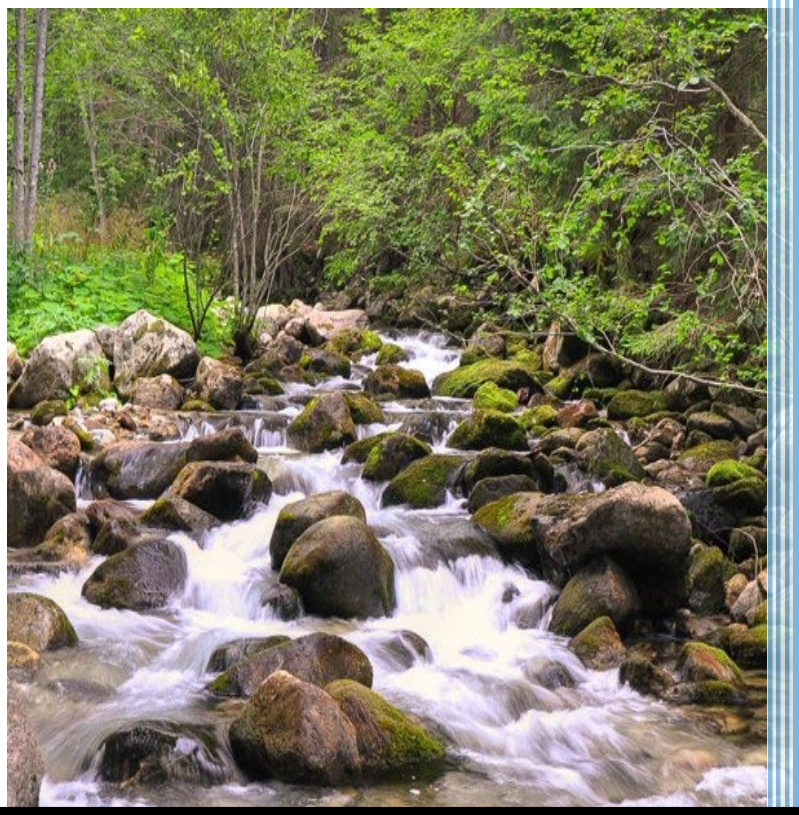


2025

Island of Ireland Freshwater Stakeholder Survey

A Joint Survey Report Produced by NI Environment Link and Sustainable Water Network

Contents

Executive Summary

During Summer 2025, Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) and the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN) conducted an online survey to gather information about the work currently being done across the island of Ireland to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems. The survey was aimed at anyone working, either in a paid or a voluntary capacity, on freshwater-related issues. The purpose of the survey was to identify the key challenges to freshwater quality through a diverse range of questions. Three key themes emerged from an analysis of the results of the survey:

1) **Political Advocacy and Engagement**

In general terms, the survey findings indicate that there are concerns amongst freshwater stakeholders about the state of freshwaters across the island of Ireland, and about their ability to address the issues identified. These concerns go beyond the issue of funding and resourcing (although this did emerge as a key challenge), but relate to more systemic problems within freshwater governance, legislation and regulation. Indeed, the survey results shine a spotlight on the issue of political decision-making related to freshwater issues and suggest that respondents feel a lack of confidence in decision-making and commitment at the highest levels. These results highlight the importance of effective political advocacy and engagement in underpinning the systemic issues identified above.

2) **Freshwater and Agriculture**

Overall, there is a clear consensus amongst respondents on the need to address the issue of water pollution from a range of sources, particularly agriculture. Data from the survey indicates that most time and resources are currently being directed towards addressing agricultural pollution. This is indicated as being the top priority work area for respondents over the next five years, but also the area where stakeholders find that progress is most difficult.

Most respondents indicated a lack of staff/capacity as a major constraint to delivering on their priorities. Increasing the number of staff with expertise in this area, and/or improving capacity for increased work across sectors (primarily the agriculture sector) could make a significant difference to freshwater progress. In addition to the points made above, the results suggest that overcoming political inertia around agricultural law and policy could lay the foundation for improvements to water quality outcomes.

3) **Collaboration and Coordination**

The results also highlight the importance of improved collaboration and coordination of efforts in the freshwater context. Where there is clear alignment in terms of key

challenges and priorities for future work (coupled with a widespread lack of capacity and resource) a logical approach would be to pool resources, share, and combine cross-sectoral voices to strengthen political messaging.

1. Introduction

Freshwater ecosystems are in crisis across the island of Ireland. Monitoring required under the EU Water Framework Directive[1] in both jurisdictions indicates that we are likely to miss legal targets to improve water quality by a significant margin. This reality has been widely reported in both the media, and by monitoring agencies in the North and the South. In Northern Ireland (NI), the most recent monitoring data shows that only 31% of surface water bodies are at good ecological status, and none of our water bodies are at good overall status. Almost half of all lakes in NI are at 'poor' or 'bad' ecological status, and these latest statistics also show that fewer rivers are at good or high ecological status in 2024 than in the previous assessment in 2021. In Ireland, 52% of surface water is at good or high ecological status – a reduction from 54% in the previous assessment. These statistics paint a troubling picture: not only will we fall short of the legal targets, the overall water quality across the island, is in decline.

As a graphic indication of the scale of the freshwater problems we are currently facing across the island, both jurisdictions continue to contend with the issue of blue-green algal blooms. This problem has been brought into the spotlight in recent years due to the prolific harmful algal blooms at Lough Neagh in NI, but it is important to highlight that this is not an isolated incident. Multiple water bodies, both inland and coastal, across the island have been impacted. As has been widely reported, elevated nutrient levels in water bodies contribute to the development of algal blooms. In addition to being detrimental to water ecosystems, elevated nutrient levels can be harmful to human and animal health, and can also come with an economic cost. Our survey results reflect the concern felt amongst freshwater stakeholders about the profound impacts of water pollution, the scale of the challenge in addressing this issue, and the need for coordinated efforts to do so.

We know that the challenge of reducing water pollution will require large scale and sustained efforts and investment. However, resources are limited. For this reason, we need a more coordinated, strategic and unified approach to tackling water quality issues. Establishing a baseline, or a 'stock-take', of existing work being done to improve water quality across the island is an important first step in operationalising such an approach. It is also beneficial to garner the views of water stakeholders on the main challenges to improving water quality, details of why these elements are challenging, and information on what kinds of interventions water stakeholders believe will help to

[1] EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) – known as the WFD. In NI, the relevant legislation is The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017, which are classified as Retained EU Law post-Brexit. In the South the equivalent legislation giving effect to the WFD is the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003).

improve water quality, in order to inform a strategic approach to resource-use and policy development, both at a political level and amongst all those working on water-related issues.

Research Approach

The overall aim of the survey was to gain an overview of any work, paid or voluntary, related to the protection and restoration of the freshwater environment across the island of Ireland. The data was gathered using a voluntary online survey, publicised across the websites and social media accounts of both NI Environment Link and SWAN, as well as being sent to members of both organisations directly. In addition, both NIEL and SWAN (NIEL in the North and SWAN in the South, respectively) sent the survey link to other stakeholders. The survey was open for a period of 6 weeks between June and July 2025, though this was then extended due to coinciding with the holiday period in both jurisdictions and to allow maximum time for responses. The survey was closed and responses collated at the end of August 2025. The data was analysed largely using quantitative analysis to give a snapshot of stakeholder views across a range of issues related to freshwater work. Some survey questions allowed respondents to offer more nuanced views on issues, and these responses were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

Key Findings

The findings indicate that there is valuable work being done across the island to improve water quality, but there is serious concern amongst water stakeholders about the state of water quality, and their ability to address this.

