

Fish in Rivers Factsheet

ERBD

River Tolka Catchment

Factsheet: 2025/06

The Tolka River Catchment is located within the Eastern River Basin District and covers an area of approximately 148km². The Tolka River flows in a south-easterly direction for approximately 32km from Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath towards Blanchardstown, before reaching the sea at Dublin Harbour. The River Tolka is joined by several tributaries, including the Castle, Pinkeen, and Claremont streams.

The geology of this catchment is mainly limestone, with land use consisting primarily of agriculture in the upper reaches. Urban and industrial development dominate the lower reaches in the Tolka catchment, where the river flows through the north side of Dublin City.

Inland Fisheries Ireland conducts annual nation-wide fish sampling surveys to assess and report the status of stocks in Ireland's rivers, lakes and transitional waters. This report presents the results of an electro-fishing (CEN 2003) survey carried out in the Tolka Catchment. Seven sites were surveyed between the 12th to 13th of August 2025.

The survey method included 10-minute timed Electro-Fishing (TEF₁₀). All TEF₁₀ fish count results were converted to minimum population estimates according to Matson *et al.* 2018.



Tolka River at Clonee Bridge (Site 2), Co. Meath.



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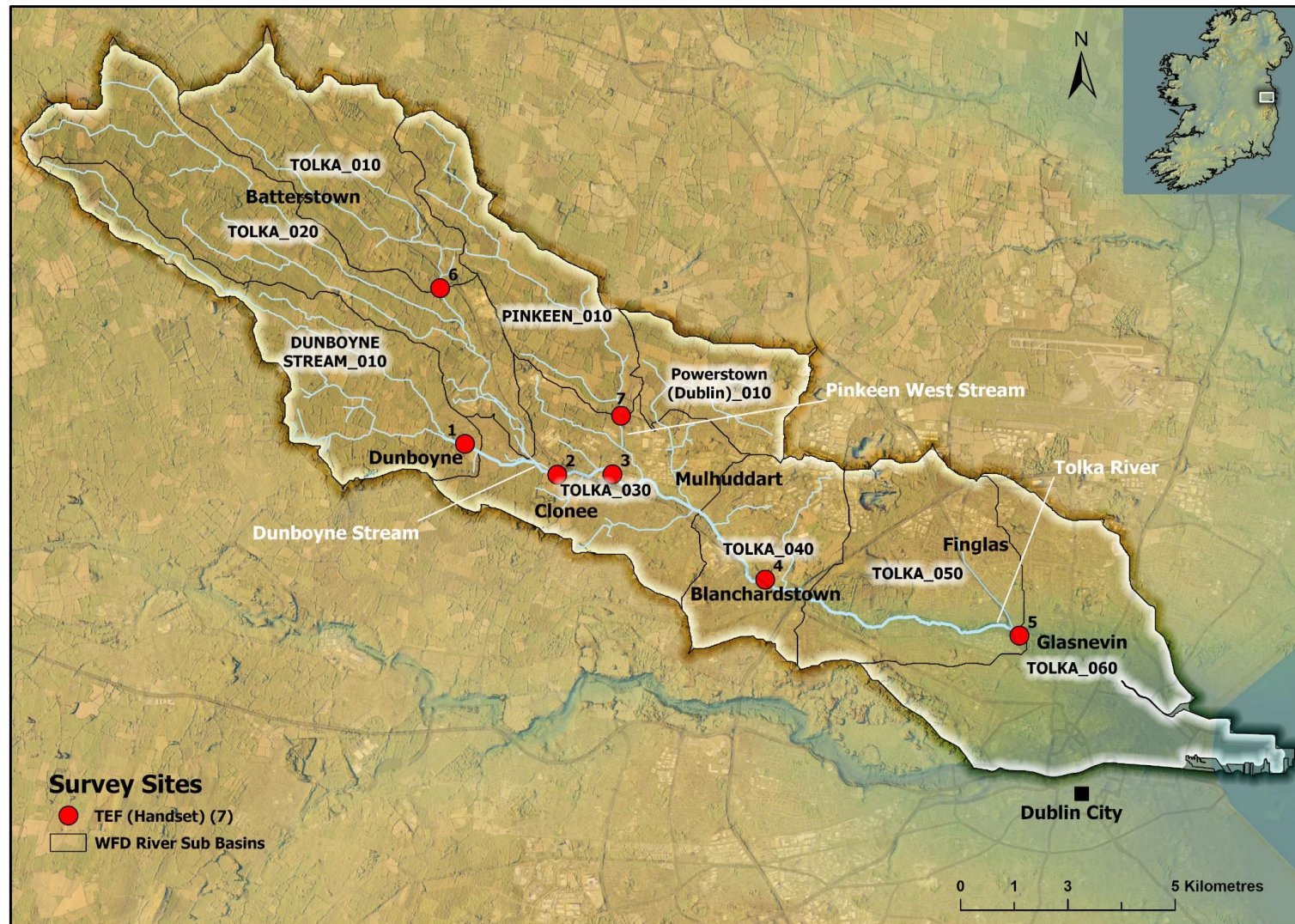


