

Consultation on the Bathing Waters Policy Review for Northern Ireland

1. What is your name?

2. What is your e-mail address? (Please complete if you wish to receive a copy of your response)

3. Are the views and opinions in your response personal or expressed on behalf of an organisation?

(Required)

☐ Personal

☐ Organisation

If the views and opinions expressed are on behalf of an organisation, please provide the name of the organisation below.

4. Please indicate if you are happy for your response to be published.

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please indicate if you are content for the name of the organisation to be associated with your response.

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

6. Have you used the DAERA Bathing Water Quality Dashboard to make informed decisions about where and when to swim at identified bathing waters?

(Required)

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not aware of dashboard

7. If yes, did you find the dashboard easy to use and understand? Please include any suggestions for how this could be further improved

☐ Yes

☒ No

No. The dashboard is difficult to navigate and not live. Provide a mobile-first service showing status, timestamps, risks and actions, with accessible, validated data through an open feed that trusted sites can use e.g., OutMoreNI

8. When do you usually check the water quality information for your preferred identified bathing water site? (Select all that apply)

(Required)

☐ Option 1 I check the information displayed at the site (e.g., notice boards, signage).

☐ Option 2 I check the DAERA Bathing Water Quality Dashboard before deciding which bathing site to visit.

☐ Option 3 I do not usually check water quality information.

☒ Option 4 Other

If "Other", please specify:

As the Clean Water Sports Alliance NI represents over 300,000 water users, the approach will vary and would not be in a position to stipulate any single response.

9. How would you prefer bathing water quality information to be communicated at an identified bathing water? (Select one option)

(Required)

☐ Scan a QR code to obtain up to date information.

☐ I would prefer the notice board to be updated regularly with a poster as it is now.

☒ I would accept the notice board only being updated when a pollution incident or public health concern is identified, with a QR displayed to obtain the most recent results

☐ Not sure.

Please explain your answer (Required)

Support incident-led updates only if permanent signs show the classification, risks and actions. Provide prominent warnings and phone/web alternatives for people unable to use a QR code.

10. Do you have any suggestions on how risk forecasting could be improved?

Please explain your answer

Combine rainfall, spill, event-duration and water-quality data. Show update times, confidence, limits and advice after heavy rain. Publish the model, validation and accuracy via an open feed.

11. Of the following options please indicate your preference for the bathing water season. (Select one option)

(Required)

☐ Option1 No change – keep as 1 June to 15 September

☐ Option 2 All year round/no set dates for bathing season

☒ Option 3 1 April to 31 October

12. Do you think it would be useful to incorporate a winter-season only, i.e. from 1 November to 31 March, at a selection of sites that are vulnerable to blue-green algae blooms in the spring / summer / autumn?

(Required)

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Please explain your answer

Yes. Winter monitoring can identify safer periods at sites affected by warmer-season cyanobacteria and reflect year-round use. Select sites transparently and do not reduce monitoring elsewhere.

13. If you selected, all year round as your response to Question 11, i.e. there will be no set dates for the bathing season. Are you content with DAERA adopting a more flexible, site-specific monitoring timetable based on usage and risk throughout the year?

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not applicable

Please explain your answer

Not applicable: we prefer 1 April–31 October as the immediate minimum. Add site-specific winter monitoring, including for major events, where year-round use or public-health risk warrants it.

14. Do you agree with the proposal set out above to introduce a risk-based sampling approach?

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not sure

Please explain your answer, including any risks or benefits you wish to highlight.

Not sure. Support monthly sampling only at Excellent sites shown genuinely low risk, with criteria, CSO exclusions, checks and automatic escalation after incidents. Fund higher-risk monitoring.

15. Do you think the current criteria used to determine whether a site qualifies for identification as a bathing water remains appropriate? (Criteria include evidence of high numbers of bathers, site safety and accessibility, and the presence of an operator.)

(Required)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not sure

Please explain the reasons for your answer.

No. Replace 'bather' with 'recreational water user'. Assess regular use, foreseeable contact, informal activity, access and equality. Operators should inform, not determine, eligibility.

16. Should Northern Ireland adopt an approach similar to other UK regions where the list of bathing waters is published annually rather than amended through legislation?

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not sure

Please explain your answer.

Not sure. Annual publication could respond faster to changing use but must not weaken protection. Publish criteria, consult users, undertake equality screening and provide review safeguards.

17. Should the bathing water programme be extended to include other recreational activities that involve whole-body contact such as diving, surfing, sailboarding, kiteboarding, whitewater canoeing?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Please explain your answer.

Yes. Use 'recreational water user' for people on or in water, or at the edge where contact is foreseeable. Base criteria on exposure and use an illustrative list including emerging activities.

18. Are you aware of any locations where recreational whole-body water contact activities occur that are not currently identified bathing waters?

(Required)

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

If yes, please list these locations and describe the activities taking place.

Yes. Use surveys and a validated Bluespace Map to identify organised and informal recreation beyond designated waters. CWSA NI, Outscape, governing bodies and communities can provide evidence.

19. Do you think DAERA should introduce a more structured 'pre application' or 'candidate site' stage for sites being considered as bathing waters? (This would allow selected sites to be monitored for a defined period before decisions on formal identification.)

(Required)

☒ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not sure

Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Not sure. Support a time-limited, transparent candidate stage that identifies risk, informs users and drives improvement. 'Feasible and affordable' must not become a veto on polluted popular sites. High use or foreseeable exposure should trigger monitoring and a funded improvement plan. Publish criteria and reasons, consult users, complete equality screening and provide independent review.

20. Do you agree that monitoring candidate sites in advance of formal identification would improve transparency and public confidence in the decision-making process?

(Required)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Not Sure

21. Do you agree that the automatic de identification of bathing waters after five consecutive years of 'poor' classification should be changed?

(Required)

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

22. Do you agree that poor performing bathing waters should instead be reviewed on a case by case basis rather than automatically de identified after five years?

(Required)

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

23. Do you think a more flexible, evidence based decision making process would better support long term water quality improvements?

(Required)

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

24. Do you think this approach would strengthen or maintain public health protection at poor performing sites?

(Required)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not sure

Additional comments

No, not as framed. Case-by-case review can protect health only if poor sites remain designated, monitored and clearly signed while funded, enforceable and time-bound improvement plans are delivered. Decisions must address use, pollution sources, equality, access and displacement. Publish criteria, deadlines and accountability, with consultation, Section 75 assessment and review.

25. Are the current monitoring locations for the 33 identified bathing waters appropriate?

(Required)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not sure

If not, please tell us the swimming location for your identified bathing water site.

Not enough evidence is published. Review every sampling point against current access and activity patterns, currents, outfalls, rainfall and seasonality, with governing bodies, clubs and users. Large or variable sites may need multiple points. Publish the rationale and use a validated GreenspaceNI/Bluespace map to identify gaps.

26. Do you have any other recommendations for improving the bathing water programme that have not been raised in this consultation?

Other Recommendations

Recognise all recreational water users and foreseeable contact. Extend the season to 1 April–31 October, with winter monitoring where justified. Allow monthly sampling only at Excellent sites proven low risk and subject to safeguards. Require funded improvement plans and polluter accountability. Provide real-time alerts and open data. Co-design delivery; publish annual usage and monitoring maps.