The survey results revealed several key findings:

- Most respondents characterised water quality on the island of Ireland as ‘poor’ (45%), and more than half feel that water quality on the island of Ireland will get worse over the next 5 years.
- Pollutants coming from agricultural activity, wastewater infrastructure and stormwater runoff were identified as the top factors impacting water quality on the island of Ireland.
- Reducing pollution from agricultural sources is a key area of work for freshwater stakeholders but is also the most difficult area in which to gain progress.
- There has been significant time and resource investment into addressing biodiversity decline across freshwaters on the island of Ireland, but this has also been identified as a top area in which it is challenging to make progress.
- Freshwater stakeholders identified a ‘lack of political will’ as a major issue affecting their work. Respondents signalled that this is one of the biggest issues

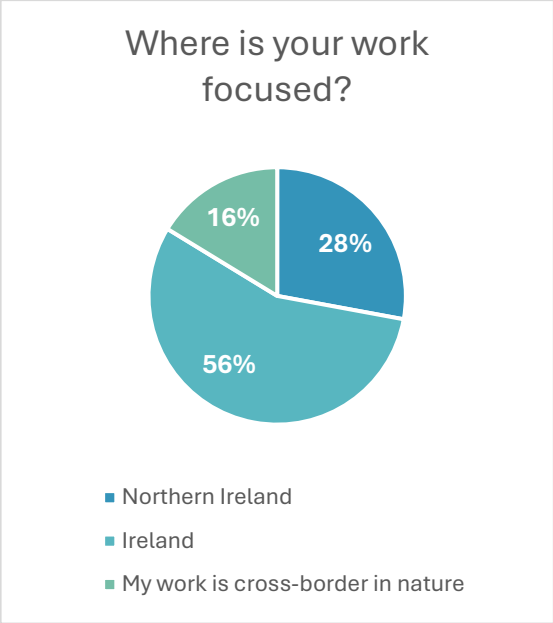
impacting water quality across the island, because it serves as an obstacle to making progress across other areas of work.

- Raising public awareness of freshwater issues is identified as a key area of work amongst freshwater stakeholders, and one of the top priorities for freshwater stakeholders over the next 5 years (ranking 6th most selected option).
- There are mixed feelings on potential solutions to the water crisis we face, but there is a general sense that action will be required across a range of areas in order to make progress.
- Most respondents (49%) told us that one of their top priorities over the next 5 years would be to reduce pollutants. Other top priorities for freshwater work over the next five years are: securing or improving legislation and regulation, improving governance related to freshwater, local freshwater habitat restoration projects, and the use of Nature-based Solutions (NbS).
- 77% of respondents told us that they do not currently have the resources they require to deliver their priorities, with 'Staff/capacity' being the most significant resource gap.
- Most respondents have already been engaged in cross-sectoral work on water-related issues, with most work in this area involving environmental NGOs (eNGOs), Community groups, and local government.

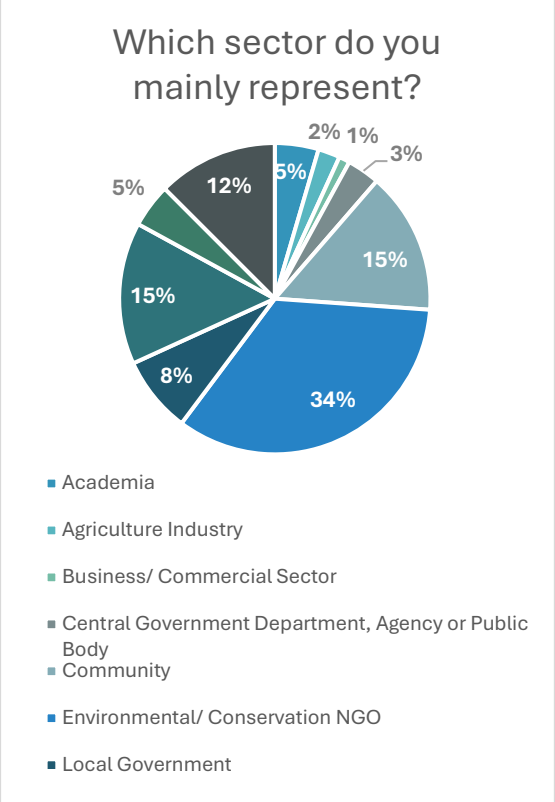
The survey also sought to gather information about people working on water-related issues in order to collate some examples of best practice, which may be used to inform the development of new work going forward. Details of some of this work can be found in Section 10. Respondents also had the opportunity to be added to a database of freshwater stakeholders, which will be a useful resource for beginning to establish a cross-border network of individuals and organisations working on these issues. If you have any questions about this, or if you would like to request to be added to this database please contact Dr Bróna McNeill, Area Lead ((Fresh) Water) at NI Environment Link: brona@nienvironmentlink.org.

2. Who responded to the Survey?

There were 88 validated responses to the online survey. Respondents were predominantly individuals (65%), rather than organisations (35%),[2] and there were slightly more responses from those working on freshwater issues on a voluntary basis (56%), than those working on a paid basis (44%).



We received more responses from Ireland than NI, in alignment with the relative sizes of the jurisdictions. We were pleased to receive insights from 14 individuals and organisations working on freshwater issues on a cross-border basis, and it is interesting to note that these responses came primarily from environmental NGOs and local government authorities.



This could provide some indication that these sectors are leading the way in engaging in cross-border work.

Responses came from a wide range of sectors. However, it should be noted that just over a third of responses were from environmental or conservation NGOs. For this reason, the overall data analysis was complemented by an analysis of the data from the environment sector alone. In general terms, the key findings from the environment sector are replicated across the overall body of responses. The analysis notes where this is not the case.

[2] A list of organisations who responded is included at Appendix A.

3. What has been the focus of freshwater work on the island of Ireland to-date?

The survey asked respondents to indicate what has been the focus of their, or their organisation's work on freshwater issues to-date. In answering this question, we asked respondents to think specifically about which areas they had spent the most time or resources working on and offered a list from which respondents could choose as many options as were applicable. The options offered are listed on the right.

The results indicate that, amongst survey respondents, most time and resources being spent on freshwater issues are currently being directed towards reducing pollution from agriculture. Education/raising public awareness of freshwaters was the second most identified focus area. The third highest score was for addressing biodiversity decline.

- Reducing pollution from agriculture
- Reducing sewage pollution
- Tackling other contaminants (eg industrial chemical pollution, antimicrobial-resistant bacteria, microplastics etc)
- Addressing biodiversity decline
- Tackling invasive non-native species
- Reducing over-abstraction of water
- Challenging damaging physical modifications (eg land drainage, fish barriers, channelisation)
- Challenging damage from forestry
- Addressing climate change
- Working in the area of extreme climatic events (eg floods, droughts)
- Education/raising public awareness and understanding of freshwaters
- Widening public access to freshwaters
- Advocating or campaigning for political action on water issues
- Development and testing of water treatment/management technologies
- Monitoring and analysis
- Research
- Other

These results might be qualified by highlighting that the eNGO sector was the largest proportion of respondents (34%). Certainly, when the results are filtered by sector, the top 3 overall areas of focus align with the top 3 areas of focus for the eNGO sector. However, it should be noted that for the majority of sectors, 'reducing pollution from agriculture' was the most selected option, or joint top (eNGO sector, Agriculture, local government, sport and recreation) or was the second most selected option (Community sector), confirming that this is an area of comparatively high time and resource investment across a range of sectors. This is an important insight into the nature of freshwater work across the island and is not entirely surprising given what we know about the primary pressures facing freshwater systems across the island.

Some sectors presented a more mixed picture, which are worthy of note. For instance, the top 3 areas of focus for academia were: 'Education/raising public awareness and understanding of freshwaters'; 'research' and 'monitoring and analysis' (17% each of the overall responses).

‘Working in the area of extreme climatic events’ was the least selected option amongst respondents. This might be explained by its specific nature and the fact that it is necessarily limited by the frequency of extreme climatic events themselves. As such, it could reasonably be assumed that the amount of time and resources being directed towards this option would increase if the frequency of these kinds of events increased.

