Water

Our water environment is generally in a good condition but problems remain. These must be tackled in partnership with all water users.

Scotland's water provides a wide range of benefits essential for our health and prosperity. These include providing drinking water, water for use in industry, energy from waves, tides and hydropower and recreation opportunities (such as bird watching, angling and kayaking). Our water supports a diverse array of habitats and contains nationally and internationally important populations of some species.

Our water environment is generally in good condition, with significant improvements to water quality having occurred over the last 20 years.

Commercial fishing causes damage to estuaries and Scotland's seas, both by trawling physically damaging the habitat and unsustainable numbers of some fish species being taken.

Damage to habitat (e.g. dredging, fishing and coastal protection schemes in marine waters, and the straightening of rivers) has damaged a large proportion of the water environment.

The trend for groundwater, freshwaters, coastal waters and estuaries is positive, as planned improvements will improve the vast majority of the water environment by 2027.

Click for explanation of diagram.

Topic	Summary
Groundwater  Groundwater is a hugely valuable asset with more than 80% of it in good condition. Issues from mining and agriculture must be addressed.	Scotland's groundwater is a hugely valuable hidden asset, providing 75% of private drinking water supplies and 70% of the water used in distilling. More than 80% of Scotland's groundwater is in good condition; although there are particular regions with widespread problems. There is also a large number of private water supplies with localised problems. Legacy industrial activity and agriculture are the main causes of regional-scale groundwater problems, whereas inadequate construction of private water supplies and inappropriate management of wastes cause the localised problems.
Rivers and canals  Half our rivers are of at least good quality but there are still problems to tackle. This requires collaboration between all water users.	The health of our rivers has improved significantly in the last 25 years and half are now good or high quality, although there are still significant problems. A better appreciation is needed of the benefits that a healthy river ecosystem provides, and a better understanding of the link between this health and a successful economy.

Lochs  Scotland's lochs are generally in good condition. They are an important part of our landscape and provide benefits such as water for drinking and power generation.	Scotland's lochs are a distinctive part of our landscape and environment. Lochs supply much of our drinking water and renewable energy from hydropower. Almost three-quarters of lochs are good or high quality, although there are still a number of concerns, for example poor land management introducing excessive amounts of nutrients, and physical alterations causing changes to water levels and obstacles to fish migration. These two most significant problems require integrated management of the catchments around lochs to reduce nutrient inputs, as well as striking the right balance between maximising the hydropower generated from lochs while at the same time protecting the wider environment.
Estuaries  Scottish estuaries are important resources for wildlife and humans, but are under pressure from human activity and climate change.	In the past, waste water flowed untreated into industrialised estuaries, causing serious pollution. Improved effluent treatment has resulted in better water quality; however, sediments in some estuaries remain contaminated as a result of past discharges. Important estuarine habitats have been lost in some estuaries as a result of land reclamation, construction of ports, harbours and sea defences, and canalisation. Nitrogen inputs from agriculture are a cause for concern in some estuaries in rural areas.

Coastal waters  Scottish coastal waters are mainly healthy and clean but they are under pressure from human activities at sea and on land	Overall coastal waters are high or good quality, although there are localised impacts from commercial fishing, aquaculture and diffuse inputs. The growth in industries such as aquaculture and renewable energy is putting additional pressure on the coastal environment, and a new marine planning structure, including a national marine plan, has been put in place to manage the conflicting demands on coastal waters to ensure the seas remain clean, safe, healthy, biologically diverse and productive.
Scotland's seas Detailed asssessment in Marine Atlas Overall, Scottish seas are clean, safe, healthy, biologically diverse and productive. But increased and varied use may mean competition for sea space.	Scotland's seas are mainly clean and safe although there are some localised areas of concern. The seas support a diverse array of habitats and contain nationally and internationally important populations of certain species. There are two significant pressures on the marine area which are widespread: • human activity contributing to climate change; • fishing, which impacts on the seabed and species. Decision-making is being improved through the adoption of Marine Planning and the development of a National Marine Plan.