Figure 1. Location of electrofishing survey sites on the River Tolka Catchment, 2025. Sub-catchments and WFD River Sub-basins are also highlighted.

Table 1. Site survey details, River Tolka Catchment, 2025.

No.	WFD Sub-basin	River	Site	Method	WFD	Date
Tolka River Catchment						
1	DUNBOYNE STREAM_010	Dunboyne Stream	Dunboyne Bridge	TEF (Handset)	NO	12/08/2025
2	TOLKA_030	Tolka River	Clonee Bridge	TEF (Handset)	NO	12/08/2025
3	TOLKA_030	Tolka River	Damastown Road	TEF (Handset)	NO	13/08/2025
4	TOLKA_040	Tolka River	Mill Road	TEF (Handset)	NO	13/08/2025
5	TOLKA_050	Tolka River	Violet Hill Drive	TEF (Handset)	NO	13/08/2025
6	TOLKA_010	Tolka River	Black Bull Bridge	TEF (Handset)	NO	12/08/2025
7	PINKEEN_010	Tolka (Pinkeen West) River	Bridge South of Calliagawee	TEF (Handset)	NO	12/08/2025

Table 2. Minimum density estimates of fish (no. fish/m²), River Tolka Catchment, August 2025 (previous results are shown where applicable).

Tolka River Catchment								
Site no.	1		2		3		4	
Species	2017	2025	2017	2025	2017	2025	2017	2025
Brown trout	-	-	0.043	0.197	0.007	0.047	0.055	0.042
0+ brown trout	-	-	0.006	0.106	-	0.024	-	0.014
1+ & older brown trout	-	-	0.037	0.090	0.007	0.024	0.055	0.028
Salmon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.007
0+ salmon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1+ & older salmon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.007
Lamprey sp.	-	0.017	-	-	0.007	0.012	-	-
Minnow	0.174	0.079	0.184	1.138	0.199	0.437	0.106	0.293
Stone loach	-	-	0.062	0.164	0.007	0.035	0.017	0.014
Three-spined stickleback	0.132	0.157	0.102	0.098	-	0.018	-	0.166
All fish	0.307	0.253	0.391	1.597	0.220	0.550	0.179	0.522
Tolka River Catchment								
Site no.	5			6		7		
Species	2011	2017	2025	2017	2025	2011	2017	2025
Brown trout	-	0.008	0.146	0.024	-	-	-	0.048
0+ brown trout	-	-	0.035	-	-	-	-	-
1+ & older brown trout	-	0.008	0.111	0.024	-	-	-	0.048
Salmon	0.003	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
0+ salmon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1+ & older salmon	0.003	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
European eel	0.012	0.012	0.013	-	-	-	-	-
Lamprey sp.	0.021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Minnow	1.082	0.193	0.575	0.035	-	0.016	0.065	0.361
Nine-spined stickleback	-	-	-	-	-	0.049	-	-
Stone loach	0.003	0.060	0.084	-	-	-	-	0.024
Three-spined stickleback	0.303	0.012	0.027	0.130	0.187	0.942	0.136	0.337
All fish	1.423	0.285	0.845	0.189	0.187	1.006	0.201	0.771

Table 3. Salmonid % age class structure (where recorded), River Tolka Catchment, August 2025.

Species	Site No.	% of catch				
		0+	1+	2+	3+	4+
Brown trout	2	55	36	-	9	-
	3	50	50	-	-	-
	4	33	17	17	-	33
	5	25	63	6	-	6
	7	-	100	-	-	-
Salmon	4	-	-	100	-	-