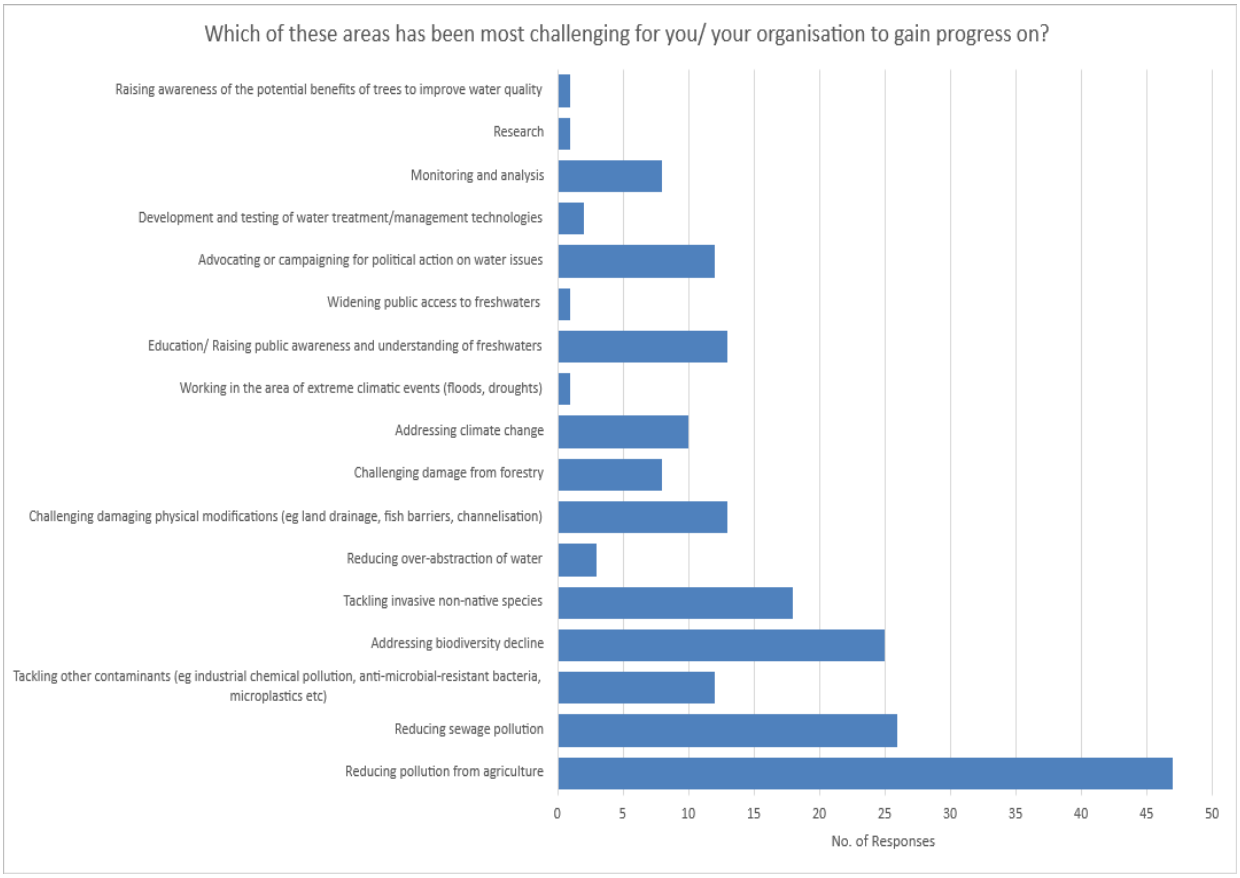
4. Challenges Facing Freshwater Stakeholders on the Island of Ireland

The survey asked respondents to identify which three areas of their freshwater work they find most challenging. Specifically, the question provoked respondents to think about the areas in which they have found it difficult to make progress. The options offered to respondents were necessarily high-level and are intended to be indicative of the areas in which freshwater stakeholders work, rather than reflecting specific tasks, or specific legal or policy outcomes. The list from which respondents selected their responses is reproduced on the right:

The data indicates that the area that respondents have found to be most challenging, by a significant margin, is 'reducing pollution from agriculture,' which had nearly twice as many responses as the next most commonly selected option. This statistic offers a clear indication that a range of sectors view this as the most significant challenge from a freshwater perspective, and may go some way to explaining the relatively high time and resource investment in this area of work (identified in the previous section).

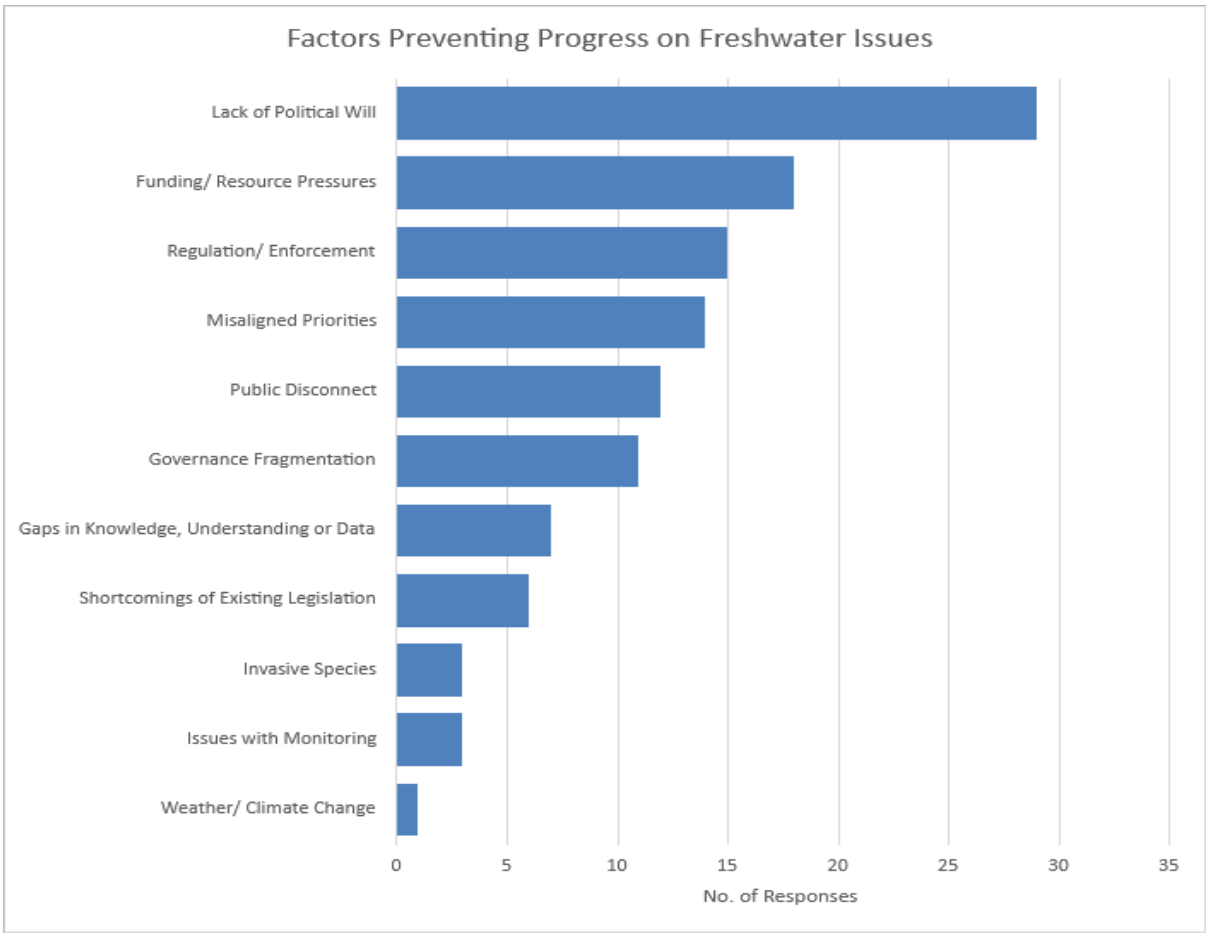
The second and third most commonly selected responses were 'Reducing sewage pollution' and 'addressing biodiversity decline'.

- Reducing pollution from agriculture
- Reducing sewage pollution
- Tackling other contaminants (eg industrial chemical pollution, anti-microbial-resistant bacteria, microplastics etc)
- Addressing biodiversity decline
- Tackling invasive non-native species
- Reducing over-abstraction of water
- Challenging damaging physical modifications (eg land drainage, fish barriers, channelisation)
- Challenging damage from forestry
- Addressing climate change
- Working in the area of extreme climatic events (floods, droughts)
- Education/raising public awareness and understanding of freshwaters
- Widening public access to freshwaters
- Advocating or campaigning for political action on water issues
- Development and testing of water treatment/management technologies
- Monitoring and analysis
- Research
- Other (suggestions could be added)



The survey also offered respondents the opportunity to record what factors they felt are making progress difficult. A range of responses were recorded, but very clear themes emerged within the data, and we used thematic analysis to present the results. As demonstrated in the graph below, the number one barrier identified related to a lack of political will to address the issues. As with the data on challenges described above, this received almost twice as many responses as the next-highest barrier identified by respondents, which related to funding or resource pressures.

