

Water

Scotland has around 19,000 km of coastline, which makes up 8% of Europe's coast. The area from the coast to our fishery limits (470,000 km²) is around six times the size of the land area of Scotland.

Scotland's water is essential for our health and prosperity. As well as being used for drinking, water is used in industry (e.g. distilling whisky and supporting fisheries), for producing energy (hydropower), and for recreational activities (such as bird-watching, angling and water sports). Scotland's seas support a wide variety of activities, including commercial fishing and energy production. Our water supports an array of habitats and contains nationally and internationally important populations of some species.

Scotland has around [19,000 km](#) of coastline, which makes up [8% of Europe's coast](#). The area from the coast to our Exclusive Economic Zone is around six times the size of the land area of Scotland.

Covering about 2% of Scotland's land area, our rivers and lochs contain 90% of the UK's surface freshwater.

State

Our water is generally in good condition, and there have been significant reductions in pollution over the last 25 years.

Most of our seas, coasts and estuaries are in good or excellent condition. There are localised areas of concern, but pollution problems caused in the past have largely been addressed.

Habitats within Scottish inshore waters are declining in condition or are stable but still of concern, and most areas have some species that are declining to a point that is now of concern.

Most of our groundwater is in good condition, and approximately two-thirds of lochs and just over half of rivers were reported as being in good or better condition under the Water Framework Directive assessment.

Overall, the wildlife of rivers and lochs is considered to be in good condition, although a number of individual species are declining.

Challenges

For rivers and lochs, the main issues are:

- loss of habitat as a result of development (historic and ongoing);
- agriculture causing nutrient enrichment and habitat loss;

- energy production disrupting the natural movement of water.

The main challenges faced by the marine environment are:

- commercial fishing, which can harm the sea bed and marine species;
- aquaculture causing localised pollution;
- loss of coastal and estuary habitat to development;
- diffuse pollution of estuaries and coastal areas.

Groundwater is under pressure from:

- agricultural inputs;
- water abstraction, causing water-table levels to drop;
- pollution from historic mining activities;
- pollution from historic industrial activities.

Response

We need to work together to balance the many demands on our water environment. The National Marine Plan and River Basin Management Plans aim to encourage development that balances the needs of the economy, society and the environment, now and in the future.

What is it?

[Coastal waters](#) - Almost all (97%) of Scotland's coastal waters are in good or high condition, but there are local impacts from commercial fishing, aquaculture and diffuse pollution. Growth in industries such as aquaculture and renewable energy may increase pressure on coastal waters.

[Estuaries](#) - Scottish estuaries are important resources for wildlife and humans, and 85% are in good or high environmental condition. However, they remain under pressure from human activity, particularly from nutrient enrichment and the damaging impacts of climate change.

[Freshwater lochs](#) - Scotland's lochs are an important part of our landscape and provide water for drinking and power generation as well as space for recreation. They are generally in good condition.

[Offshore waters](#) - Our seas are biologically diverse and relatively unpolluted. Some fishing is unsustainable, and energy production competes for space and increases pollution risks.

[Rivers and canals](#) - Scotland's river quality has improved in recent decades. Almost half of our rivers are now of good or better quality. Plans are in place to improve the remaining poorer-quality rivers.

Benefits and uses

[Aquaculture](#) - Aquaculture is a growing and increasingly important industry in Scotland. It helps to underpin sustainable economic growth in rural and coastal communities, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, with many depending on the employment and revenue it provides.

Wildlife

[Estuaries and coastal](#) - Scottish coastal and estuarine habitats are full of rich, diverse and fragile sea life that is under considerable pressure and shows signs of damage, but may be recovered through sustainable management.

[Rivers and lochs](#) - Scotland's freshwaters provide a range of habitats for plants and animals. Overall, freshwater habitats and species are in good condition. However, while some individual habitats and species are improving, others are still under pressure.