

# Bathing Water Expert Group

Year-round swimming in  
Ireland - survey results



Photo:  
**Doire Fhionáin,**  
(Derrynane),  
Co. Kerry.



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Year-round swimming in Ireland - survey results



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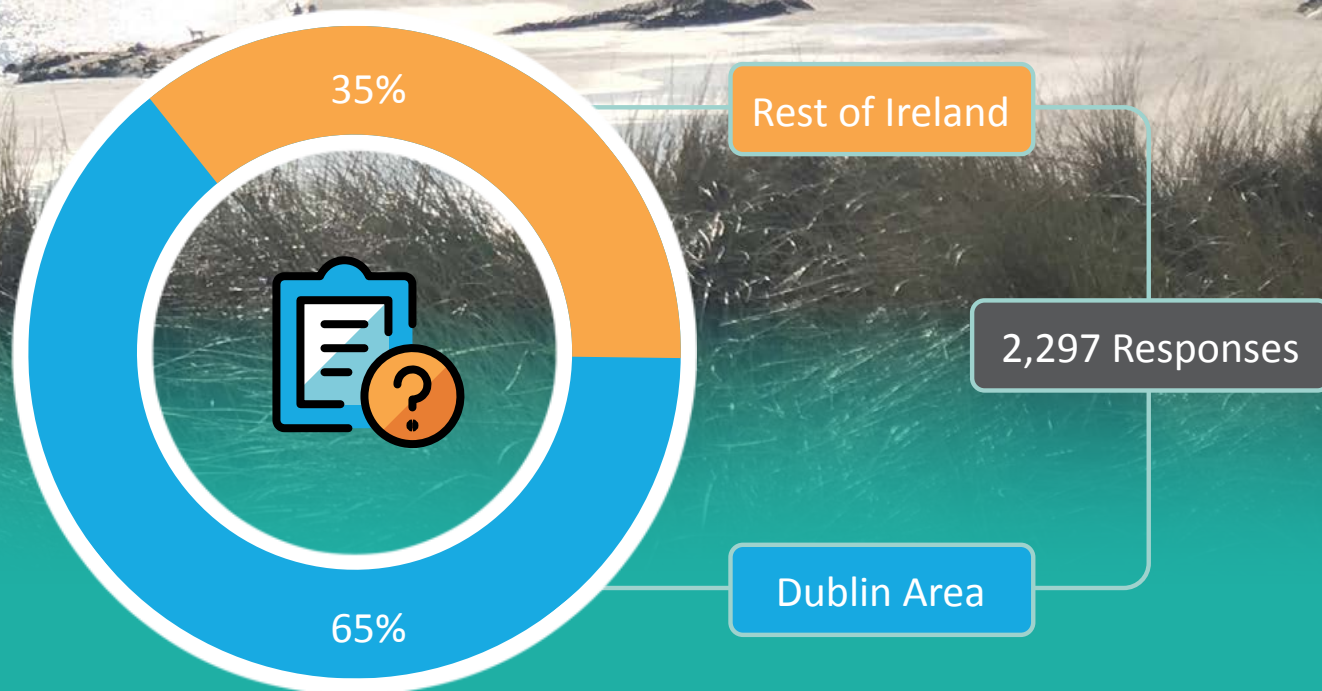




# Introduction

The National Bathing Waters Public Survey was written by the Bathing Water Expert Group who operate under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and advise on how to implement the bathing water directive in Ireland.

Under the bathing water directive, designated bathing waters are monitored to help protect swimmer's health during the designated bathing season, which runs from 1 June to 15 September. The last two years has seen significant growth in the numbers of people swimming all year round, so the bathing water expert group issued a survey to help inform potential options for protecting swimmer's health



- The survey collected information on swimmers' behaviors and attitudes, to obtain a better understanding of how to support out-of-season swimmers. Covid-19 had seen a huge surge of interest in year-round swimming due to restricted travel, health & fitness and the need for social contact.
- The survey was open for 3 weeks from 20 April 2022 to 6 May 2022. The survey consisted of 25 questions, a mix of drop down and free text boxes.
- There were 2297 responses. Of these, 65% were in the greater Dublin area and 35% across the rest of the country.
- Whilst sea swimming was most popular, there were significant numbers of people using lakes and rivers.

# Who?

Photo:  
Sandy Cove  
Beach,  
Co. Dublin



98%

of respondents were involved in  
out of season swimming



17%

swim on their own, 50% with  
friends and family, and 29% as a  
combination of the above.

