



# Integrated trans-boundary river basin and transitional water management in Ireland – NI/IE

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

## 2. Key approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based
- Socio-economic

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The main positive experience from the trans-boundary integration of the river basin with transitional and coastal waters in Ireland is a very close and lasting cooperation between both jurisdictions during the plan preparation and approbation phase. The authorities in both jurisdictions agreed a common timeframe and Significant Water Management Issues report content. For each international river basin district, a single report on significant water management issues was produced; stakeholders and authorities groups were asked to help identify the key issues and views were gathered at public workshops. It has been necessary to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the draft plans and programmes of measures. A single collaborative strategic environmental assessment has been commissioned to cover both jurisdictions. For the plans and programmes of measures, the authorities in both jurisdictions have also agreed to use a common template.

This cooperation is continuing in the implementation phase. Ongoing coordination arrangements regarding public participation include reciprocal invites to attend meetings of the formal stakeholder groups in Northern Ireland and the Advisory Councils in Ireland. Both jurisdictions jointly monitor groundwater sites and transitional and coastal waters, as well as representative sites on trans-boundary rivers and lakes.

## 4. Overview of the case

In 2003, the WFD was transposed into law in Northern Ireland by the Water Environment Regulations and in Ireland by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations. The main objectives of the WFD are to maintain the “good and high status” of water where it exists, prevent any deterioration in the existing status of waters and to restore at least “good status” in all waters by 2015. The mechanism by which this is to be achieved under the WFD is through the adoption and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and Programmes of Measures for each of the identified River Basin Districts (RBDs). The trans-boundary framework puts additional requirements on the Programmes of Measures.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

Some 400 river basins on the island of Ireland have been grouped and assigned to a total of eight RBDs; one of these lies wholly in Northern Ireland, four lie wholly in Ireland and three are International River Basin Districts because their catchments lie partly in Ireland and partly in Northern Ireland. The River Basin Management Plans and associated

Programmes of Measures provide a framework for sustainable management of the water environment and set out how the environmental objectives of the WFD are to be met. The Water Framework Directive requires that, in cross-border River Basin Districts, Member States must coordinate their activities with the aim of producing a single management plan covering the entire district.

On the island of Ireland:

- substantial areas lie within cross-border river basins;
- some waters in each jurisdiction flow into or through the other jurisdiction;
- the rivers and lakes of the island of Ireland are designated as being within a single eco-region (eco-region 17) requiring a high degree of coordination between the authorities in both jurisdictions, to ensure consistent management of the entire aquatic environment;
- all coastal and transitional waters surrounding the island of Ireland are also included in one eco-region (eco-region 1) and their management must be closely coordinated.

Prior to the introduction of WFD, there had already been a tradition of coordination in relation to the protection of the water resources between the two jurisdictions of Ireland. In 2003, the first steps in the coordinated implementation of the Directive included the identification and delineation of the river basin districts on the island of Ireland. Since 2003, substantial coordination of effort between the two jurisdictions has accompanied every stage of the Directive's implementation.

There is also a critical requirement to harmonize the RBMPs and Programmes of Measures with the Habitat and Bird Directives as well as with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD, 2008). The latter one covers the coastal waters overlapping with the WFD regulations.

Therefore, an extensive range of background documents was compiled, which have provided the information for the classification, delineation and description of the rivers, estuaries, transitional and coastal waters and contributed to the development of the plans including technical studies of key water issues, details of monitoring programmes, environmental objectives and programmes of measures.

## **b) Objectives**

1. To maintain the "high or good status" of transitional and coastal waters, prevent deterioration in existing status of waters, reduce chemical pollution and to achieve at least "good status" in relation to these waters by 2015.
2. To promote common approaches, standards and measures for the trans-boundary transitional and coastal water management in both countries sharing the Neagh Bann and North Western International River Basin Districts.
3. To encourage and ensure active public involvement in the implementation of the trans-boundary transitional and coastal water management measures in both countries.

## **6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)**

### **a) Management**

A Working Group on Water Quality, set up in 2000, comprising of officials North and South with appropriate technical support, are co-operating on a range of initiatives in relation to Water Quality. A North South Water Framework Directive Co-ordination Group is established to deal in particular with the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Tasks of the group include: 1. The joint management of IRBD's as required under WFD. 2. Funding matters in relation to cross border WFD implementation activities and IRBD management projects.

### **b) ICZM tool**

Good ecological status (GES) or good ecological potential (GEP) objectives were identified to be achieved by 2015. LSO means less stringent objective, which means that the waters won't achieve good status or good potential before 2027. The measures to achieve GES, GEP or LSO objectives fall into three categories:

1. The implementation of 11 key directives specified under the Water Framework Directive. These directives have already been transposed into domestic legislation in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.
2. The implementation of other stipulated measures required by the Water Framework Directive. Again domestic legislation has been or will be made in both Ireland and Northern Ireland to address these stipulated measures.
3. The use of additional or supplementary measures.

