

**\*\*\* PRESS RELEASE \*\*\***

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## **Awards for best beaches and marinas in Northern Ireland**

**Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful have announced 25 of the best beaches and marinas at their annual beach and marina awards. The event also highlighted the work of the EU SWIM project on bathing water quality monitoring**

Beach and Marina Operators received 13 national and 12 international awards for excellence in facilities, environmental management, environmental education, accessibility and water quality.

The internationally renowned Blue Flag will be flown at 8 of Northern Ireland's beaches and 4 marinas during the 2019 season. The Blue Flag award is certified by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and has 45 participating countries. In 2019 Blue Flags have been awarded to 4,560 beaches, marinas and boats worldwide. Beach and marina operators receiving a Blue Flag are demonstrating their commitment to protecting the coastal environment, excellent water quality, safety, and providing access for all. Fun educational activities are also available at these sites.

The Seaside Award is the national standard for beaches across the UK. This programme ensures visitors of a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed beach with the facilities provided being appropriate for the location of the beach. Twelve beaches have received the Seaside Award in 2019 and they can be identified by the Seaside Award Flag or Plaque.

The Blue Flag and Seaside Awards may only be flown if all the criteria are successfully met and maintained throughout the summer season.

One of Northern Ireland's beaches, Helens Bay, received the Green Coast Award, which recognises an agreement between the operator and the local community to protect and promote a natural beach environment rather than developing visitor infrastructure. Green Coast Award beaches can also be found in the Republic of Ireland and in Wales, but due to their more natural state, may not be flying a flag.

Northern Ireland's coastline has some iconic sights, and many of our award winning beaches include or are next to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty with specially protected habitats and species forming a large part of the experience visitors enjoy. The aim of these award programmes is to improve the connection between people and their surroundings by encouraging them to spend more time in and learn more about their coastal environment. Most award winning beaches and marinas provide information points to showcase the best of Northern Ireland's wildlife and provide visitors with information on how they can enjoy these natural wonders without disturbing or damaging them.

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Information on all the award winning beaches and marinas can be found at [www.beachni.com](http://www.beachni.com) or by picking up an award winning beaches and marinas leaflet from your nearest Tourist Information Centre.

The awards were presented on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019, in time for the bathing season, which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> June until the 15<sup>th</sup> September each year. The awards event also provided an update on the work of the EU SWIM Project on bathing water quality monitoring.

**Ian Humphreys, Chief Executive of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, said** “For your health, for good old fashioned ‘screen free’ fun and for helping us realise the wonder of our natural environment, it is hard to beat a visit to our coast or lough shores. Behind every enjoyable experience is a small team of committed beach and marina operators who toil year round to keep these places in pristine condition. These awards are one way of recognising their ongoing dedication and of course advertising the best very places to take a holiday.”

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful is also one of the partners of the EU SWIM Project (System for Bathing Water Quality Monitoring). It is a cross-border research project funded by the INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, which is in the final stages of developing a system for live bathing water monitoring. The EU SWIM Project combines the expertise of lead partner University College Dublin and partners, Agri-Food Bioscience Institute and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The development of a bathing water quality prediction model uses the data collected by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, (DAERA) Marine and Fisheries Division and directly links into software to support the collection of data and delivery of information to the public.

**Ian Humphreys added:**

“The addition of the EU SWIM bathing water quality app will complement the Beach and Marina awards by ensuring the public are informed of the water quality status at the nine beaches being monitored across Northern Ireland and the Republic. The app that is being developed will provide peace of mind to bathers in the future that the water is of sufficient quality before they visit the beach. The app will be refined during the 2019 season.”

**DAERA** currently monitors 26 identified bathing water sites across Northern Ireland on a weekly basis during the bathing season and is also contributing to the EU SWIM Project.

**David Small Deputy Secretary (Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group) commented:**

“I am delighted that so many of Northern Ireland’s beaches have received the coveted Blue Flag, Seaside and Green Coast Awards. These awards and the recognition that our first-class marinas have received, are testament to the hard work and dedication of those who manage our beaches and marinas. These outstanding awards let people around the world know that Northern Ireland is not only open for business but that our beaches, marinas and coastline are great destinations; clean, healthy and safe to enjoy, and supporting our vision of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.”