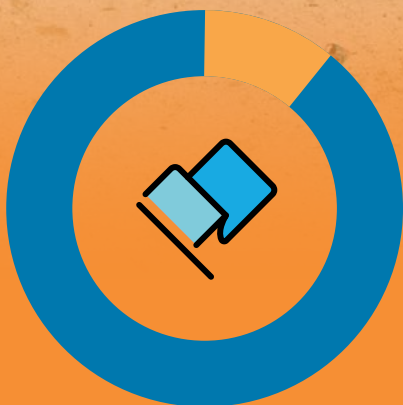


50%

In all, half of all bathers estimated  
that between 10-50 people used  
the same location and 35% said  
there were more than 50.



# When & Where?



81%

Approximately 81% of swimmers swam at waters that were either Designated Bathing Waters (71%) or Other Monitored Waters (10%), although they were not all aware of this.



70%

70% of swimmers use a single location and usually swim when the tide conditions are favorable.



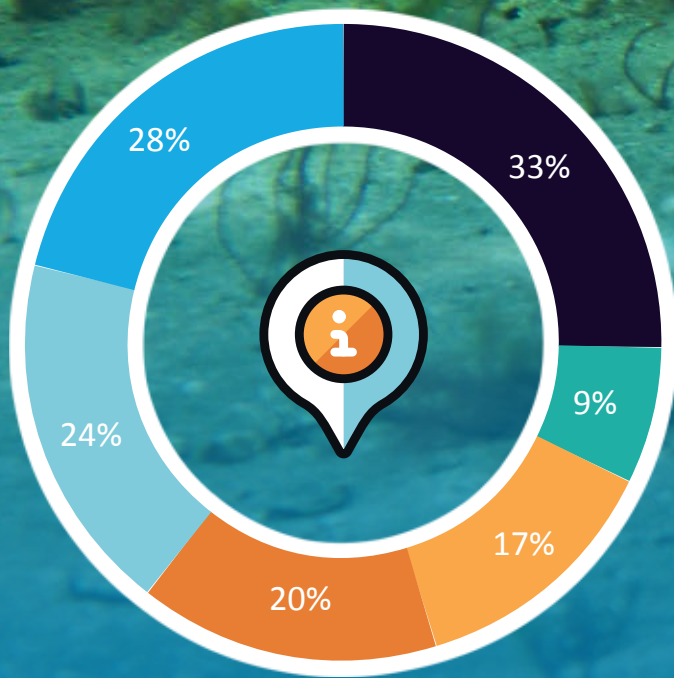
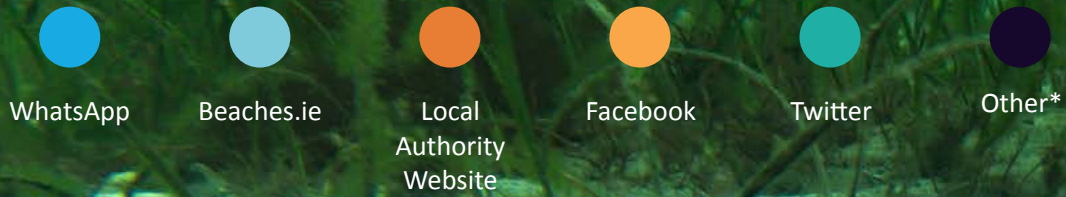
33%

One in three said they swam every day whilst over half said they swam at least once a week.