This is a striking statistic, and indicates that, whilst resources matter, the biggest blockage is leadership. These results generate a broader picture from which we might conclude that, from a freshwater stakeholder perspective, our freshwater issues are not derived from a lack of understanding or knowledge, or the shortcomings of our existing legal frameworks. The issues are well-understood but require systemic change and shifts in priorities and approach.

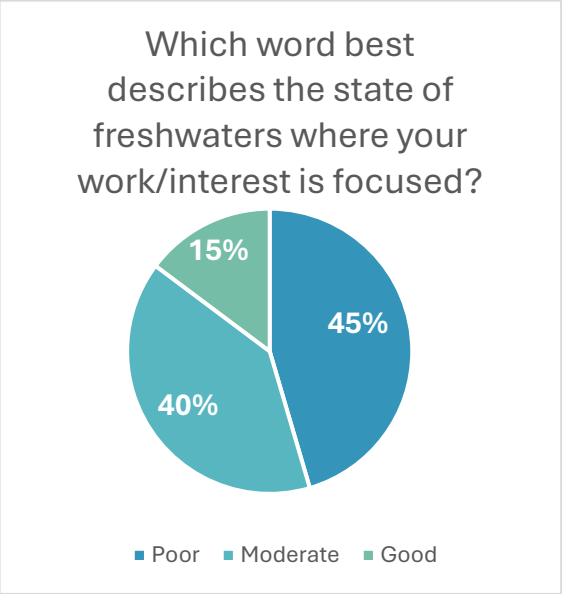

Factors Preventing Progress on Freshwater Issues
Lack of Political Will
Funding/ Resource Pressures
Regulation/ Enforcement
Misaligned Priorities
Public Disconnect
Governance Fragmentation
Gaps in Knowledge, Understanding or Data
Shortcomings of Existing Legislation
Invasive Species
Issues with Monitoring
Weather/ Climate Change
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
No. of Responses

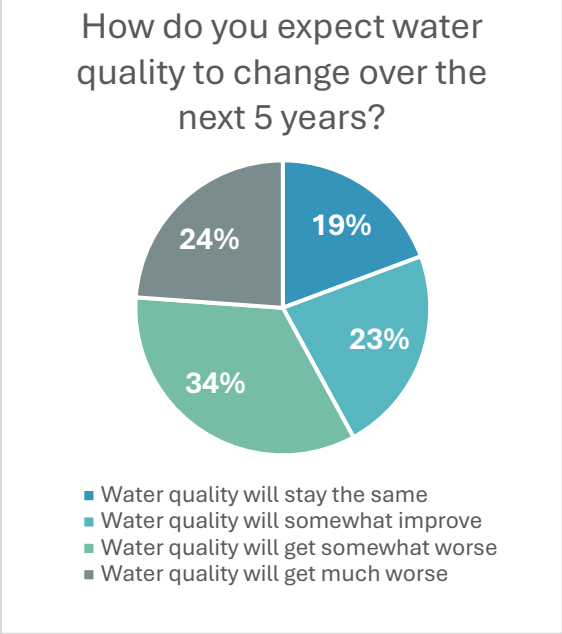
5. Freshwater Stakeholder Views on Water Quality

Most of the respondents (45%) described the state of freshwater quality in their work area as 'Poor'. Another 40% believed the freshwater quality to be 'Moderate' and only 15% of the respondents said the freshwater quality in their area of focus was 'Good'.

When asked if they expect a change in the next 5 years, 34% of the stakeholders that responded to the survey expect freshwater quality to get 'somewhat worse', while 23% expected water quality will 'somewhat improve'. Only 19% expect that water quality will 'stay the same' over the next 5 years. The remaining 24% expect that water quality will get 'much worse'.

The answers to the question asking stakeholders to explain their answers, yielded very diverse responses. Broadly we were able to categorise these into 7 themes. These are listed below in descending order of frequency.



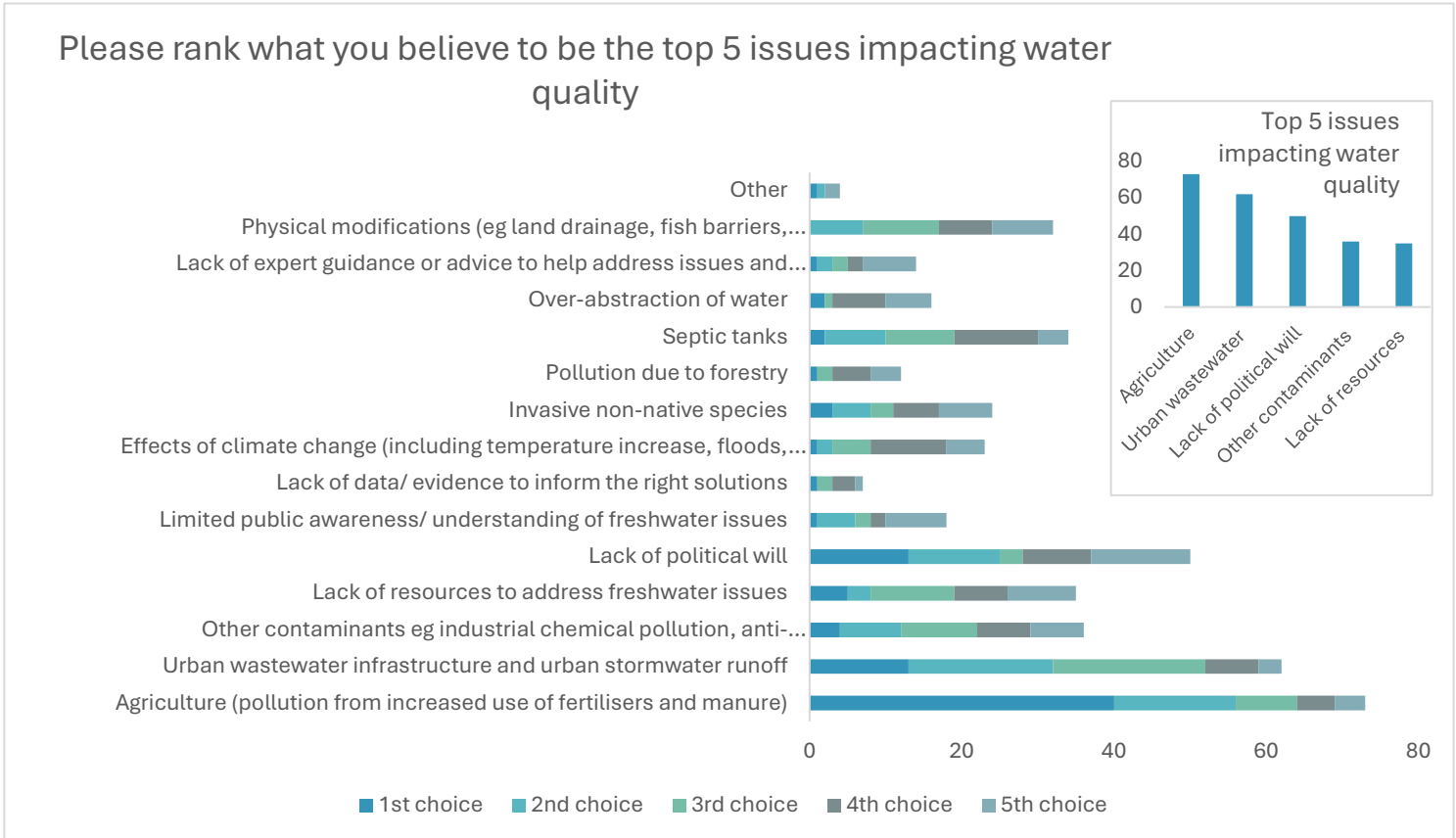


1. Inadequate policies, enforcement or implementation measures
2. Lack of political will, insufficient government support/accountability
3. Lack of funding or investment
4. Capacity constraints in staffing, infrastructure and expertise
5. Polluting or unchecked degrading practices
6. Lack of awareness and public interest
7. Climate change

Stakeholders were asked to rank what they believed to be the top 5 issues impacting water quality from a set of 14 fixed choices and had an opportunity to write their own response under 'Others'.