– ENDS –

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**Notes to editors**

**For reference:**

**Newry, Mourne and Down District Council**

**Blue Flag**

1. Cranfield West Beach
2. Murlough Beach
3. Tyrella Beach

**Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council**

**Blue Flag**

4. Benone Beach
5. Downhill Beach
6. West Strand
7. Whiterocks Beach
8. Ballycastle Marina

**Seaside Award**

9. Ballycastle Beach
10. Castlerock Beach
11. Portrush East Strand
12. Waterfoot Beach

**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

**Seaside Award**

13. Ballywalter Beach
14. Groomsport Beach
15. Millisle Beach
16. Cloughey Beach

**Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)**

**Seaside Award**

17. Crawfordsburn Beach

**Green Coast Award**

18. Helen's Bay Beach

**Mid and East Antrim Borough Council**

**Blue Flag**

19. Carrickfergus Marina

**Seaside Award**

20. Ballygally Beach
21. Brown's Bay

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22. Carnlough Beach

**Mid Ulster District Council**

**Blue Flag**

23. Ballyronan Marina

**National Trust**

**Blue Flag**

24. Portstewart Strand

**Quay Marinas Limited**

**Blue Flag**

25. Bangor Marina

**Seaside Award – 12**

**Blue Flag – 8 beaches 4 Marinas**

**Green Coast - 1**

To speak to a press spokesperson, please contact;

- Programme Coordinator Jamie Miller 077 2526 2248
- Local Environmental Quality Manager Jade Berman 077 9664 7012

**Further Information:**

## **Awards for Beaches and Marinas**

A Blue Flag is a symbol of excellence worldwide. Beaches and marinas with a Blue Flag are demonstrating their commitment to protecting the coastal environment, excellent water quality, safety, and access for all. You will often find activities and events happening on Blue Flag sites, as environmental education is an important part of the award criteria. The beaches and marinas are inspected during the season and may only fly the Blue Flag if all the criteria are successfully met and maintained.

The Seaside Award is the national standard for beaches across the UK. The award ensures visitors are guaranteed to find a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed coastal environment with varied levels of facilities provided depending on the location of the beach. Seaside Award beaches are likely to have facilities such as toilets and parking.

Green Coast recognises beaches where the local community has made a commitment to protecting and promoting the environment rather than developing visitor infrastructure. As such this award aims to recognise more rural, natural beaches that retain their unspoilt character.

## **Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful**

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful is a charity working towards the vision of a cleaner, greener Northern Ireland by running environmental education programmes and awareness raising campaigns, increasing volunteering opportunities and reporting on local environmental quality. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful runs a range of awareness raising and volunteering campaigns including the BIG Spring Clean and the Clean Coast programme as well as local environmental quality programmes such as international Eco-Schools and Blue Flag programmes, the Seaside Award, Borough Cleanliness Surveys and Live Here Love Here Green Business Awards. For more information, visit [www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org](http://www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org) or view our [Media Kit](#) here.

For detailed information on Blue Flag or Seaside Awards, the assessment criteria, water quality, the beaches receiving the awards and other information please contact Jamie Miller, Certifications Coordinator for Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful at [Jamie.miller@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org](mailto:Jamie.miller@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org)

## **EU SWIM Project**

The project combines the expertise of lead partner University College Dublin (UCD) and Northern Irish project partners Agri-Food Bioscience Institute (AFBI) and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB). The project is part-funded by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in Ireland, this research takes place across sites in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The 2019 Bathing Season will be a trial period to test the model for real time bathing water predictions across the nine beaches and people will be able to download the app or check digital signage on the beaches. Visit <https://swimproject.eu/>

**There are currently 9 SWIM beaches:** Enniscrone (Co Sligo), Lady's Bay (Co Donegal), Castlerock (Co Antrim), Portrush - Curran (Co Antrim), Waterfoot (Co Antrim), Ballyholme (Co Down), Ballywalter (Co Down), Newcastle (Co Down) and Clogherhead (Co Louth). Some of which have a blue flag or Seaside Award status.

### **Project Funding:**

- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV

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and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.

- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The INTERREG VA Programme has a value of €283 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit [www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)

For information on the EU Swim project please contact Dr. Jade Berman, Local Environmental Quality & Business Development Manager for Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful at: [jade.berman@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org](mailto:jade.berman@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org)

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