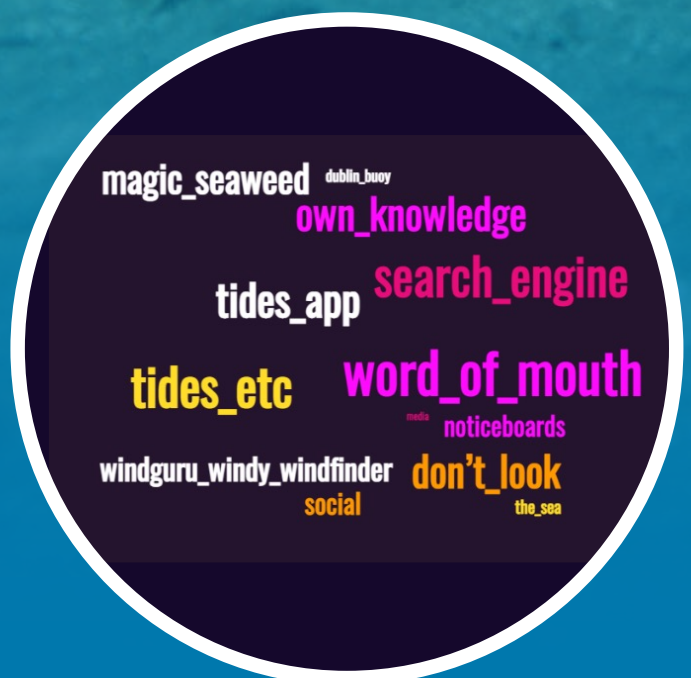


# Information

Swimmers use different sources to access information about where they swim:



The most common 'other' sources of information includes:





## We asked

How they'd like to see websites improved, some of the responses included;

*App/  
Mobile  
friendly*

*Weather/water  
temperature/  
tides info*

*Water quality  
information*

*More  
locations/  
more location  
specific*

*Year round  
information*

*Easier/  
clearer*

*More up  
to date*



Beaches.ie is a mobile friendly website operated by the EPA and much of the information requested by people in the survey is available for designated bathing waters.

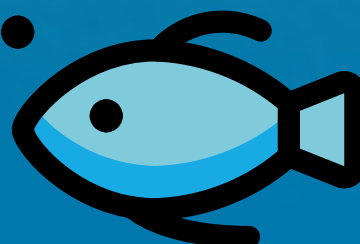
This includes;

- Information on bathing water quality, including year-round where available (currently for some bathing waters in the Dublin City, and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown council areas).
- Weather forecasts
- Tide information
- Amenities including beach wheelchairs

The EPA, and its partners, are always looking for ways to improve beaches.ie

Some issues under consideration include;

- Increased publicity to inform swimmers of the website
- Other channels to issue alerts on issues at each bathing water
- Increasing the number of waters covered





# How do people choose where to swim?

The main factors people chose where to swim were ranked in order of their preferences based on a drop-down list. The top 5 were;