The figure below shows the totals for the top 5 issues that emerged irrespective of choice of selection. Agriculture, urban wastewater infrastructure, lack of political will, contaminants and lack of resources were the top 5 issues that stakeholders deem to be impacting water quality. These are in line with themes that emerged from other questions in the survey. It must be noted however that the list of issues given was not exhaustive.

- Urban wastewater infrastructure and urban stormwater runoff
- Septic tanks
- Other contaminants (eg industrial chemical pollution, anti-microbial resistant bacteria, microplastics, residues from pharmaceuticals and care products, pollution from contaminated land
- Invasive non-native species
- Over-abstraction of water
- Physical modifications (eg land drainage, fish barriers, channelisation)
- Effects of climate change (including temperature increase, floods, drought)
- Lack of resources to address freshwater issues
- Lack of data/evidence to inform the right solutions
- Lack of expert guidance or advice to help address issues and provide effective solutions
- Limited public awareness/ understanding of freshwater issues
- Agriculture (pollution from increased use of fertilisers and manure)
- Pollution from forestry
- Lack of political will
- Pollution from mining
- Other



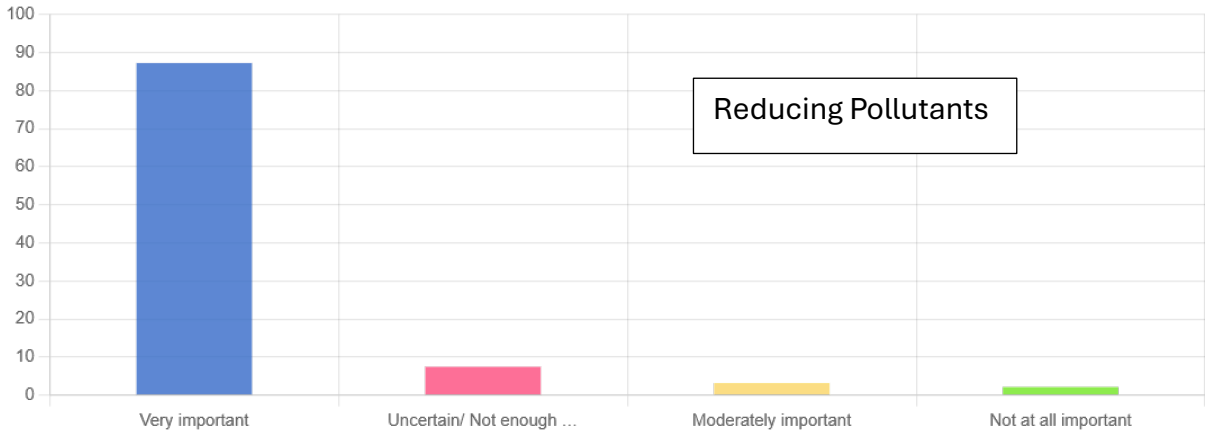
6. Freshwater Stakeholder Views on Improving Water Quality

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt that various types of solution would have a measurable positive impact on water quality across the island. The list of possible solutions offered is reproduced below, and respondents were asked if they thought each of these interventions would be 'not at all important', 'moderately important', or 'very important.' Respondents could also select 'Uncertain/Not enough information to assess'. This question was not aimed at 'ranking' solutions per se, reflecting the recognition that each of the solutions identified – which are broad categories of actions – may suit different freshwater contexts and specific challenges. Instead, the question aimed to determine whether there was general support amongst freshwater stakeholders for existing, or suggested, solutions to freshwater issues, and to clarify whether there are clear areas that require further research or evidence in order to justify (or negate) time and resource investment amongst freshwater stakeholders.

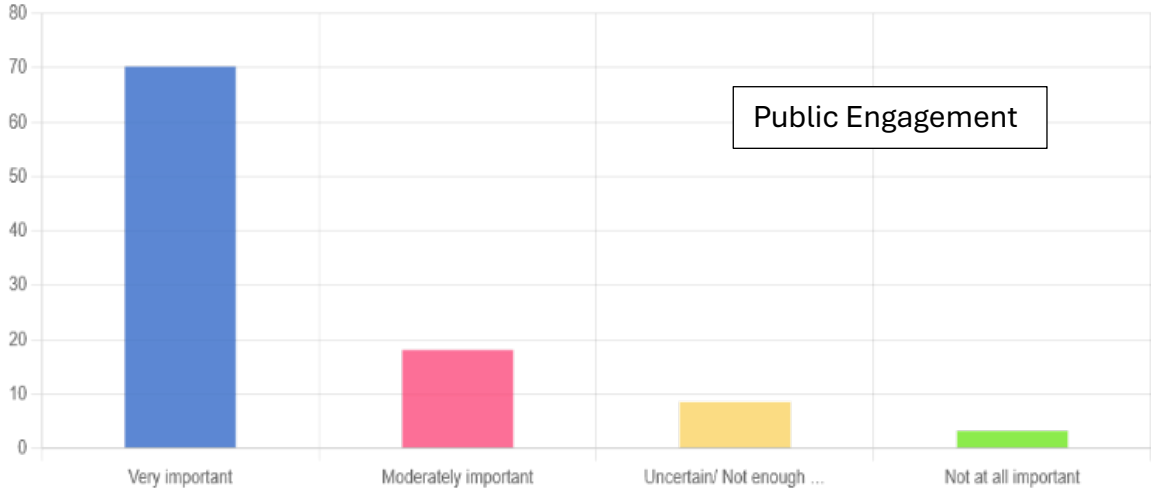
- Improved governance related to freshwater
- Legislation and regulation
- Introduction of 'Rights of Nature' approaches
- Nature based solutions
- Investment
- Local freshwater habitat restoration projects
- Incentives
- Reducing pollutants
- Efficient resource use
- Monitoring
- Knowledge sharing
- Infrastructure
- Public engagement and education
- Innovation, research and technology
- Widening access to the freshwater environment
- Improved cross-border co-operation and collaboration

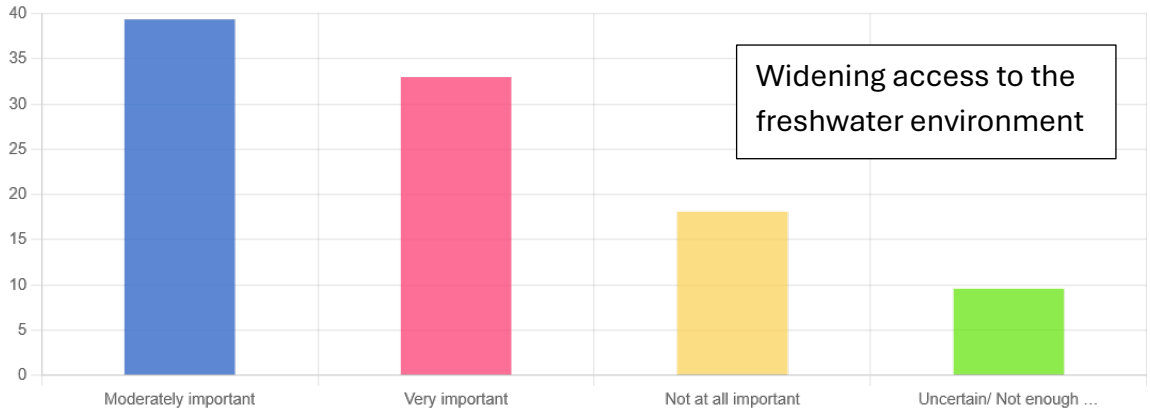
In general terms, respondents largely felt that all of these interventions would be either moderately or very important in terms of improving water quality. However, there were

some categories of action that can be identified as having the largest proportion of 'very important' responses, indicating a level of certainty amongst freshwater stakeholders that action in these areas will improve the freshwater environment. These are: Reducing pollutants; Improved governance related to freshwater; Legislation and Regulation; and Investment. In some ways, these results align with what some of the other data indicates in terms of where time and resources are being directed. For example, Section 4 highlighted that reducing pollutants from various sources represented a large proportion of the overall work of freshwater stakeholders across the island, and this aligns with the sense from this question that this is a 'very important' area of action to improve water quality.



