# Campaigners warn of worsening blue-green algae threats to Lough Neagh as warm summer looms



Campaigners in Northern Ireland are expressing significant concern over the potential escalation of blue-green algae problems at Lough Neagh, particularly as the region anticipates a warm, dry summer. Lough Neagh is a vital water source, supplying approximately 40% of the region's drinking water. In recent years, increasing temperatures coupled with fertiliser runoff have created ideal conditions for algal blooms, which pose serious risks to the quality of drinking water.

Following a notably warm and dry April, algae has already begun to appear in the lough. Conor MacNiocaill, a representative from the Save Lough Neagh campaign, conveyed this urgency to The Irish News, stating, "This year, there’s a real sense of dread, especially in the Lough shore communities. Last year, our tap water was contaminated for several months." He elaborated that the current conditions have raised concerns about the algae situation worsening as the warmer season progresses. “It’s too early for the thick summer blooms, but it’s clearly starting,” he noted, emphasising the visibility of algae along the shore.

The previous summer was particularly problematic for residents in mid-Ulster, who experienced significant difficulties in accessing safe drinking water due to the contamination of the lough. Mr MacNiocaill described the effects of the algae bloom as "terrifying," pointing to alarming reports, including images of baby bottles with blue-green sediment at the bottom. He expressed worries about the unknown long-term health impacts of consuming this contaminated water.

In response to the ongoing environmental crisis at Lough Neagh, the Stormont Executive had launched an action plan last year. However, MacNiocaill and other campaigners feel that the steps taken are insufficient. He articulated a need for more robust regulation surrounding pollution, highlighting issues such as slurry and chemical spills. He asserted that "slurry is often sprayed outside of the legal season, even on wet days when it can’t be absorbed, and there’s been no serious consequence for this."

The viewpoint of Mr MacNiocaill is echoed by Declan Allison, a spokesperson for Friends of the Earth NI. He indicated that the government’s proposals do not adequately address the root issues contributing to the algae problem. “The single most likely thing to work, stopping the nutrients getting into the loch in the first place, is the thing that’s going to be most effective, and they’re not the things that are really being suggested,” he told The Irish News. He pointed out that reliance on education and voluntary measures from farmers and NI Water has not yielded successful results in the past.

Mr Allison highlighted a perceived lack of political will to implement more effective solutions, suggesting that other priorities overshadow environmental concerns. He argued that the agricultural sector wields substantial political influence, which often leads to policy decisions that favour farming over environmental protection. Although he acknowledged the Lough Neagh action plan as a step in the right direction, he reiterated that the most impactful solutions remain largely unaddressed by current strategies.

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

## References

* <https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2024/01/07/la-pollution-du-lough-neagh-concentre-des-maux-de-l-irlande-du-nord_6209493_3244.html> - This article discusses the significant pollution crisis at Lough Neagh in 2023, highlighting the proliferation of toxic blue-green algae and its impact on water quality, wildlife, and human health. It attributes the pollution primarily to intensive agricultural practices and inadequate environmental regulation in Northern Ireland.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/08/13/news/drinking_water_quality_not_affected_by_widespread_toxic_algae_blooms_ni_water-3526852/> - This report from August 2023 states that Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) confirmed that the widespread toxic blue-green algae blooms in Lough Neagh did not affect the quality of drinking water, assuring the public of its safety despite the algae presence.
* <https://www.rte.ie/news/ulster/2023/0928/1407917-lough-neagh-meeting/> - An environmental scientist warns that it could take up to 20 years to halt outbreaks of toxic blue-green algae in Lough Neagh, emphasizing the severity of the pollution and its long-term impact on the lake's ecosystem and water quality.
* <https://www.qub.ac.uk/News/Allnews/2024/queens-research-lough-neagh-public-risk.html> - Research from Queen's University Belfast details the public health risks associated with harmful algal blooms in Lough Neagh, identifying the primary sources of contamination as agricultural runoff and human wastewater discharge.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/09/21/news/168_confirmed_reports_of_blue-green_algae_across_northern_ireland_say_officials-3633385/> - This article reports that, as of September 14, 2023, there were 168 confirmed reports of blue-green algae across 65 different locations in Northern Ireland, with the majority around Lough Neagh, highlighting the widespread nature of the problem.
* <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/lough-neagh-report-and-action-plan> - The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) published a report and action plan in July 2024 addressing the blue-green algae issue in Lough Neagh, outlining strategies to improve water quality and mitigate pollution sources.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/lough-neagh-water-dread-as-hot-dry-weather-could-spark-summer-algae-misery-6R6J62KBZ5BSHPPWWGEDJQBY2A/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data