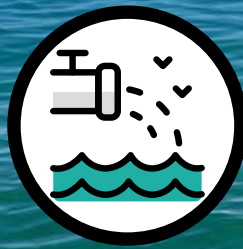
1

Close proximity to home or work



2

Easy access to water



3

Water quality



4

Deep water close-in

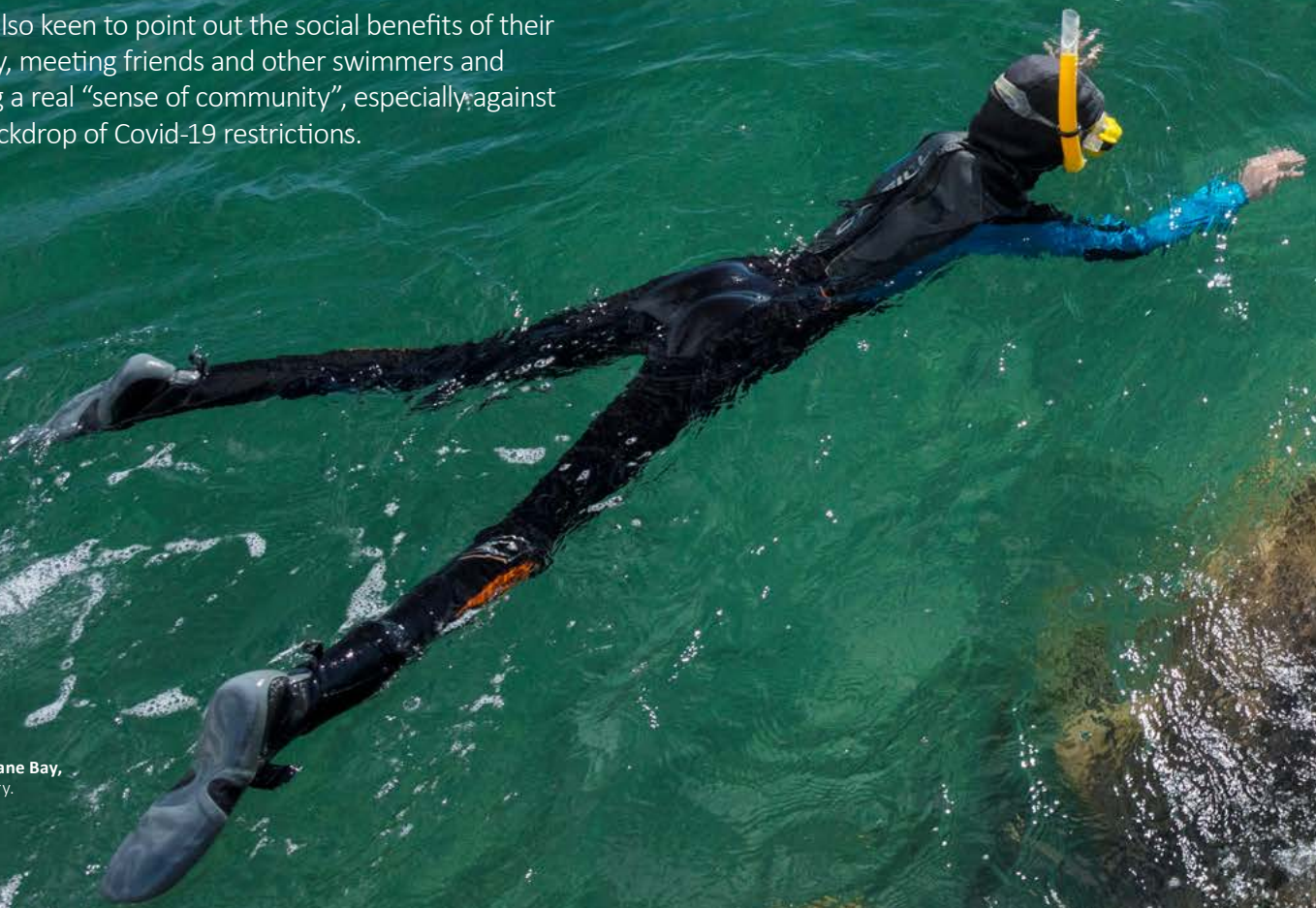


5


Good parking

Swimmers also placed a high priority on safety, namely the presence of other swimmers in the area. Swimmers were also keen to point out the social benefits of their activity, meeting friends and other swimmers and getting a real “sense of community”, especially against the backdrop of Covid-19 restrictions.

Photo:  
Derrynane Bay,  
Co. Kerry.







*I have an understanding of the impacts on bathing waters and use a common sense approach when deciding to swim or not*

*We live in a major capital city. The water quality should not be impacted by heavy rain*

*Please monitor and publish water quality from Sep to May at all swimming locations*







## Quality and Safety

The majority (81%) of swimmers said they considered water quality when deciding where, and if, to swim. Generally, swimmers were conscious of the potential risks to water quality after heavy rain.

Over 93% considered water safety issues with many swimmers saying that they relied on their own local knowledge to keep them safe, along with the importance of swimming with others within their capabilities. Some swimmers said they felt more lifeguards were required, along with protection from jet skis etc.



## What facilities would swimmers like to see?

There was a wide range of views represented, but generally swimmers wanted toilets, a freshwater tap, information boards & simple changing facilities, possibly with a shower, that were maintained and open year-round at popular locations.

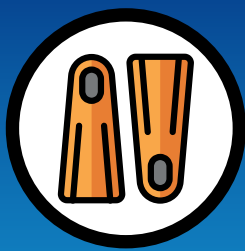
Solar showers, such as those located at Dollymount, were seen as good. Some private operators were providing mobile saunas and similar facilities which were proving popular.

Access issues for swimmers with reduced mobility was raised as well as safety equipment, and lighting.

Bike stands was another common thread as was a desire for more up-to-date monitoring results for water quality. A significant number of respondents wanted less or no facilities as they preferred the unspoiled natural enjoyment of their swimming spot.







## Next steps

The National Bathing Water Expert Group would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for taking the time to fill out the survey. We will use the information collated in this survey when considering how best to protect swimmers' health outside the bathing season and to help all stakeholders involved understand the issues swimmers are concerned about.



## About the Bathing Water Expert Group

The BWEG is made up of representatives from the major stakeholders concerned with bathing water management i.e.: the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Environmental Protection Agency; the Health Service Executive; the County and City Management Association; An Taisce; Coastwatch Ireland; Water Safety Ireland; and Irish Water.

The key functions of the expert group include, but are not limited to, providing advice regarding the implementation of the Bathing Water Directive in Ireland and developing guidance for its implementation.







Photo:  
**Barleycove Beach,**  
Co. Cork.