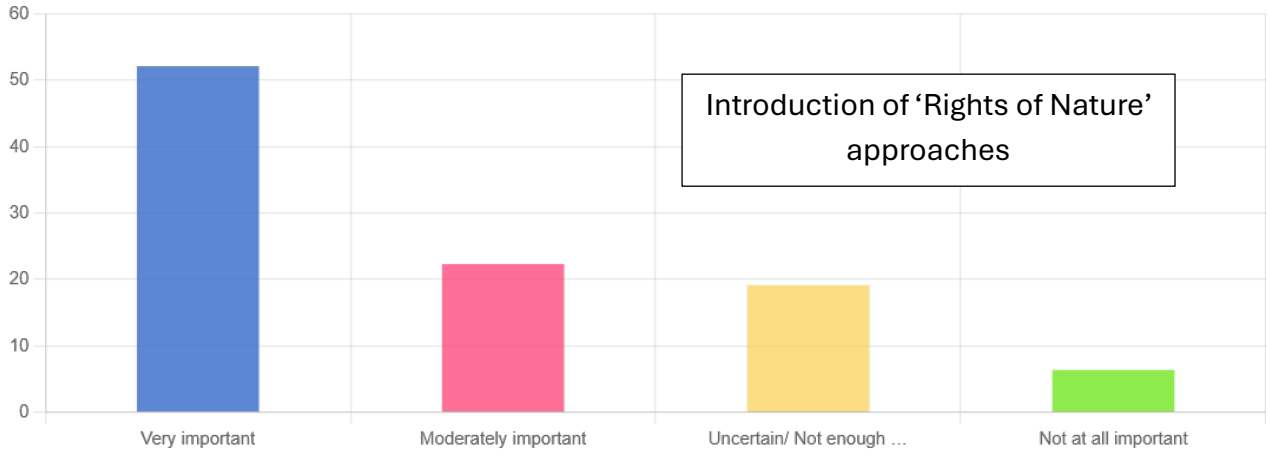
However, some of these results are more anomalous. For instance, comparatively fewer respondents felt that 'Public engagement and education' and 'Widening access to the freshwater environment' were 'very important' areas of action to improve freshwater outcomes. Indeed, 'Widening access to the freshwater environment' was the category that received the highest number of 'not at all important' responses. However, 'Education and public awareness' was identified in Section 4 as one of the top time and resource investment areas amongst freshwater stakeholders. This slight disconnect may indicate that some clarification is required around how action in this area can result in improved outcomes for our freshwater habitats, and discussion around how to quantify this.



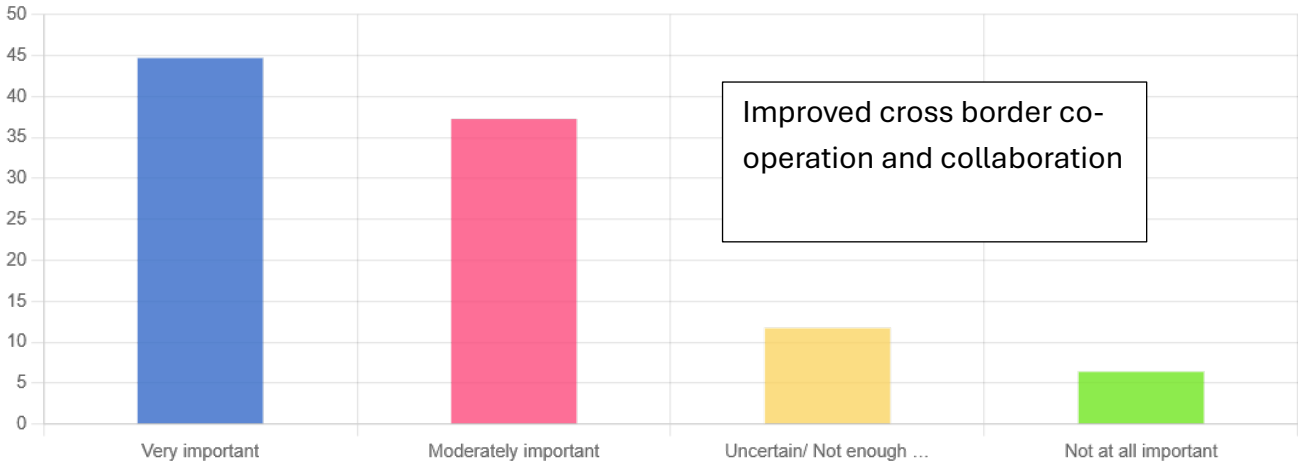


Comparatively small numbers of respondents selected the 'Uncertain/Not enough information to assess' option for any of the areas of action (there was an average of 57 respondents across each area of action in the 'very important' category, compared with an average of 8 respondents for each area of action across the 'Uncertain/Not enough information to assess' category). Within this category, however, the areas respondents selected most often were 'Introduction of 'Rights of Nature'[3] approaches' and 'Incentives', indicating that these are areas where more research or evidence as to effectiveness in improving freshwater outcomes would be beneficial.

[3] Rights of Nature is a concept suggesting that ecosystems and the species they support have intrinsic rights (to exist and flourish, for example) and should therefore be granted legal personhood. Proponents would suggest that, in the freshwater context, this could strengthen protection for our rivers, lakes and watersheds by enabling innovative legal action to reduce pollution and support long-term sustainability.

