



Bottom-up policy review of AQUACROSS case studies – Executive Summary¹

Overview

This executive summary highlights key results of the bottom-up policy review conducted for the eight AQUACROSS case studies. The case studies represent the diversity of the European aquatic realms and showcase specific elements of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. The transposition of the EU policy framework in place to protect biodiversity to the local level was analysed to identify synergies and conflicts between policy targets and measures.

The EU adopted a Biodiversity Strategy in 2011, with the aims to halt biodiversity and ecosystem services loss across Europe by 2020. However, the 2015 Mid-Term Review of the Strategy concluded that biodiversity protection is deficient and that, at current trends, the EU will fail to achieve its goal of halting the negative effects of anthropogenic activities on ecosystems by 2020.

Our previous top-down analysis (Rouillard et al. 2017, D2.1) found that at the EU-level, sectoral policies support drivers of biodiversity loss, reducing the potential effectiveness of the EU's environmental policies. As a second step, we conducted a bottom-up policy analysis for the eight AQUACROSS case studies, in which we investigate whether the same is occurring at the local level. We undertook an in-depth review of relevant local policies for each case study and the linked effect on drivers of pressures to the local aquatic biodiversity, highlighting gaps and conflicts in each policy framework.

We found that, similarly to the EU level, that as aquatic biodiversity declines across Europe, sectoral activities that drive biodiversity loss receive strong policy support at the local level in the shape of funding mechanisms and regulatory instruments. Our analysis suggests that local

¹ This is the executive summary of AQUACROSS Deliverable 2.3: Bottom-up policy review of AQUACROSS case studies. The full version of this document can be found at www.aquacross.eu in [project outputs](#).

policy makers promote economic growth without sufficient environmental safeguards. Many of the drivers found in local areas are linked to emerging economic sectors that are key for local development: agriculture, fisheries, renewable energy or tourism. While these activities are key drivers of the increasing pressures on aquatic biodiversity in Europe, they are directly and indirectly supported by local regulations and European funds. Environmental policies in place are comprehensive on a formal level, but do not achieve their ambitious targets in practice. This conflicting policy mix results in sectoral ambitions outweighing environmental ones, thus contributing to the ongoing decline of aquatic biodiversity in Europe.

We suggest that local policy frameworks need to be restructured to simultaneously aim for biodiversity protection and sustainable economic welfare. Ecosystem-based management is proposed as a policy tool to achieve environmental mainstreaming in local policy frameworks that manage aquatic ecosystems.

Key findings

- ▶ **Commercial fisheries and aquaculture:** Local legislation implementing and supporting the Common Fisheries Policy and Blue Growth Strategy will consequently support the driver of commercial fisheries and hence sustain species extraction, even if a focus lies on sustainability.
- ▶ **Agriculture:** A considerable focus on environmental goals to reduce environmental pressures such as nutrient pollution is required of the local implementation of the Common Agricultural to achieve biodiversity targets.. However, cross-compliance requirements within the CAP are currently not implemented sufficiently to ensure that nitrogen pressures from farming reach a sustainable level.
- ▶ **Renewable energy:** is managed locally as an environmental solution (to exit fossil fuel-based energy sources), while it is rather an operative shift in structure and infrastructure which has the potential to cause pressures such as hydromorphological changes on the aquatic environment.
- ▶ **Tourism:** is often supported by local policies that mainly focus on increasing economic growth with few environmental safeguards, thereby contributing to the intensification of a range of pressures (e.g., additional nutrient pollution, extraction of species, morphological alterations, invasive alien species) on aquatic ecosystems.

Case study example

In AQUACROSS's [Lough Erne case study](#), the bottom-up policy analysis showed that the pressure of invasive alien species arriving in the ecosystem through effects of tourism are coherently addressed by a number of local environmental policies. However, several policies and instruments supporting tourism increase the recreational activities in the Lough. For example, the Fermanagh Lakelands Tourism Area Plan aims to increase visits by 17% until 2020, with an emphasis on the need to continue partnerships to enhance water-based recreation. Environmental safeguards are missing to ensure sustainable tourism growth as well as a decline in biodiversity loss by 2020.