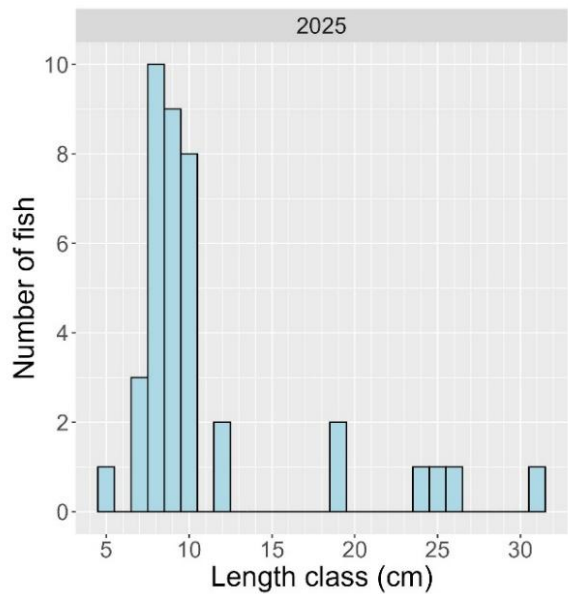


Figure 2. Length frequency distribution for brown trout (n = 39), River Tolka Catchment, 2025 (No. sites = 5)

Table 4. Fish ecological status, River Tolka Catchment, August 2025.

Site No.	2011	2017	2025
Tolka River catchment			
1		P	P
2		M	M
3		P	M
4		P	M
5	P	P	M
6		P	P
7	P	P	P

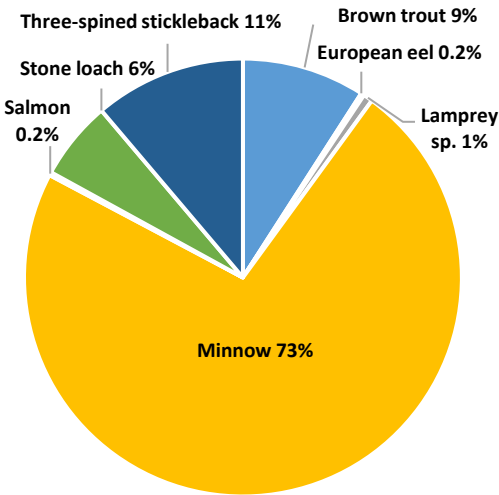


Figure 3. Fish species composition (%), River Tolka Catchment, 2025.



River Tolka at Violet Hill Drive (Site 5), Glasnevin, Dublin.



Salmon parr captured at Mill Road (Site 4), Blanchardstown, Dublin.

