

Pollution of Water Sources is not Acceptable

12/10/07

- **Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007 Signed**
- **All local authority waste water discharges must be authorised**
- **New Regulations should result in improved water quality in rivers, lakes and coastal waters**
- **All sources of pollution must be tackled**

“Water is a precious resource and just is not acceptable that our ground waters are being polluted unnecessarily,” so said The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr John Gormley, T.D (today 12th October) as he announced he had signed new regulations which provide for the licensing and policing regime of sewage treatment facilities. The new licensing system which will be policed by the Environmental Protection Agency will set strict limits on discharges allowed from these plants into our surface waters such as rivers, canals and lakes, groundwater and coastal waters. The Regulations have been made to implement outstanding aspects of the EU Dangerous Substances and Water Framework Directives.

The Minister reiterated his commitment to preserving and enhancing environmental standards and the quality of natural water resources in particular. *“These new Regulations will form part of an overall strategy to protect the environment and improve the quality of life”*, the Minister said. *“The Regulations, in conjunction with the recently announced provision of €4.7 billion in the National Development Plan for new and upgraded water services infrastructure, are a reflection of the Government’s commitment to this aim”* he added,

The Environmental Protection Agency, in considering applications for authorisations, will stipulate conditions to ensure compliance with standards applying for various substances and to conform with obligations under applicable EU Directives, including the Water Framework, Dangerous Substances, Birds, Groundwater, Drinking Water, Urban Waste Water Treatment, Habitats and Bathing Water Directives.

EPA Report on Water Quality

The results of the EPA report today shows some improvements in water quality in rivers and lakes, but indicates a trend of decline in groundwater quality, and calls for more stringent management of that resource. *“The report shows the very serious challenge which faces us in relation to curbing pollution of our water sources. Generally our water quality is of a decent standard but there is a small pocket of persistent polluters who need to be tackled,”* said Minister Gormley.

“My Department is continuing to take action to address the threats to water quality. I recently announced the 2007-2009 phase of the ongoing Water Services Investment Programme, which provides for construction or upgrading of some 955 water supply and waste water treatment schemes, involving a total investment of €5.8 billion. This programme of investment in sewage infrastructure, will greatly reduce the inputs of nutrients from municipal sources. Pollution of waters by agricultural sources will also be reduced through the good agricultural practices supported by the Nitrates Regulations. I am confident that these measures, among others being pursued by the Government will ensure improvements in water quality in coming years.”

“The key way to address our difficulties with pollution sources is through the regulatory regime and the Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations 2007 are only one element of a range of measures being taken to protect our water resources,” added Minister Gormley.

Nitrates Regulations (Farm Pollution Laws)

“The Nitrate Regulations which were a long time coming and only finalised last year will also play a major role in curbing pollution from farming sources. Under the Nitrates Regulations I have increased maximum penalties to €5,000 and/or 3 months imprisonment for summary offences, and €500,000 and/or 1 year imprisonment for indictable offences.”

“The final part of the jigsaw and the one thing that will stop this needless pollution of our water sources is effective enforcement. I am currently working on further regulations under the Nitrates Directive which will require both the EPA and Local Authorities to effectively enforce the regulations. I want to see more inspections, I want to see enforcement and if people are in breach of these regulations, I want to see the full rigours of the law applied to them.” concluded Minister Gormley.

The key changes in the Waste Water Discharge (Authorisation) Regulations include:

- the Environmental Protection Agency will be the competent authority for authorising a waste water discharge
- local authorities must apply to the EPA for a licence/certificate authorising all waste water discharges from their sewage works
- in the conditions attaching to authorisations, the EPA will set emission limits for pollutants likely to be in waste water and the timeframe within which these are to be achieved
- the EPA will periodically review discharge authorisations granted
- failure by local authorities to comply with conditions attaching to an authorisation will be an offence

The Regulations set specified dates, depending on the capacity of the waste water works, by which applications for licences must be received. In the case of discharges from smaller sewage systems, certificates will apply instead of licences. The first licence applications, in respect of about 55 sewage systems serving populations greater than 10,000, have to be made by 14th December next.

