Conservation Status of the Otter in Ireland

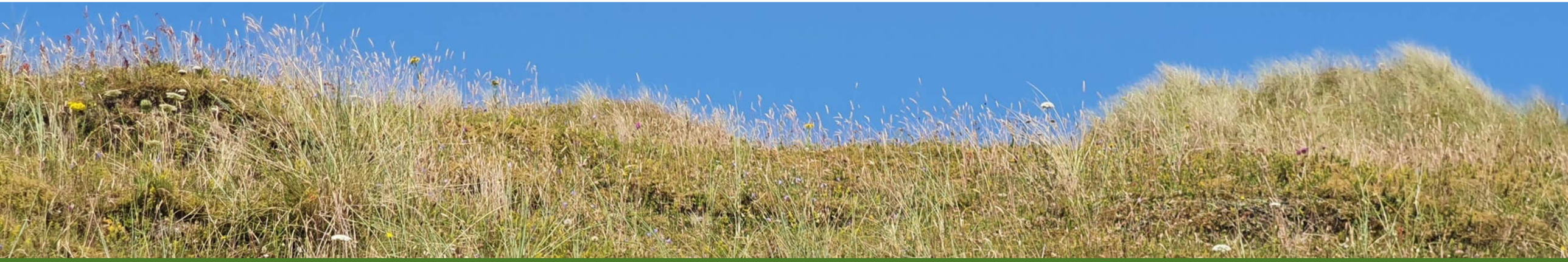
Ferdia Marnell
Scientific Advice & Research Directorate
NPWS

16 October 2025

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

The Habitats Directive

- The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) was adopted in 1992, transposed into Irish law in 1997.
- Aims to protect over 1000 species, 230 habitat types across Europe.
- Ensure that these species and habitat types are maintained at, or restored to, a favourable conservation status within the EU.
- Huge influence on how we approach nature governance in EU (SACs, SCOs, AA, LIFE etc.)



Monitoring and assessment

- Article 11: Requires surveillance of the conservation status of habitats and species – approx. 120 habitats and species listed for Ireland.

- Article 17: Report to the Commission on the conservation status of all these protected species and habitats types every 6 years.



59 Habitats Directive Habitats

MARINE

- SANDBANKS
- ESTUARIES
- TIDAL MUDFLATS
- **LAGOONS***
- LARGE SHALLOW INLETS AND BAYS
- REEFS
- DRIFT LINES
- MARINE CAVES
- SUBMARINE VENTS

COASTAL

- PERENNIAL VEGETATION OF STONY BANKS
- SEA CLIFFS
- SALICORNIA MUD
- ATLANTIC SALT MEADOWS
- MEDITERRANEAN SALT MEADOWS
- HALOPHILOUS SCRUB
- EMBRYONIC SHIFTING DUNES
- MARRAM DUNES (WHITE DUNES
- **FIXED DUNES (GREY DUNES)***
- **DECALCIFIED EMPETRUM DUNES***
- **DECALCIFIED DUNE HEATH***
- DUNES WITH CREEPING WILLOW
- DUNE SLACK
- **MACHAIR***

FRESHWATER

- LOWLAND OLIGOTROPHIC LAKES
- UPLAND OLIGOTROPHIC LAKES
- HARD WATER LAKES
- NATURAL EUTROPHIC LAKES
- DYSTROPHIC LAKES
- **TURLOUGHS***
- FLOATING RIVER VEGETATION
- CHENOPODIUM RUBRI

BOG, FEN & HEATH

- WET HEATH
- DRY HEATHS
- ALPINE AND SUBALPINE HEATH
- JUNIPER SCRUB
- **RAISED BOG (ACTIVE)***
- **BLANKET BOG (ACTIVE)***
- DEGRADED RAISED BOGS
- TRANSITION MIRES
- RHYNCOSPORION DEPRESSIONS
- **CLADIUM FEN***
- **PETRIFYING SPRINGS***
- ALKALINE FENS

GRASSLAND

- CALAMINARIAN GRASSLAND
- **CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND (ORCHID-RICH*)**
- **SPECIES-RICH NARDUS UPLAND GRASSLAND***
- MOLINIA MEADOWS
- HYDROPHILOUS TALL HERB
- LOWLAND HAY MEADOWS