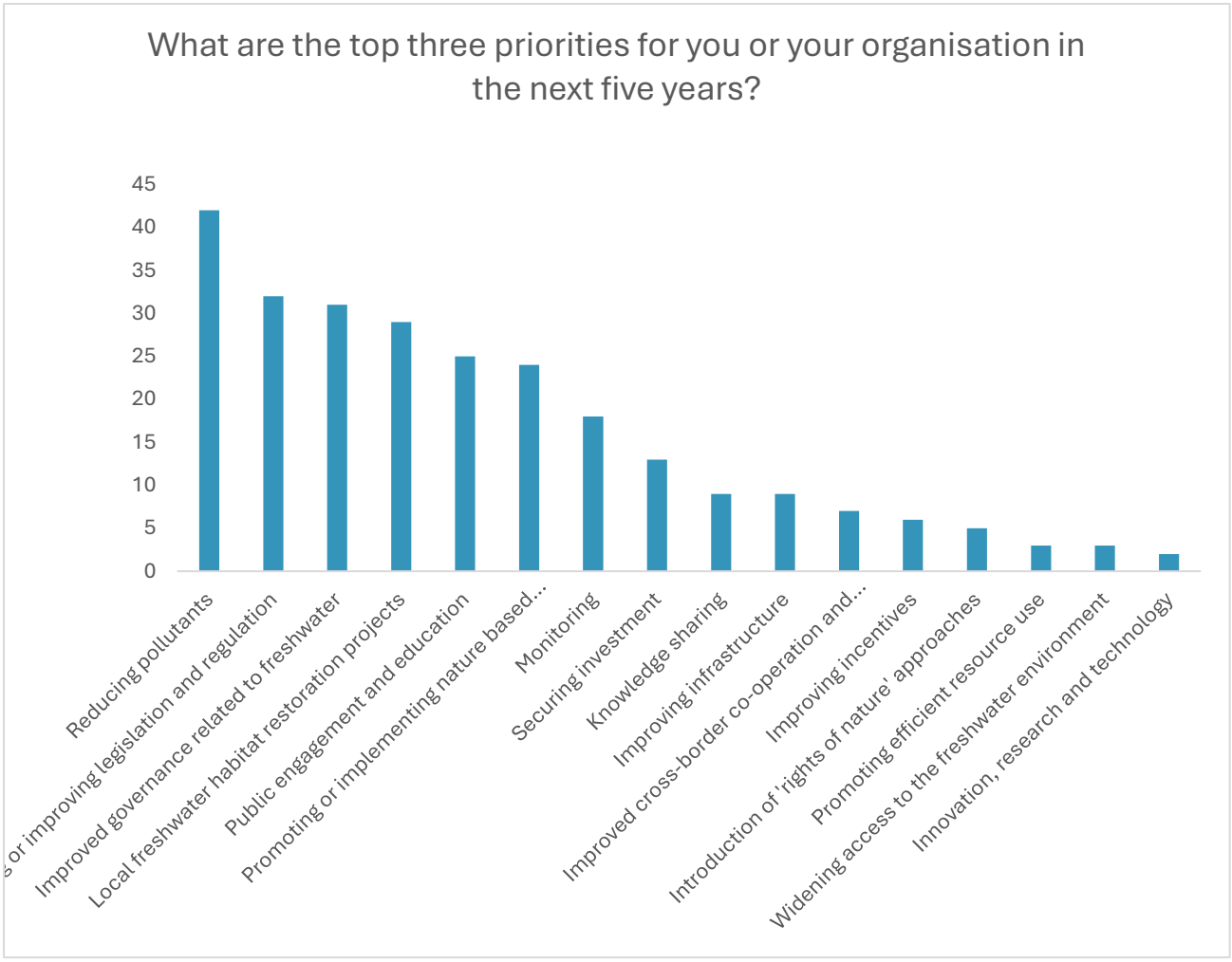


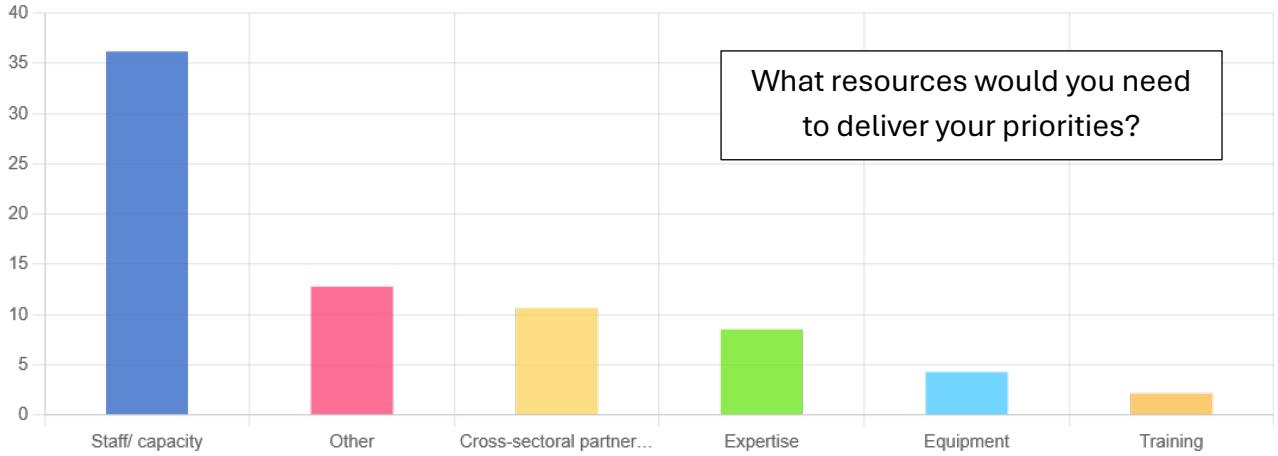
A final result to note relates to 'Improved cross-border co-operation and collaboration'. A comparatively low proportion of respondents (when compared with 'Reducing pollutants', for example) deemed this to be a 'very important' area of action. As the graph below demonstrates, there was a much more even spread of responses across all categories. Notably 12% of respondents selected the 'Uncertain/Not enough information to assess' category. Interestingly, when filtered to view only the results from those respondents who deemed their work to be cross-border in nature (predominantly environmental NGOs and local government stakeholders), 79% of respondents felt that improved cross border co-operation and collaboration was 'very important' in terms of improving water quality. These results indicate, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the recognition amongst those who are working on the ground on cross-border projects of the value of cross-border co-operation and collaboration is higher than amongst freshwater stakeholders more broadly. It should also be noted that the ambition to reduce overall pollutants (recognised across the board as one of the most important areas of action) would, in practical terms, require effective cross-border co-operation and collaboration. In addition, when asked to offer suggestions as to what factors were preventing progress on freshwater issues, respondents made reference to governance fragmentation as a key issue, which could include governance across jurisdictions. This range of data indicates that more evidence and clarity around the benefits of improved cross-border co-operation and collaboration would be useful.


50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Very important
Moderately important
Uncertain/ Not enough ...
Not at all important
Improved cross border co-operation and collaboration

7. Future Plans and Priorities for Freshwater Stakeholders

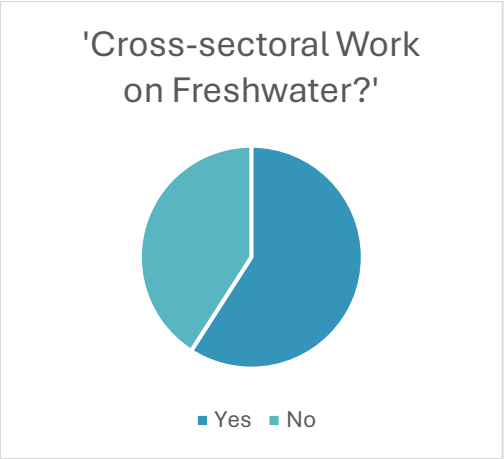
Respondents were asked what the top priorities were for them or their organisations for the next five years. 'Reducing pollutants' was a top priority, followed by 'securing and improving legislation' and 'improved governance'. The graph below shows the results.





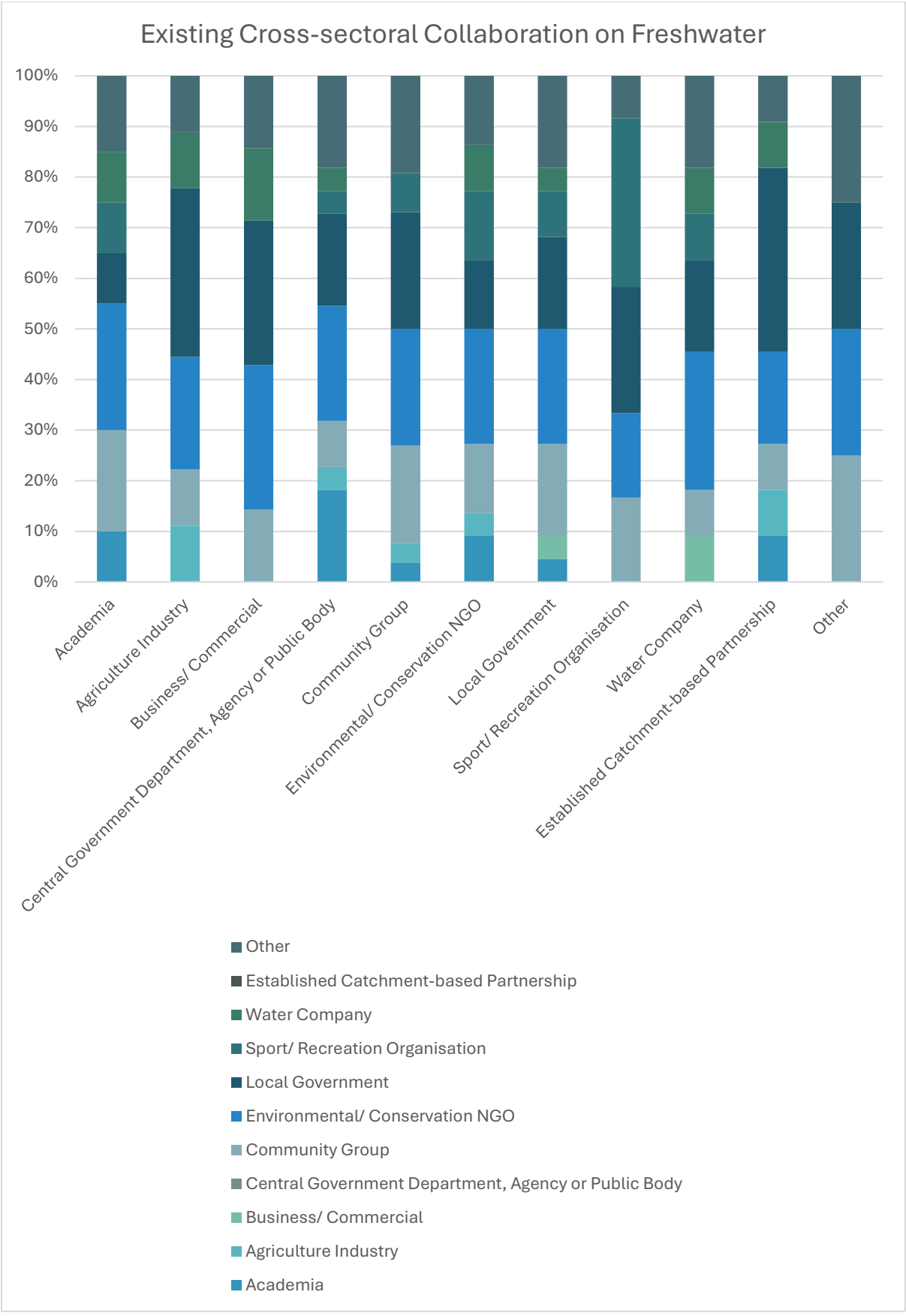
When asked whether they had the resources available to deliver these priorities, the majority of respondents (78%) said they did not. The survey sought further information and prompted respondents to provide more detail on what resources they would require in order to deliver their priorities. As can be seen in the graph above, the main resource gap identified as 'Staff/capacity.' Within the 'Other' category, the majority of responses (78%) related to the need for additional funding.