Report On Water Quality in Ireland 2006

Oct 12 2007

Water Quality in Ireland 2006 - Key Indicators of the Aquatic Environment

Improvement in River and Lake Water Quality - But Poorer Quality in Some Groundwaters

The EPA report, Water Quality in Ireland 2006, summarising the most recent national water quality monitoring results shows:

- 71 per cent of river channel length and 92 per cent of lake surface area examined were of satisfactory water quality.
- 19 per cent of estuarine/coastal water bodies examined were eutrophic (over-enriched) while 3 per cent were potentially eutrophic.
- 57 per cent of the groundwater sampling locations were contaminated by faecal coliforms.
- Approximately 25 per cent of the groundwater locations examined exceeded the national guideline value for nitrate concentration for drinking water and two per cent breaching the mandatory limit.
- The overall quality of the bathing waters in Ireland remains very good.
- The number of fish kills, while reduced compared to 2005, remains at an unacceptably high level.

The EPA will today present Mr John Gormley, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, with the Water Quality in Ireland 2006 report. The summary indicator report was presented to him during his first visit as Minister to EPA Headquarters in Wexford.

The report presents the latest data available in Ireland on the eleven most relevant and significant indicators of water quality. The value of this report is that it delivers timely, scientifically sound information on water quality to decision and policy makers in particular, as well as to the wider general public. The statistics, summarising the monitoring results for surface and groundwaters for the period 2004 – 2006, show that a high percentage of Ireland's waters was of a satisfactory standard in 2006.

“Ireland has an abundant supply of fresh water, although not evenly distributed across the country. The quality of this resource is vital, as we depend on surface and groundwaters for our drinking water” said Dr Mary Kelly, Director General, EPA. *“Water is also crucial as a habitat for freshwater and marine plants and animals and as an amenity for all of us to enjoy”.*

Key Findings:

The trends in the data indicate a further increase in the extent of satisfactory water quality in rivers and lakes compared with the previous assessment. Nevertheless, there remains an unacceptable and sizeable level of water pollution in the country. 29 per cent of river channel length, 8 per cent of lake surface area and over 22 per cent of the estuarine/coastal water bodies examined are in a condition that will require remedial measures to restore these waters to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. The level of bacterial and nutrient contamination in our groundwaters is increasing and the number of fish kills in our rivers remains unacceptably high.

Commenting on the publication of the report, Dr Mary Kelly said, “Eutrophication of rivers, lakes and tidal waters continues to be the main threat to surface waters, with agricultural and municipal discharges being the key contributors. Although improvements in river and lake water quality are observed in the latest figures, there are differences across the country. Groundwater shows a trend of decline in water quality, as do estuarine and coastal waters and shellfish waters. It should be noted that this report covers the quality of groundwater prior to any treatment that would occur where groundwater is abstracted for drinking water. Although water extracted from groundwater sources is treated before being used in public supplies, increased contamination puts further pressure on drinking water treatment plants. More stringent protection of groundwater resources is now urgently required.”

Dr Kelly continued, “The challenge, under the Water Framework Directive is to protect our high status waters and have all waters, both surface and groundwater, in good or higher status by 2015. The recorded annual incremental improvement in water quality based on that occurring between 2005-2006 (and indeed for the three year period since 2004) would, if maintained, still leave Ireland potentially falling short of the Water Framework Directive target in the time left for remediation. Urban waste water treatment discharge licensing, nutrient management and catchment management need to be tackled immediately.”

This Water Quality in Ireland 2006 report deals with 13,200km of river and stream channel, 421 lakes, 69 tidal water bodies (from 21 estuarine and coastal areas) and 285 groundwater sources. As well as giving the present situation, regarding the state of the aquatic resource, the report also includes analyses of trends over time. Only by including historical information can improvement or deterioration be discerned and programmes of measures for remediation instituted.