ROCKY

- SILICEOUS SCREE
- EUTRIC SCREE
- CALCAREOUS ROCKY
- SILICEOUS ROCKY
- **LIMESTONE PAVEMENT***
- CAVES

WOODLAND

- OLD OAK WOODLANDS
- **BOG WOODLAND***
- **RESIDUAL ALLUVIAL FORESTS***
- **TAXUS BACCATA WOODS***







SPECIES Listed on the Habitats Directive

60 (8 vagrant)

Common Name	Group	Annex
Common Frog	Amphibian	V
Natterjack Toad	Amphibian	IV
Leatherback Turtle	Reptile	IV
Sea Lamprey	Fish	II
Brook Lamprey	Fish	II
River Lamprey	Fish	II, V
Allis Shad	Fish	II, V
Twaite Shad	Fish	II, V
Atlantic Salmon	Fish	II, V
Killarney Shad	Fish	II, V
Pollan	Fish	V
Geyer's Whorl Snail	Invertebrate	II
Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail	Invertebrate	II
Desmoulin's Whorl Snail	Invertebrate	II
Kerry Slug	Invertebrate	II, IV
Freshwater Pearl Mussel	Invertebrate	II, V
Marsh Fritillary	Invertebrate	II
White-clawed Crayfish	Invertebrate	II, V
Maërl	Plant - Alga	V
Petalwort	Plant - Bryophyte	II
White cushion moss	Plant - Bryophyte	V
Sphagnum genus	Plant - Bryophyte	V
Slender Green Feather Moss	Plant - Bryophyte	II
Lycopodium group	Plant - Vascular	V
Marsh Saxifrage	Plant - Vascular	II, IV
Slender Naiad	Plant - Vascular	II, IV
Killarney Fern	Plant - Vascular	II, IV
Cladonia subgenus cladina	Lichen	V

Common Name	Group	Annex
Mountain Hare	Mammal	V
Otter	Mammal	II, IV
Pine Marten	Mammal	V
Lesser Horseshoe Bat	Mammal - bat	II, IV
Common Pipistrelle	Mammal - bat	IV
Daubenton's Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Nathusius' Pipistrelle	Mammal - bat	IV
Brandt’s Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Natterer's Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Brown Long-Eared Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Whiskered Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Leisler's Bat	Mammal - bat	IV
Soprano Pipistrelle	Mammal - bat	IV
Humpback Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Northern Right Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	Mammal - marine	II, IV
Common Dolphin	Mammal - marine	IV
Harbour Porpoise	Mammal - marine	II, IV
Grey Seal	Mammal - marine	II, V
Harbour Seal	Mammal - marine	II, V
Killer Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
False Killer Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Long-Finned Pilot Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Risso's Dolphin	Mammal - marine	IV
White-Sided Dolphin	Mammal - marine	IV
White-Beaked Dolphin	Mammal - marine	IV
Striped Dolphin	Mammal - marine	IV
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
True's Beaked Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Minke Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Sei Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Fin Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Pygmy Sperm Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Sperm Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Blue Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Beluga/White Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Northern Bottlenose Whale	Mammal - marine	IV
Gervais' Beaked Whale	Mammal - marine	IV



