



Appendix 9.2

Water Framework Directive

Coolglass Wind Farm EIAR Volume 3

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Introduction

The EU Water Framework Directive⁵ (WFD) became EU law in December 2000 and provides for a single European framework to assess water quality (Ecological status) and allows for the comparison of results across Europe. The WFD covers rivers, lakes, estuaries or transitional waters, coastal waters as well as groundwaters.

Surface waters are classified into five quality classes (Ecological status) under the WFD; High, Good, Moderate, Poor and Bad Ecological status. Groundwater is classified into just two quality classes, Good and Poor Ecological status. High Ecological status is when the water is unpolluted, while at the opposite end of the classification Bad Ecological status is when the water is highly polluted.

The WFD required baseline water quality in all waterbodies to be established for biological, chemical and hydromorphology quality. These three quality variables are combined to give the overall Ecological status classification of the waterbody; good or high ecological status and good chemical status for surface waters and good chemical and quantitative status for groundwaters.

The two principal objectives of the WFD are:

- that all water bodies must reach at least 'Good' overall status by 2027, at the latest. For surface waters, good overall status is a combination of good ecological status (or potential) and good chemical status; and
- that the status of each water body, including all the quality elements which make up the overall status, must not deteriorate relative to the baseline reported in the relevant RBMP.

The WFD identifies where actions are required to achieve Good Ecological status or maintain waterbodies which are already Good or High Ecological status. Waterbodies can be restored Good and High Ecological status by using targeted actions and measures to reduce the impact of human activities on them.

For heavily modified or artificial water bodies, which are incapable of achieving Good Ecological status without impairing an existing specified water use, the environmental objective is to achieve good ecological potential.

The WFD requires that management plans are prepared on a river basin basis and specifies a structured method for developing these plans.

River Basin Management Plans

The River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) provide a single system of water management based on the natural delineation of river catchments and is the method by which the aims of the WFD are achieved.

⁵ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

For each river basin district in Ireland a RBMP plan needs to be established and updated every six years, to provide the context for the co-ordination requirements of the WFD key aims which are to:

- Provide for protection to all waters, surface waters and groundwater;
- achieving Good Ecological status for all waters by 2027;
- establish water management measures based on river basin catchment areas;
- establish a combined approach of emission limit values and quality standards for waters;
- involving citizen more closely in the WFD and RMBMP; and
- streamlining and aligning national legislation.

The RBMP provides a detailed account of how the objectives set for each river basin in terms of ecological status, quantitative status, chemical status and protected area objectives are to be reached within the timescale of the plan. The plans include the results of the catchment analysis including the river basin's characteristics, a review of the impact of human activity on the status of waters in the basin, estimation of the effect of existing legislation and the remaining gap to meeting these objectives; and establish a set of measures designed to meet the objectives.

River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027

The current RMBP report for Ireland is at the draft stage⁶. The draft report states that while substantial progress has been made in the management of water services and how we work together to protect, restore and improve water quality with the improvement in some areas and aspects of water quality, many waterbodies are still subject to mounting environmental pressures and overall water quality is in decline primarily due to nutrient pollution.

The RMBP states that due to the overall decline in water quality stronger measures are now required which will improve overall water quality; the sustainable management of water resources is important to address and adapt to the impacts of climate change, with many of the required measures having co-benefits for climate mitigation and biodiversity. Protecting and restoring water quality in Ireland will most of all need measures to address:

- the loss of agricultural nutrients to water;
- continue to improve waste water treatment; and
- to re-establish natural free-flowing conditions in more rivers.

The plan states that Ireland's water resources and services face challenges on a number of fronts including a continued need for investment in infrastructure and an ever increasing demand for water services due to urbanisation, population and economic growth. These challenges are set against a backdrop of widespread, rapid, and intensifying climate change.

⁶ Draft River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027, Government of Ireland



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