The report is available on the EPA website at
<http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/water/indicators/>
or from the **EPA's
Publications' Office,
McCumiskey House,
Richview, Dublin 14
01-2680100.**

Report Findings

Surface Waters

Rivers. The proportion of river and stream channel length with an overall satisfactory water quality status has again increased in the latest 2004 – 2006 period (to 71.4%) compared to the previous period of assessment 2003-2005 (70.2%). There was a reduction (-1.1%) in the moderately polluted channel length. The overall proportion of slightly and seriously polluted channel length has remained unchanged between the two periods.

Loading of Phosphate and Nitrate, in excess of background levels, is the principal pressure on surface waters in Ireland leading to eutrophication. Concentrations of both these nutrients in 11 large rivers showed differences across the country with notably higher levels in the southeast and south.

Nine of these rivers have considerably increased nitrate levels in 2006 as compared with when first sampled in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

The increase in nitrate values has coincided with the demise of the pollution-sensitive pearl mussel in some rivers.

While phosphate concentrations are declining from their peak levels of some 20 years ago, only five of these eleven rivers would achieve the target set in the Phosphorus regulations.

Lakes. The percentage of lake surface area with satisfactory water quality status has also increased in the 2004 – 2006 period (91.9 %) compared to the previous period of assessment 2003-2005 (89.9%).

Of the 449 lakes assessed, water quality in 66 of these was less than satisfactory, with 15 lakes classified as being highly polluted.

Fish Kills. There were 34 fish kills recorded in 2006, which were attributed largely to activities associated with local authority services and agriculture. The number of instances of these events remains at an unacceptably high level.

Estuarine and Coastal Waters. The overall quality in the 69 water bodies from 21 estuarine and coastal areas examined in 2002-2006 showed a decline in the number of water bodies being classified as unpolluted and an increase in the numbers showing evidence of enrichment.

Data from the Marine Institute's winter nutrient monitoring programme, in coastal waters of the western Irish Sea and southern Celtic Sea, indicate no instances of excessive nutrient enrichment in these waters.

The quality of shellfish waters showed a marked decline in 2006 compared to the previous year with a reduction in the percentage of those waters assessed to be of the highest quality for the purpose of shellfish production from 30 to 25 percent.

A further improvement was recorded in the number of reported pollution at sea incidents from 46 in 2005 to 44 in 2006. These events were attributed to oil spillages (77 per cent) and other substances (23 per cent), e.g. algae or unidentified blooms. Diesel and gas oils were the most frequently identified polluting substances.

Bathing water. The overall quality at the 131 bathing waters in Ireland remains very good in 2006 showing little change from 2005.

Groundwaters

Bacterial contamination. In Ireland, groundwater is a significant source of drinking water supply. The presence of faecal coliforms in groundwater is taken as evidence of faecal contamination and provides an indication that pathogens (disease-causing organisms) may be present.

The number of groundwater samples and sampling locations showing bacteriological contamination, in the period 2004 – 2006, showed an increase for the first time since 1995. Approximately 29 per cent of the 1591 samples of groundwater taken between 2004-2006 showed bacteriological (faecal coliform) contamination, with some 13 per cent of samples being grossly contaminated. The groundwater monitoring locations in karst limestone areas appear to show the greatest degree of contamination, because pollutants can move more freely through fissures in the underlying rocks.

Nitrates. Approximately one quarter of the groundwater locations examined exceeded the national guideline value for nitrate concentration for drinking water in the period 2004 – 2006. This represents an increase of 2 percent from the 2001 – 2003 reporting period. Two per cent of locations breached the mandatory limit, the same as previously.

While elevated nitrate concentrations were recorded in monitoring points close to potential point source waste discharges; however, the greater number of monitoring locations with elevated nitrate concentrations appear to relate to areas with more intensive agricultural practices, which suggests that diffuse, agricultural sources are the cause.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

<http://www.environ.ie/>

Environmental Protection Agency Ireland

<http://www.epa.ie/>