The Neagh Bann and North Western IRBD Programmes of Measures have four components:

1. The Plan which describes the coordination that takes place between the two jurisdictions. It focuses on the status of the shared waters, the future environmental objectives for these waters and the measures proposed to achieve these objectives. It also provides a summary of the whole international district's status, objectives and measures.
2. The draft Programme of Measures summary documents which contain more focused information on the assessments and proposals for status, objectives and measures for each jurisdiction.
3. Electronic information systems which provide access to the status, objectives and measures for each individual waterbody.
4. An extensive range of background documents which have contributed to the development of the plans including technical studies of key water issues, details of monitoring programmes and classification of waters, environmental objectives and programmes of measures.

There are specially tailored comprehensive Transitional and Coastal Waters Action Programmes (plans) developed, agreed upon and implemented for both International River Basin Districts – the Neagh Bann IRBD and North Western IRBD. They are comprised of the following components:

1. Description of Transitional/Coastal Protected Areas enjoying some protection under the national and EU legislation.
2. Description of status/impacts: 1) Overall status; 2) Status elements; 3) Possible impacts.
3. Pressures/risks (according to Pressure Based Risk Assessments): 1) Land-based pressures; 2) Marine pressures.
4. Action Programme (measures): 1) Bathing Waters; 2) Shellfish Waters; 3) Water Pollution and Services Acts; 4) Birds and Habitats Directives; 5) Urban Wastewater Treatment; 6) Morphology (Controls on Physical Modifications).
5. Site-specific objectives.

## **7. Cost and resources**

Complete costing is not available

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

Both jurisdictions (Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland) used the same systems for characterizing groundwaters, transitional waters and coastal waters for the purpose of development the coherent approach in the trans-boundary management of the transitional waters. Both jurisdictions jointly monitor groundwater sites and transitional and coastal waters, as well as representative sites on cross-border rivers and lakes within the framework of joint monitoring programmes. For the identification of common problems and trans-boundary measures within the framework of the integrated management plan development for the trans-boundary transitional and coastal waters the authorities in both jurisdictions agreed to use a common template. Such approach allowed involving stakeholders into the development and screening process very actively.

The effectiveness of the implementation of the trans-boundary approach in transitional and coastal waters' management very much relies on the activeness and commitment of both institutional platforms: the official North/South Water Framework Directive Coordination Group and the non-official transboundary transitional water stakeholder bodies (stakeholder groups in Northern Ireland and advisory councils in Republic of Ireland). It is also critically important that both trans-boundary transitional water bodies – Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough are designated as protected areas under the EU Habitat and Bird Directives.

## 9. Success and Fail factors

### a) Success factors

1. Well established and functioning EU trans-boundary regulation drivers for transitional and coastal water bodies: WFD, MSFD and SEA Directive.
2. Solid regulatory framework for international river basin management.
3. Strong technical and local expertise in marine and transitional waters' monitoring, planning and management.
4. Progress of networks in coastal zone management.
5. Powerful datasets and interactive databases covering trans-boundary transitional, coastal and marine waters.
6. Focus on ecosystem approach in the management of trans-boundary transitional, coastal and marine waters.
7. There are specially tailored comprehensive Transitional and Coastal Waters Action Programmes (plans) developed, agreed upon and implemented for both International River Basin Districts – the Neagh Bann IRBD and North Western IRBD.

### b) Fail factors

1. No integrated regulatory framework for transitional waters' management combining WFD and MSFD requirements in both jurisdictions of Ireland.
2. No integrated trans-boundary plan in operation for marine monitoring in both jurisdictions of Ireland.
3. Perceived "complexity" of coastal zone management and integration of WFD and MSFD requirements in a trans-boundary context.
4. Fragmented and ad hoc decision taking by the transitional waters' stakeholder bodies.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

None as yet

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## 13. Sources

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## 14. Relevance for cross-border management of transitional waters

Both trans-boundary transitional waters of Ireland are encompassed by the international river basin districts. The Foyle catchment is within the North Western International River Basin District, and the Carlingford catchment is within both the North Eastern River Basin District and Neagh Bann International River Basin Districts. There are specially tailored comprehensive Transitional and Coastal Waters Action Programmes (plans) developed and implemented for both International River Basin Districts – the Neagh Bann and North Western, which are integral parts of the respective Programmes of Measures. Therefore, the case study is highly relevant for cross-border management of transitional waters regarding implementation of WFD in a trans-boundary framework.