8. The Potential of Cross-Sectoral Collaboration



It is clear that restoring rivers, lakes and coasts across the island requires action from every sector that influences water quality and freshwater habitats. No single department or organisation can fix the problem alone. Cross-sectoral collaboration is therefore not just desirable, it is necessary for solving the water crisis. Without cross-sectoral collaboration, one sector's improvements can be wiped out by inaction or counter measures undertaken elsewhere, and collaborative design and delivery can also dramatically increase ecological impact. For these reasons, the survey aimed to gather information about existing levels of cross-sectoral collaboration across the island. The results (as demonstrated in the chart above) indicate that most freshwater stakeholders who responded to the survey (59%) are already engaged in some form of cross-sectoral collaboration. However, there is additional nuance to be derived from the results, in terms of what type of cross-sectoral collaboration is taking place, and where. For instance, a greater proportion of respondents whose work is based in Ireland (65%) than in NI (38%) indicated that they have already been, or are, engaged in cross-sectoral collaboration. The percentage was even higher (86%) amongst those respondents whose work is cross-border in nature. These results could indicate that a large proportion of cross-sectoral collaboration is taking place in cross-border settings.

In addition, as the chart above illustrates, some sectors appear to be more widely engaged in cross-sectoral collaboration than others. In this respect, environmental NGOs, local government and community groups are the most widely represented sectors, with Central Government Departments, Agencies or Public Bodies the least represented, alongside the business and commercial sector and the agriculture sector. Although these data represent a snapshot of freshwater work across the island, they may give some indication of where opportunities exist for increasing the scale and effectiveness of cross-sectoral collaboration, and where examples of best practice might be sought.


Existing Cross-sectoral Collaboration on Freshwater
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Academia
Agriculture Industry
Business/ Commercial
Central Government Department, Agency or Public Body
Community Group
Environmental/ Conservation NGO
Local Government
Sport/ Recreation Organisation
Water Company
Established Catchment-based Partnership
Other
Other
Established Catchment-based Partnership
Water Company
Sport/ Recreation Organisation
Local Government
Environmental/ Conservation NGO
Community Group
Central Government Department, Agency or Public Body
Business/ Commercial
Agriculture Industry
Academia

9. Survey Recommendations

1. Elevate water quality as a political priority across the island of Ireland

Water quality must be placed higher on the political agenda, North and South, to address the widespread perception of declining freshwater health and the lack of political will identified by stakeholders. Strong political leadership is essential to unlock progress across all areas of freshwater protection, particularly in tackling diffuse pollution and strengthening governance.

2. Accelerate action to reduce pollution, with a primary focus on agricultural sources

Given that agricultural pollution was identified as both a key pressure and the most difficult area in which to achieve progress, reducing nutrients and runoff from agriculture should be a central priority across the island over the next five years. This will require clearer policy direction, consistent enforcement, and long-term commitment.

3. Scale up targeted support for farmers to enable pollution reduction

Progress on agricultural pollution depends on scaling up practical, well-resourced support for farmers. This should include advisory services, incentives, and capacity-building measures that enable the adoption of sustainable land management practices, while recognising the economic and operational realities faced by the sector.

4. Invest in local catchment-based action and nature-based solutions

Local freshwater habitat restoration projects and the wider use of nature-based solutions should be expanded, reflecting their importance to stakeholders and their potential to deliver multiple benefits for water quality, biodiversity, and climate resilience when adequately resourced and supported.

5. Build the evidence base for cross-border collaboration and shared action

More clarity and evidence are needed on the ways in which cross-border collaboration improves water quality outcomes across the island. This will include evaluating existing initiatives, identifying best practice, and communicating the added value of shared approaches to decision-makers and practitioners. Addressing water pollution should

also be placed on the agenda of the North–South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to support coordinated political oversight.

6. Strengthen capacity and resourcing for freshwater stakeholders

With over three-quarters of respondents reporting insufficient resources, addressing these gaps is critical. Without sustained investment in people and expertise, stakeholders will remain constrained in their ability to deliver agreed priorities and achieve measurable improvements.

7. Expand and diversify cross-sectoral collaboration

Mechanisms should be established to foster greater collaboration among under-represented sectors, including business and the commercial sector, alongside eNGOs, community groups, and local government. Effective cross-sector collaboration can unlock long-term investment, reduce duplication, and empower communities to play a meaningful role in protecting and monitoring local waters.

8. Strengthen public awareness and education to drive measurable outcomes

Raising public awareness remains a key priority, but future efforts should focus on how education and engagement translate into tangible freshwater outcomes. This could include developing ways to measure impact and ensure awareness-raising contributes directly to behaviour change and water quality improvements.

10. Freshwater Success Stories

Our survey respondents provided many examples of organisations carrying out valuable freshwater work across the island, as well as telling us about other interventions being used to improve water quality and public engagement. In this section, we have recorded those specific projects that our respondents told us about, in the hope that the actions and positive outcomes achieved can serve as a useful point of reference for freshwater stakeholders.

- Shared Waters – Shared Landscapes project (2017) https://cdn.ringofgullion.org/2018/01/FINAL-REPORT_Shared-Waters-Shared-Landscapes.pdf
- H2O Heroes https://www.dkit.ie/news/2025/dkits-h2o-heroes-one-of-the-peaceplus-funded-projects-under-the-united-youth-initiative (DkIT)
- Glenavy River recovery – riverbank planting of trees and shrubs, creating an off-road walkway http://www.glenavyriver.co.uk
- Dalgan River Monitoring Initiative https://www.ballyhaunistidytowns.ie/citizen-science-programme
- Black River Catchment https://www.blackrivercatchment.info. A project funded by LAWPRO and carried out in association with Bridgetown Tidy Towns
- Streamscapes – a number of initiatives https://streamscapes.ie/resources
- Urban Citizens 632 https://www.urbancitizens632.ie. A citizen science initiative monitoring Dublin's rivers/ UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere
- Dodder Action https://dodderaction.org/about/projects-dodder-action-dublin-river-campaign.html. Various activities eg volunteer days.
- East Wicklow Rivers Trust https://www.wicklowrivers.ie. Various restoration projects
- Lough Corrib Angling Federation http://loughcorribanglingfederation.ie. Trout hatchery work
- Corrib Beo Partnership - a not-for-profit voluntary association, established in 2019 to advance and promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Corrib Region. https://corribbeo.org
- Inishowen Regional Water Supply Scheme https://www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/inishowen-regional-water-
- WiseWater Academy https://wisewater.ie. Education for schools, youth clubs etc
- Water Matters https://ourwatermatters.ie. Various examples of projects across Ireland involving farmers.
- Source to Tap Project https://www.sourcetotap.eu

- Oriel River Catchments and Coastal Association (ORCCA) https://www.orccawater.ie/reports. Various projects
- CatchmentCARE Project https://catchmentcare.eu
- Projects across NI funded by the Water Quality Improvement Strand (WQIS), which is administered by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/community-groups-use-niea-funding-invest-water-quality-improvement-projects