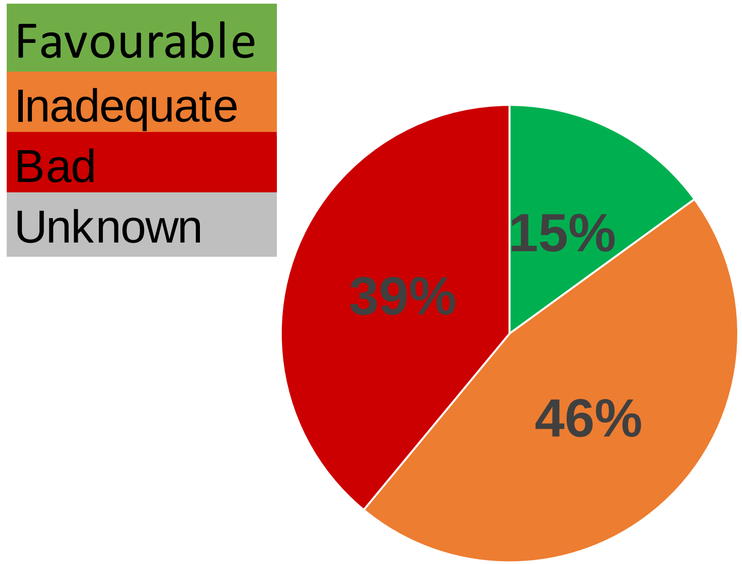


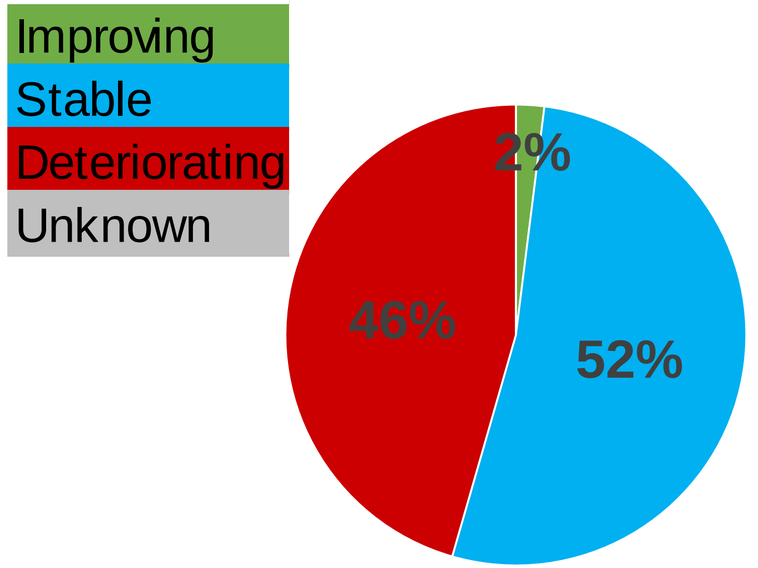




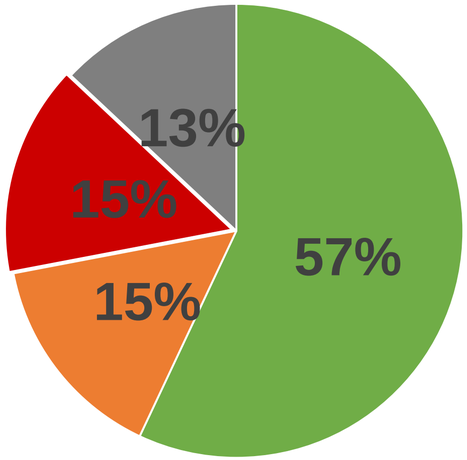
2019 Conservation status and trends

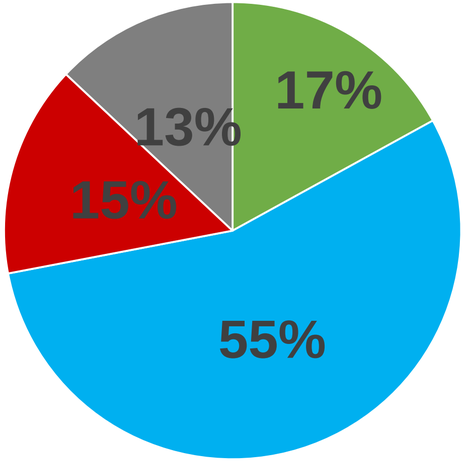
HABITATS





SPECIES



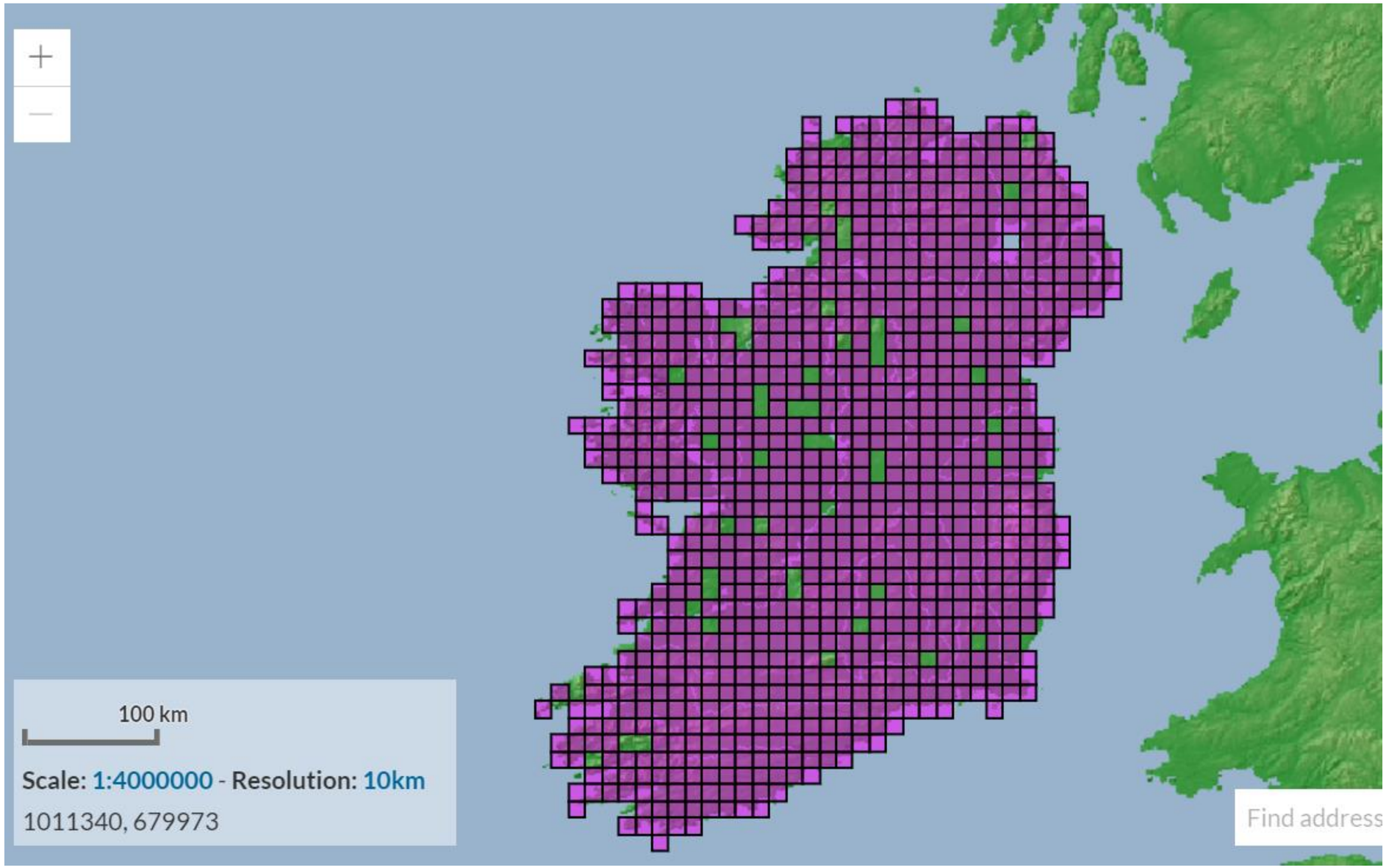


Measuring Conservation Status

SPECIES
Range (FRR) (trends)
Population (FRP) (trends)
Habitat for the species (trends)
Pressures & threats
Conservation measures
Future prospects
Overall conservation status ↑↓
Natura population (trends)



Range



2013-2024

84,000km^2

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agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

Population

5th national survey
- 900 sites (NPWS)

c13,000-14,000 adults otters

Historic declines; currently stable (results compared with previous surveys)





Habitats









Threats and pressures

Water quality

- Ongoing decline in number of water bodies meeting environmental objectives.

