# Lough Neagh eel fishing suspended amid intensifying pollution crisis and political deadlock



The alarming state of Lough Neagh has emerged as a defining issue for Northern Ireland, with its ecological degradation causing significant concern among local communities and environmental advocates alike. Recent developments have amplified these worries, as the Lough Neagh Fishermen’s Co-operative Society was forced to suspend eel fishing for the first time in recorded history. This drastic measure underscores the dire conditions under which the local fishing community operates, prompting urgent calls for action from various quarters.

While fishing has been a tradition in Lough Neagh for nearly 5,000 years, recent reports indicate that the legendary eels have been impacted by heightened pollution levels. The primary culprits behind this environmental crisis are agricultural runoff, especially from slurry, alongside wastewater management failures. These factors have led to extensive algal blooms, which pose both health risks and severe threats to aquatic biodiversity. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has acknowledged that while algal blooms can occur naturally, current nutrient oversaturation notably exacerbates the situation, resulting in a visual and ecological disaster.

Adding to the complexity of the scenario, Minister for Agriculture Andrew Muir is currently consulting on the Nutrients Action Programme aimed at improving water quality in Lough Neagh. His proactive reforms, aligned with the broader governmental agenda focused on environmental protection, remain contentious. Today, a motion put forth by three Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) members expresses alarm over Muir’s proposed framework, calling for an immediate withdrawal of the policy’s public consultation. One member of the DUP, Michelle McIlveen, cited concerns that such proposals could impede local agricultural practices, framing the debate as a clash not merely of policy preferences but of broader political strategy. This ongoing discord threatens to undermine cooperative environmental actions at a time when unity is crucial.

The urgency of addressing Lough Neagh's crisis is further emphasised by ongoing discussions among environmental groups and other political entities, advocating for the establishment of a task force dedicated to remediating the pollution. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) has taken a particularly proactive stance, urging the recall of the Northern Ireland Assembly to deliberate on both immediate and long-term action plans. Their insistence reflects a growing consensus that only comprehensive collaborative measures can effectively mitigate the damage done to this essential waterway.

Similarly, studies have revealed a staggering statistic: over 2,000 pollution incidents have been recorded in Lough Neagh over the past seven years, primarily linked to agricultural practices and insufficient wastewater treatment protocols. Such revelations have drawn ire from local activists, who stress that without systemic reforms, the ongoing ecological degradation will continue unabated.

In light of the dire situation, the urgency for change within the Northern Ireland Assembly is palpable. Calls for a dedicated independent Environmental Protection Agency echo the sentiments of those advocating for an immediate and concerted response to manage Lough Neagh's ecological health. With each passing day, the discord among political factions only intensifies the existential threat faced by this crucial water body and the communities that rely upon it.

For true resolution to occur, a shift in perspective is essential. Political fragmentation has hindered meaningful environmental progress, and stakeholders must recognise that the degradation of Lough Neagh is not merely a local issue but one that resonates with broader ecological and social ramifications. Until a cooperative approach is embraced, Lough Neagh remains poised at the precipice of potential collapse, with local fishermen and the historic legacy of this iconic lake hanging in the balance.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/23/lough-neagh-dying-in-plain-sight-say-campaigners-due-to-vast-algal-blooms)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/23/lough-neagh-dying-in-plain-sight-say-campaigners-due-to-vast-algal-blooms), [[6]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/08/11/news/sludge-like_toxic_algae_could_wash_up_on_any_shore_on_lough_neagh_agriculture_officials_warn-3524129/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/), [[3]](https://www.rte.ie/news/2023/0919/1406216-call-for-taskforce-to-deal-with-lough-neagh-pollution/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/), [[3]](https://www.rte.ie/news/2023/0919/1406216-call-for-taskforce-to-deal-with-lough-neagh-pollution/), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-08-20/revealed-the-thousands-of-pollution-incidents-in-lough-neagh)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cxe9zpzzk5ro)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-08-20/revealed-the-thousands-of-pollution-incidents-in-lough-neagh), [[6]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/08/11/news/sludge-like_toxic_algae_could_wash_up_on_any_shore_on_lough_neagh_agriculture_officials_warn-3524129/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/22/pollution-plan-must-cut-intensive-farming-for-lough-neagh-to-survive)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/political-pollution-is-blocking-the-clean-up-of-lough-neagh-the-irish-news-view-7SPXVZDEIFHMBAFHXPA5WLXQBU/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/23/lough-neagh-dying-in-plain-sight-say-campaigners-due-to-vast-algal-blooms> - In August 2023, campaigners highlighted the severe ecological crisis in Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland's largest freshwater lake, due to extensive algal blooms. These blooms, primarily caused by excessive nutrients from agricultural runoff and wastewater, have led to the lake's deterioration. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) acknowledged the issue, noting that algal blooms occur naturally but are exacerbated by excess nutrients. The situation has raised concerns about the lake's health and the effectiveness of current environmental management strategies.
3. <https://www.rte.ie/news/2023/0919/1406216-call-for-taskforce-to-deal-with-lough-neagh-pollution/> - In September 2023, environmental groups and political parties in Northern Ireland called for the establishment of a task force to address the pollution crisis in Lough Neagh. The pollution, attributed to agricultural runoff, sewage, and invasive species, has led to harmful algal blooms affecting the lake. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) urged the recall of the Northern Ireland Assembly to discuss the crisis and implement both short-term mitigation and long-term recovery strategies.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cxe9zpzzk5ro> - In May 2024, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed a motion declaring an 'ecological and biodiversity crisis' in Lough Neagh. The motion, tabled by the SDLP, highlighted the severe environmental degradation of the lake due to factors like algal blooms and pollution. It also called for the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency, as outlined in the New Decade, New Approach agreement, to address environmental issues more effectively.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-08-20/revealed-the-thousands-of-pollution-incidents-in-lough-neagh> - In August 2024, it was revealed that Lough Neagh had experienced over 2,000 pollution incidents in seven years. The pollution, primarily from agricultural runoff, wastewater treatment works, and invasive species, has led to harmful algal blooms affecting the lake. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) expressed disappointment over the number of incidents and emphasized the need for proactive measures to prevent further pollution.
6. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/08/11/news/sludge-like_toxic_algae_could_wash_up_on_any_shore_on_lough_neagh_agriculture_officials_warn-3524129/> - In August 2023, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) confirmed the presence of blue-green algal blooms at multiple locations within Lough Neagh. The algae, which can produce a foul odour, are a result of pollution from agricultural runoff and wastewater. DAERA officials warned that the algae could wash up on any part of the shoreline, posing risks to both the environment and public health.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/22/pollution-plan-must-cut-intensive-farming-for-lough-neagh-to-survive> - In July 2024, an action plan was agreed upon to address the pollution in Lough Neagh. The plan includes measures to reduce pollution from intensive farming, improve wastewater treatment, and monitor water quality. However, 17 of the plan's 37 measures could not be implemented prior to the summer break due to opposition from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), particularly concerning proposals on farming and environmental penalties.