# Blue-green algae makes an alarming return to Lough Neagh



Blue-green algae has made a significant return to Lough Neagh, with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) confirming the first cases of 2025. This alarming development follows a trend observed during the last two summers, when noxious blooms of the algae spread across large areas of the UK’s largest freshwater lake by surface area. The presence of blue-green algae has not only affected Lough Neagh but has also impacted other local waterways and beaches.

The NIEA verified two reports of algae blooms on April 10 and 11 at Traad Point and Kinturk (Curran’s Quay). These incidents came after earlier reports emerged from other bodies of water, including Martray Lough, Ballygawley, and Ballysaggart Lough in Dungannon.

In light of these developments, Environment Minister Andrew Muir had previously indicated that he anticipated the return of the algae this year. A spokesperson for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) remarked, “Minister Muir is on record a number of times saying that there are no quick fixes, with problems decades in the making and decades in the fixing.” The spokesperson noted that the appearance of algae blooms this year should not come as a surprise, particularly given the favourable weather conditions.

The potential severity and scale of the problem this summer will hinge on several factors, with ongoing efforts to address the issue through the Lough Neagh Action Plan. Minister Muir expressed a commitment to improving water quality, recognising that this will require consistent long-term efforts. He stated, “significant work is already under way to tackle the nutrient overload in our rivers, lakes and loughs,” and emphasised the need for tough decisions to address the underlying issues contributing to the environmental crisis.

Lough Neagh is a crucial water source, supplying approximately 40% of Northern Ireland's drinking water, while also supporting a vital eel-fishing industry. The primary contributors to the blue-green algae blooms have been identified as nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from agricultural fertilisers and wastewater treatment facilities. The introduction of the invasive zebra mussel species has further exacerbated the situation, as these mussels have clarified water, enabling more sunlight to nurture algal growth. Additionally, rising water temperatures linked to climate change are believed to have intensified the problem.

In response to the ongoing environmental crisis at the lough, the Stormont Executive launched an action plan last year aimed at mitigating the issue. Mr Muir reiterated the importance of combatting blue-green algae, highlighting that spring should evoke renewal and not the distressing news associated with algae growth.

The DAERA has encouraged the public to play a role in monitoring the situation by reporting suspected algae blooms. Residents can use the Bloomin’ Algae App or send an email to emergency-pollution@daera-ni.gov.uk, ideally including a photo and details of the bloom's location. The NIEA remains vigilant, tracking instances of blue-green algae and analysing any significant increases in bloom activity as the summer progresses.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://user.eumetsat.int/resources/case-studies/loch-neagh-algal-bloom> - This URL corroborates the presence of algal blooms in Lough Neagh, specifically highlighting the recurring issue in recent years such as in Summer 2023.
* <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/suppliers-identified-find-possible-solutions-blue-green-algae-0> - This URL supports the ongoing efforts by the Northern Ireland government to address blue-green algae through initiatives like the Lough Neagh Action Plan and the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI).
* <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk> - The DAERA website provides resources and information on addressing environmental issues, including monitoring and reporting algae blooms in Lough Neagh.
* <https://www.deccawater.com> - While not specifically mentioned, general information on water treatment and environmental management can be related to efforts aimed at reducing nutrient runoff contributing to algae blooms.
* <https://www.invasivespeciesireland.ie/species/zebra-mussel> - This URL details the invasive zebra mussel species, which is mentioned as a factor exacerbating algae growth by clarifying water and allowing more sunlight penetration.