Loss of terrestrial cover

- Riparian corridors in particular

Road kill

- Local roads rather than national



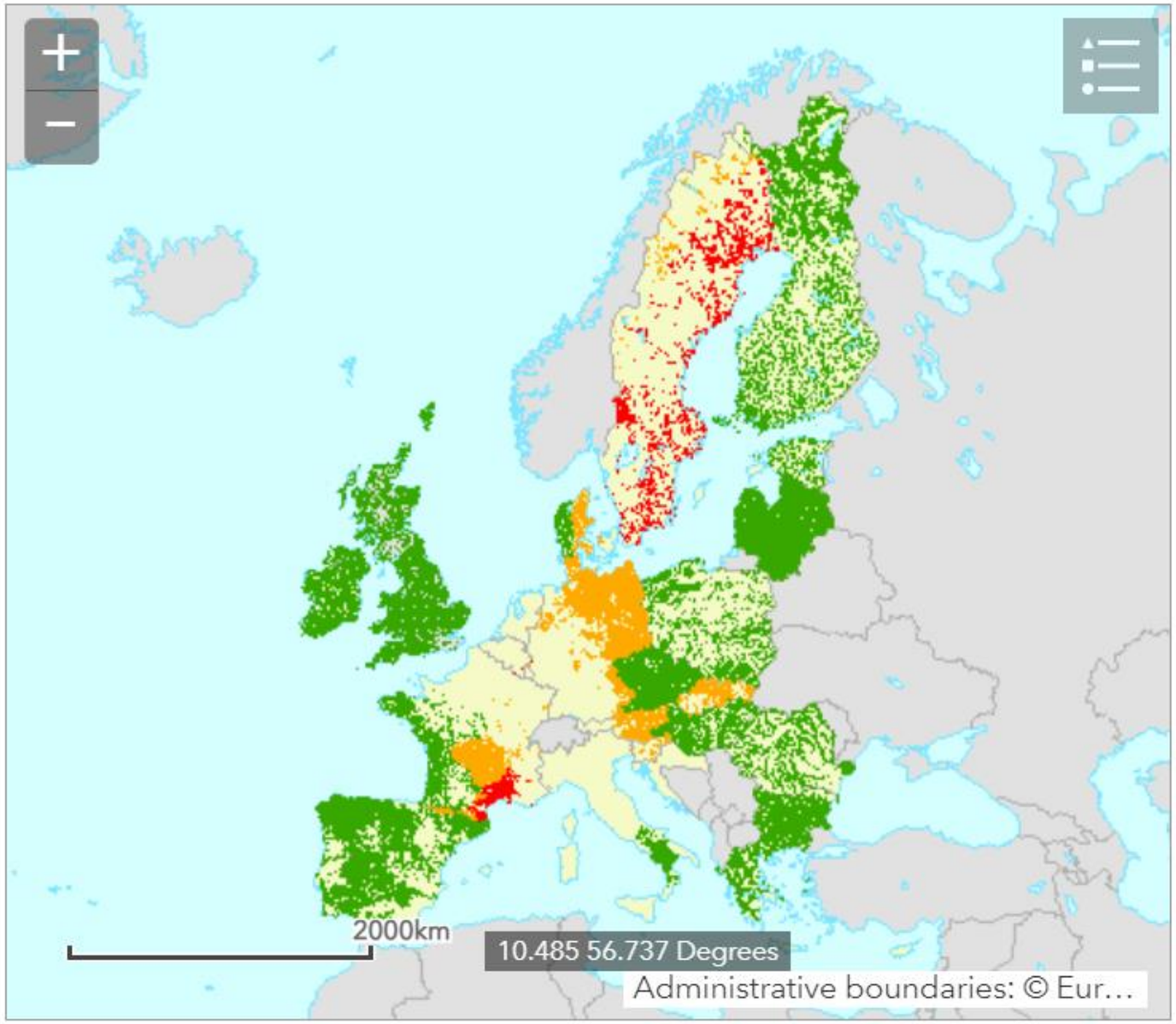
Article 17 summary

- The otter remains widespread across Ireland and its population appears to be relatively stable.
- There are some concerns about declining water quality nationally as well as ongoing pressures on riparian habitats through drainage works and riparian scrub/woodland clearance; it is not clear how these changes might impact on otters.
- Measures to address ongoing water quality declines and to reduce the impact of bank maintenance/clearance works would be beneficial.



Conservation Status remains Favourable and the trend is Stable.

Otter conservation status across EU



2019 data

Favourable

Inadequate

Bad

Huge improvement in Britain since 1980s


Online resources:
https://www.npws.ie/publications
Article 17 report
National Otter survey report
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