

RIVER CLASSIFICATION



fact file



NRA

*National Rivers Authority
North West Region*

All rivers in England and Wales are classed according to their quality and their ability to support life.

Being able to measure the quality of water is vital as it helps the National Rivers Authority identify the most polluted watercourses and take action to improve them and also to draw up plans to protect rivers with good water quality.

The key to river water quality is as follows:

Class 1

These rivers are of good quality. The water can be used for drinking after treatment and the rivers are clean enough for fish like salmon and trout to live in.

Class 2

Rivers in this class are of fair quality. The waters can be used for drinking after treatment. Coarse fish like perch, roach, bream and chub can survive in these rivers.



Class 3

These rivers are poor quality. They are too polluted to support large fish populations but many small animals can live in them. The water can be used by industry for various processes but not for drinking.

Class 4

These rivers are badly polluted. There is little or no oxygen in the water. Some small invertebrates, like blood-worm can survive in them, but no fish.

Surveys of river water quality in England and Wales are carried out every five years.

The last survey, the results of which were published in 1990, showed that in the North West, 59% of the region's 5,323km of rivers were Class 1, 20% were Class 2, 16% were Class 3 and 5% were Class 4.

Over the next few years, the Secretary of State for the Environment, with the guidance of the NRA, plans set Water Quality objectives for all rivers, canals, lakes, estuaries, coastal and underground waters in England and Wales.

These objectives relate to the uses of particular waters and individual water quality standards will be set to be achieved by a specific date.

Once set, the NRA will have a duty to see that the objectives are met and will use its legal powers to do this by improving standards for effluent discharges.

For further information on water quality or the plans to introduce Water Quality Objectives, contact the Public Relations Department on 0925 53999.



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