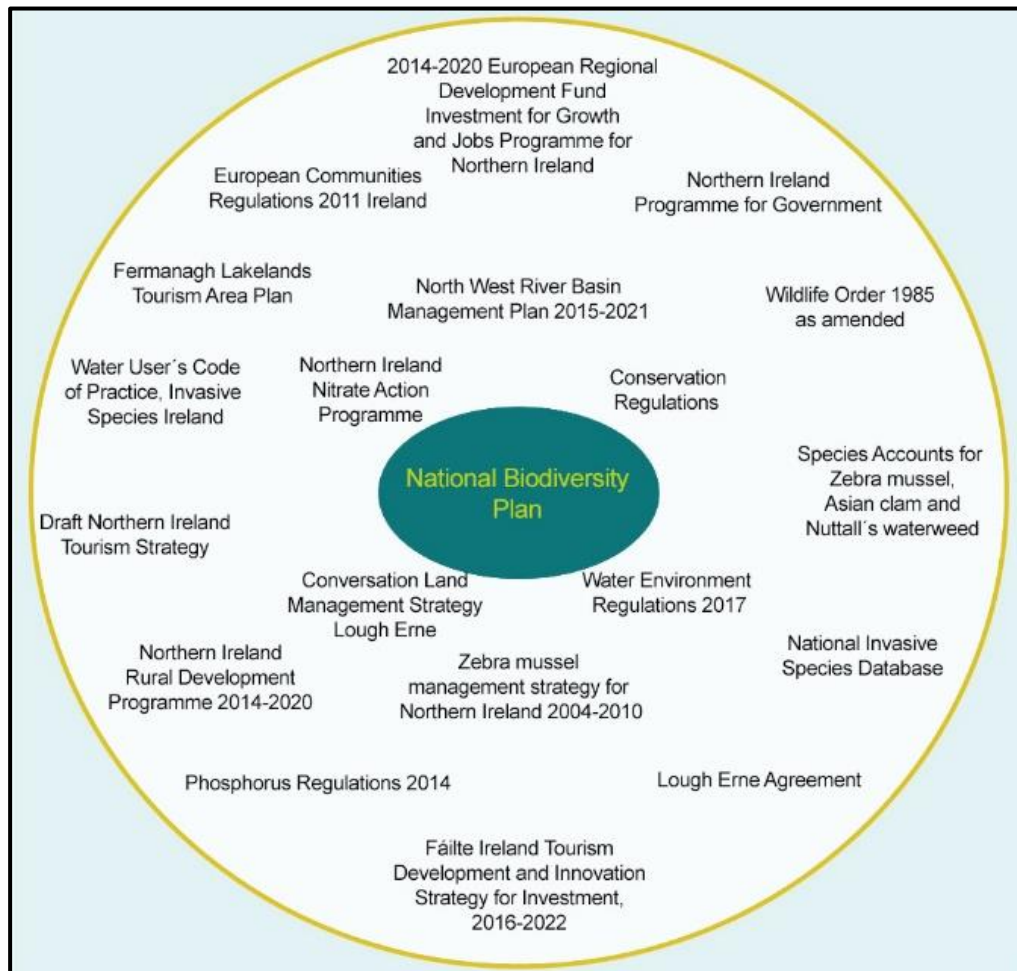


Figure 1: The complex policy framework surrounding the protection of aquatic biodiversity in the Lough Erne.

More information

This executive summary is one of a series of policy analyses within the “Policy Orientation” Work Package (WP2) within the AQUACROSS project, which identifies and explores how specific features of the existing nature, water, and marine policies can be coordinated in an integrated framework that specifically addresses the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy targets. For more information on the AQUACROSS bottom-up policy review, and other previous work done within AQUACROSS on Policy Orientation” WP, see the following documents and publications:

- ▶ [Deliverable 2.1 Synergies and Differences Between Biodiversity, Nature, Water and Marine Environment EU Policies](#)
- ▶ [Deliverable 2.1 Synergies and Differences Between Biodiversity, Nature, Water and Marine Environment EU Policies Executive Summary](#)
- ▶ [Deliverable 2.2: Review and analysis of policy data, information requirements, and lessons learnt in the context of aquatic systems](#)
- ▶ [Rouillard, J., Lago, M., Abhold, K. et al. \(2017\) "Protecting aquatic biodiversity in Europe: How much do EU environmental policies support ecosystem-based management?"](#)
- ▶ [Rouillard, J., Lago, M., Abhold, K. et al. \(2018\) "Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity across the Freshwater, Coastal and Marine Realms: Is the existing EU policy framework fit for purpose?"](#)
- ▶ [Röschel, L. \(2018\). AQUACROSS Final Conference presentation: AQUACROSS Policy Review, Lessons learnt from top down and bottom up analysis](#)

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