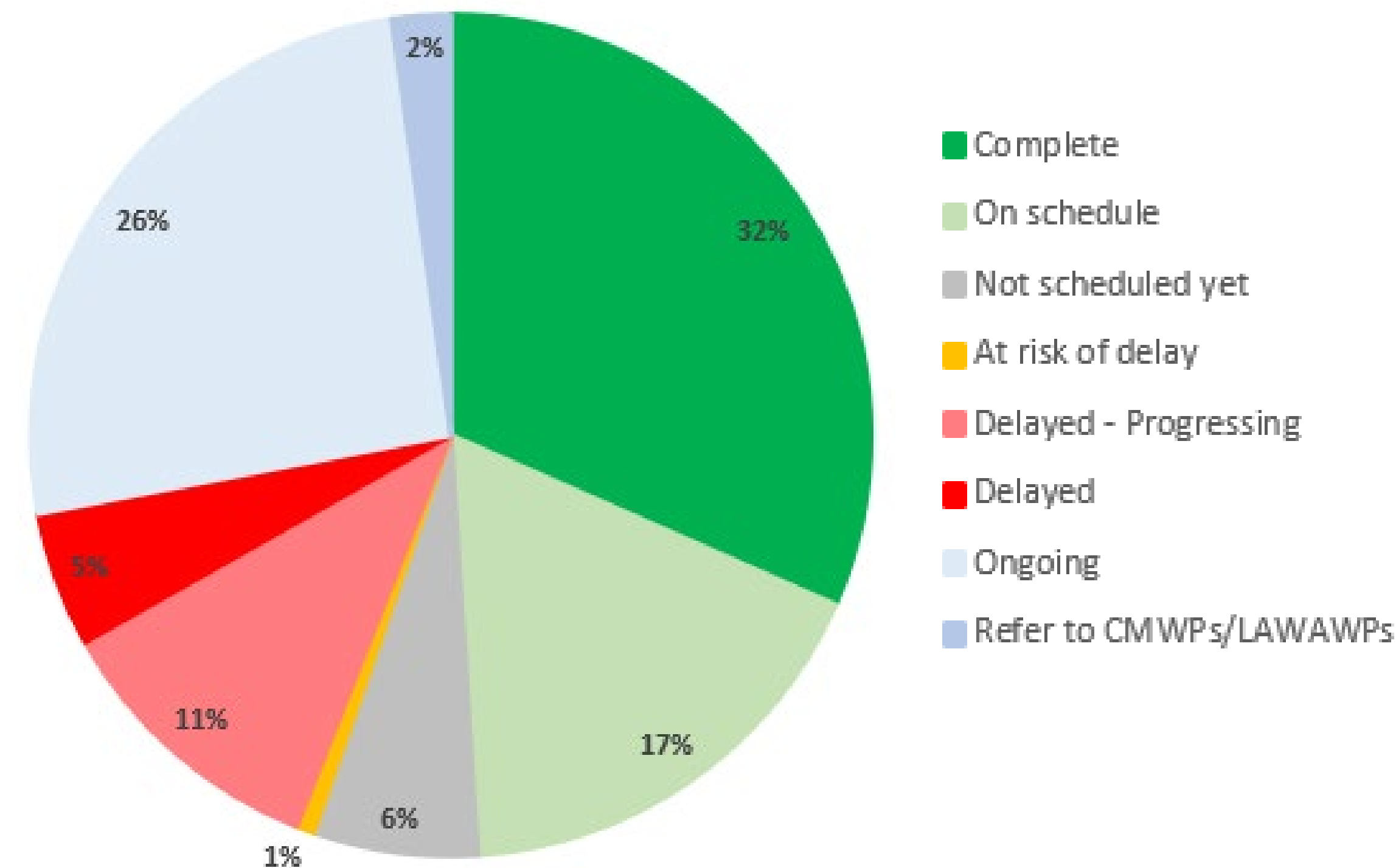


Implementation of the Water Action Plan 2024

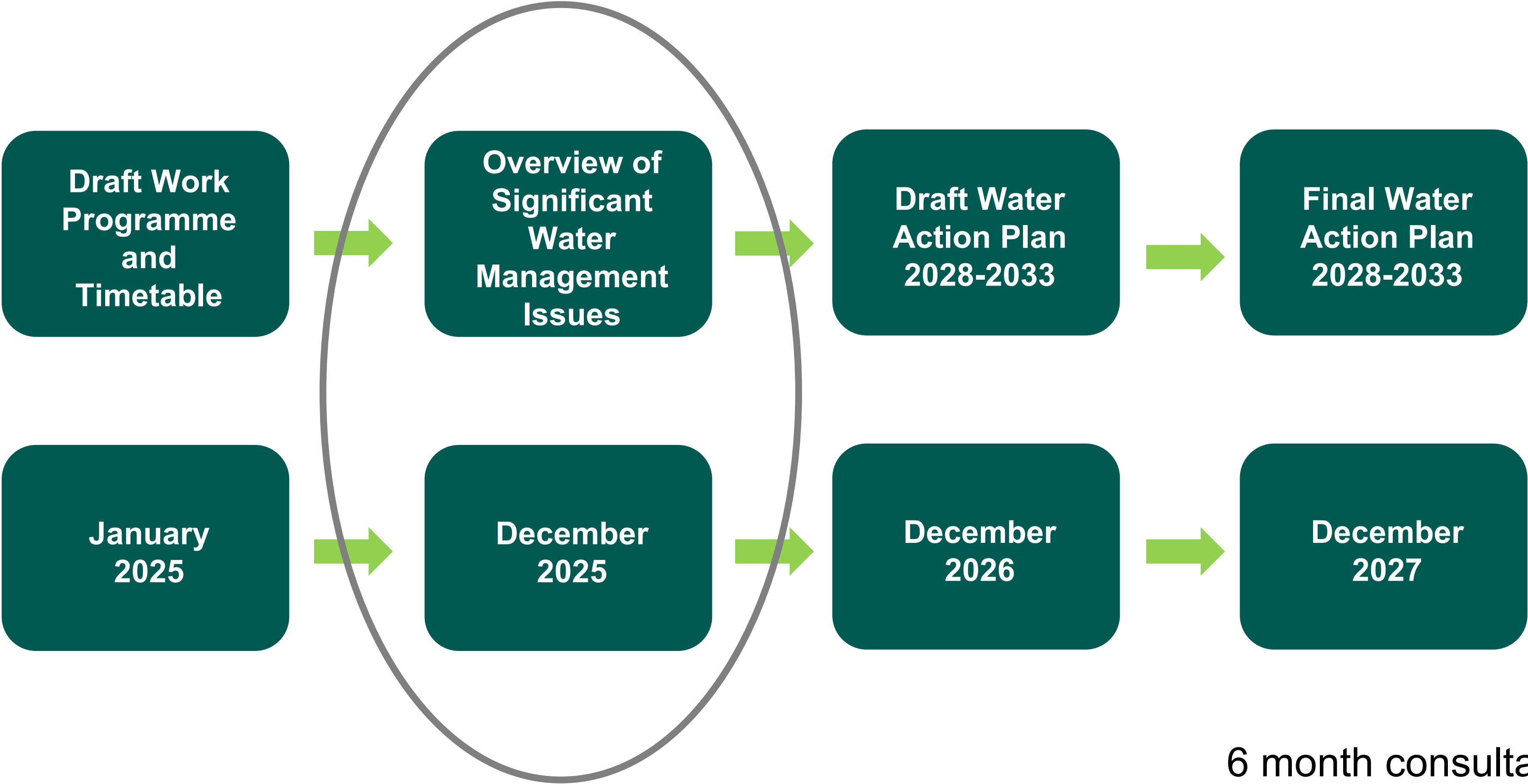


- Implementation of the Water Action Plan is progressing well
- As of the end of 2025, 50% approx. of the total number of actions are delivered or on track to be delivered.
- Implementation is ongoing for 26% of actions.
- Of the 16% of actions delayed, 2/3 are progressing while 1/3 have not yet commenced due to:
 - Resource constraints
 - Dependency on other actions

➤ Water Action Plan actions and supplementary Sectoral Action Work Plan actions



Development of the next Water Action Plan: Public Consultation Stages



6 month consultation periods at each stage leading up to final plan

Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI)



- Themes to explore:
 - *Public participation*
 - *Governance*
 - *Implementation*
 - *Policy coherence,*
 - *Maintaining a high level of environmental ambition with regard to the Environmental Objectives of the Water Action Plan*

- What is being done well?
- What can be improved?
- Are there blockages to improve water quality?
- Should we consider any other issues?