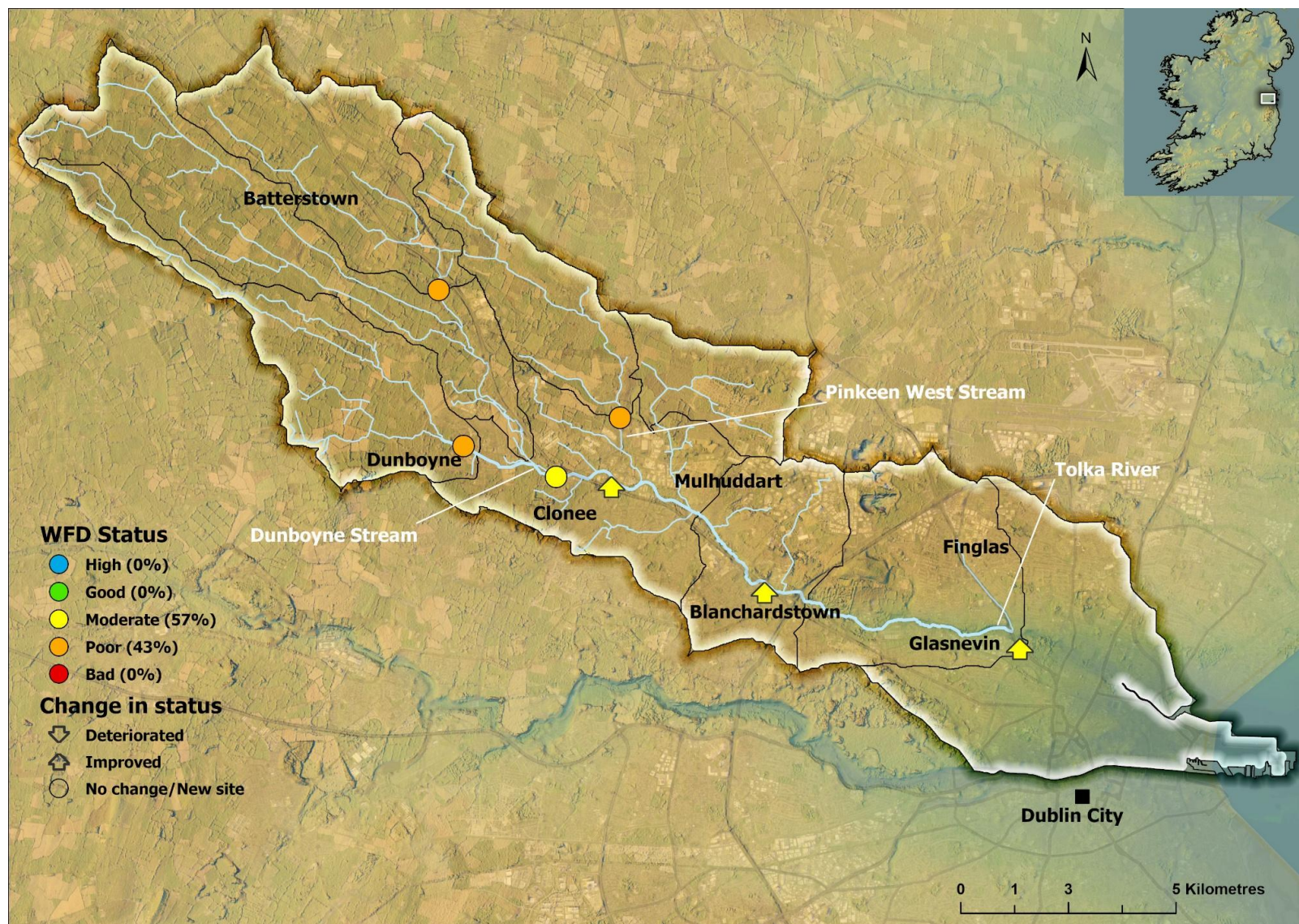


Figure 4. Fish ecological status in the River Tolka Catchment, August 2025. Arrows indicate a change in status since previous surveys (where applicable).

Summary

Seven fish species, were captured at seven sites surveyed in the Tolka Catchment in 2025.

Three-spined stickleback was the most common species present (seven sites, 100%), followed by minnow (six sites, 86%), brown trout and stone loach (five sites each, 71%), lamprey sp. (two sites, 29%) and European eel and salmon (one site each, 14%).

Minnow was the most abundant species recorded, followed by three-spined stickleback, brown trout, stone loach, lamprey sp., European eel and salmon (Figure 3).

Brown trout ranged in length from 5.5 to 31.3cm (Figure 2). Five age classes were present (0+, 1+, 2+, 3+ and 4+), with 1+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of brown trout (all ages combined) (0.196 fish/m²) was recorded at Site 2 (Clonee Bridge) on the River Tolka. The highest density of 0+ brown trout (0.106 fish/m²) was also recorded at Site 2 (Clonee Bridge). The highest density of 1+ and older brown trout (0.111 fish/m²) were recorded at Site 5 (Violet Hill Drive) in the Tolka River.

One salmon parr was captured at Mill Road (Site 4) on the Tolka River and measured 14.8cm, in the age cohort of 2+.

A Water Framework Directive fish classification tool (FCS2) was developed for Irish rivers in 2011 (SNIFFER 2011). The tool works by comparing various fish community metric values within a site to those predicted for a site under un-impacted conditions. In general, a site will achieve High status if all indicator species (e.g. both salmonid cohorts 0+ and 1+ and older) are present and in expected numbers. Status will

decline if such cohorts are missing, are in poor abundance, or if more tolerant species proliferate.

Fish ecological status was assigned to seven sites surveyed in the River Tolka Catchment during 2025 (Table 4 and Figure 4). Four sites were assigned Moderate status and three sites assigned Poor. Seven sites were surveyed previously on this catchment and assigned fish ecological status. When compared with their most recent previous surveys, three sites improved (Sites 3, 4 and 5) and four sites remained unchanged (Table 4 and Figure 4).

The reasons for the failures (i.e. moderate status) in fish ecological status were due to lower-than-expected abundance of type specific indicator species (e.g., salmon and trout), absence of certain age cohorts indicating recruitment failures. Failures and deteriorations in fish ecological status can be caused by pressures such as nutrient enrichment, habitat modification and fish passage issues.

References

- CEN (2003) Water Quality Sampling of Fish with Electricity. CEN EN 14011:2000. Brussels. European Committee for Standardization.
- Matson, R., Delanty, K., Shephard, S., Coghlan, B. and Kelly, F. (2018). *Moving from multiple pass depletion to single pass timed electrofishing for fish community assessment in wadeable streams*. Fisheries Research, 198, 99-108.
- SNIFFER (2011) River Fish Classification Tool: Science Work. WFD68c, Phase 2. Final Report. Version 6. Edinburgh. Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research.

Inland Fisheries Ireland: 3044 Lake Drive, Citywest Business Campus, Dublin, D24 Y265, Ireland

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