Development of the fourth River Basin Management Plan, the Water Action Plan 2028-2033



- Building from the Water Action Plan 2024, strengthening where necessary
- Evidence based
 - Informed by EPA characterisation outcomes
 - Feedback loop: Review > Refine
- Programme of Measures (PoMs) Group established
- Bilateral engagements ongoing to discuss PoMs development
- Draft Water Action Plan 2028-2033 to be published end of 2026 for consultation

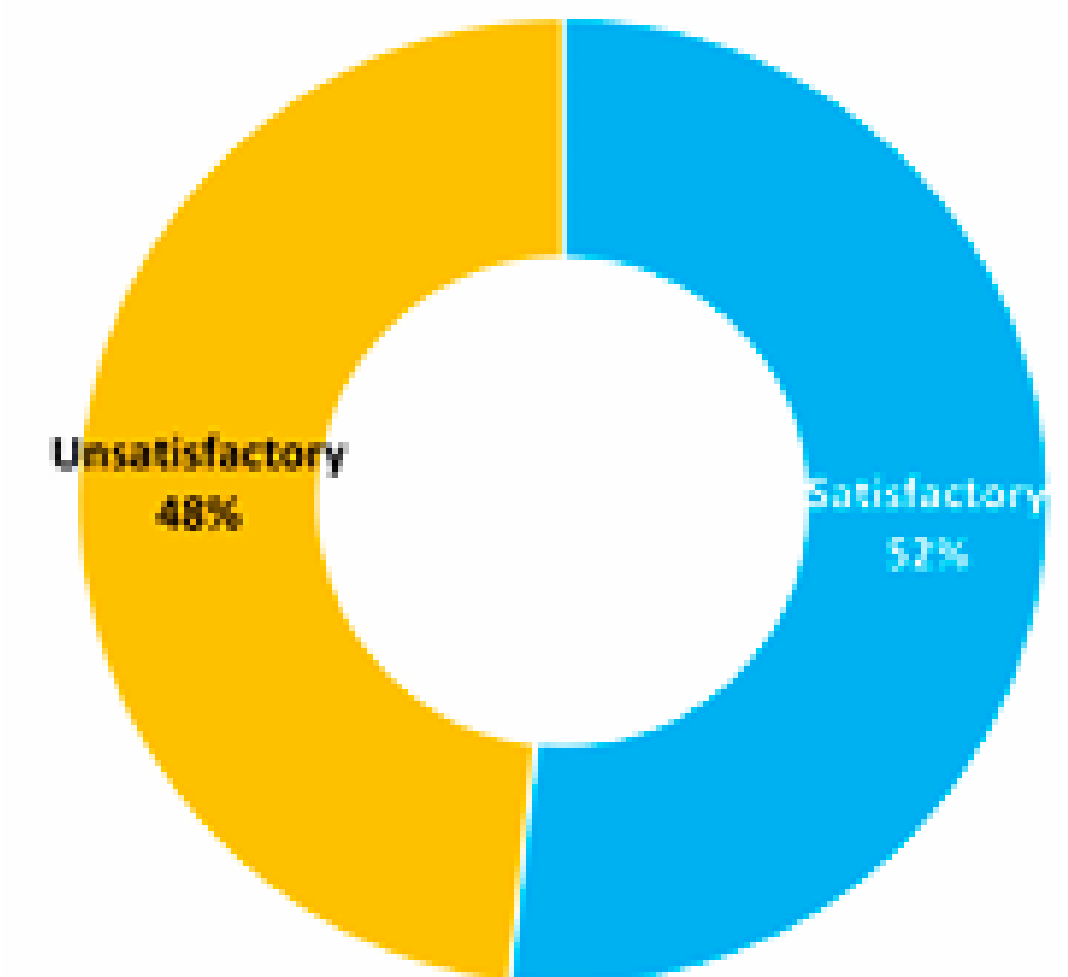
River Basin Management Planning beyond 2027

- Fifty-two percent of surface waters in Ireland are currently meeting their Water Framework Directive target – compliance gap.
- Discussions at EU level on the 2027 deadline and exemptions.
- A high level of environmental ambition will need to be maintained in the fourth cycle to close any remaining gaps > implementation focus.
- Since publication of the Water Action Plan 2024, Department's Water Quality Capital Programme will provide funding up to 2030:
 - Extension and expansion of Farming for Water EIP
 - National Mitigation Barriers Programme
 - Urban Nature Based Solutions projects

.....Supporting multiple policies



**Surface Water Quality for 2019-2024
(all rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters)**





Thank you

Kenneth.Bucke@housing.gov.ie