FOR DEFRA WFD STAKEHOLDER FORUM
Environment Agency: River Basin Management
Update on Progress - October 2008

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Evidence base for plans

Risk assessments

Work on refining risk assessments for the first round of river basin planning is now complete. We are currently updating our website and available information to reflect these changes, this will be complete by the end of October 2008.

http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd

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Protected Areas Register including Drinking Waters

Our risk assessments for surface and groundwater Drinking Water Protected Areas are now complete. We have updated our Protected Areas Register to include the information on Drinking Water Protected Areas received from Water Companies during 2006-7. This information will be presented in the river basin management plans that go out to public consultation in December 2008.

Contact: Vicky.Beaumont@environment-agency.gov.uk

Data sharing and information management

Provision and management of environmental data for the Water Framework Directive and river basin planning across the Environment Agency, is something we are currently reviewing We are also looking at smarter ways of sharing data with external partners, such as the water companies. We are currently running a pilot with Wessex Water and the Mid Levels Drainage Board to investigate some available options.

Contact: Vicky.Beaumont@environment-agency.gov.uk

Classification results published

Data from our General Quality Assessment (GQA) is due to be released to the public in early October. It is expected to show a continued good results for the chemistry and biology of rivers, and the levels of major pollutants.

Results from the new draft Water Framework Directive classification will be released alongside the GQA. The new assessments focus more on the ecological health of waters. Up to 37 measures of water quality, such as the health of river insects and plants, are scrutinised and the grading of each water body is set by the measure which scores the lowest result.

Under this new, more stringent, system, 19 per cent of water bodies are classed as 'good' or 'high', 49 per cent 'moderate', 21 per cent 'poor' and seven per cent 'bad'. For over half of water bodies that did not meet 'good' status, the cause was missing the good standard for only one indicator. This means that by taking action to improve a single measure, many waters could achieve 'good' status.

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Classification tools

Many of our new surface water classification tools require further refinement and development e.g. to work in a range of salinities and habitats, and require class boundaries to be set through a second round of European intercalibration. Partnership funding has been agreed with SNIFFER to continue work on assessing river macrophyte variability, enhancing the river invertebrate tool, finding better taxonomic metrics for lake phytoplankton and continuing work on a classification method for lakes using fish. Work will also continue on developing tools that respond to morphological pressures, this is one of the most difficult pressures to assess reliably

In saline environments, development work will continue on the plant and invertebrate classification tools, mainly aimed at transferring them to the different salinities found in estuaries and to a wider range of substrate types. It is hoped that our estuarine fish classification tool can be intercalibrated though not many other Member States have nationally agreed methods yet.

The second round of intercalibration runs until 2011 and the Commission expects all quality elements as described in Annex V to be intercalibrated by then. This will be a tall order given the wide range of sampling methods employed and the lack of scientific understanding around some pressure response relationships.

For more information please contact Richard Hemsworth at richard.hemsworth@environment-agency.wales.gov.uk

River Basin Management Plan development

Draft River Basin Management Plans

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken over the past six months in developing draft River Basin Management plans. A second version of the draft was discussed at the September round of river basin district liaison panels.

Commonly liaison panels wished to see more detail on costs and benefits from the draft Impact Assessments incorporated into the draft plan texts. Another theme of discussion in the panels was the desire for measures to deliver greater environmental improvement to become available by the time the plans are finalised. However, all liaison panels were able to support publication of the draft plans for consultation.

After further improvements and comments have been taken on board from the liaison panels, the draft plans will be discussed with Defra/Welsh Assembly Government They will be published through our website on 22 December for a six month consultation.

Impact assessments

Draft Impact Assessments analysing the differences between Scenario A, and Scenarios B and C will be needed to accompany the consultation on the draft plans. Initial versions of draft impact assessments were shared with liaison panels in some regions at their September meetings, only early summary information was available for others. Considerable further work is required over the next few weeks on these documents.

Strategic Environment Assessments (SEA)

Draft environmental reports for each river basin district were circulated to the September Liaison Panels and to Defra. We are now acting on these comments and working to ensuring that the reports are aligned to the latest draft plans. A non technical summary and techncial appendix will be published for each SEA which will be published for consultation on our website at the same time as the draft river basin management plans.

Hydromorphology

Hydromorphology the next steps – characterisation, designation and classification

The hydromorphology team will deliver work relating to the characterisation, designation and classification of Water Framework Directive water bodies for the first River Basin Management Plan. As a result from the ministerial guidance on small water bodies, the splitting of existing large Water Framework Directive water bodies and further candidate artificial and heavily modified water bodies that were identified as part of Good Ecological Potential classification work, as well as those remaining, now require the characterisation, designation and classification processes to be completed.

Key Timelines

- Investigation of the candidate artificial and heavily modified water bodies designation status of water bodies that have been challenged as not candidate artificial and heavily modified water bodies during the Good Ecological Potential Classification process. (October 2008)

- Re-run of hydromorphological risk assessments. (October – Early November 2008)
- Candidate artificial and heavily modified water bodies designation process to those new water bodies identified as potential artificial and heavily modified water bodies. (November – December 2008)
- Run Good Ecological Potential classification on newly identified and on outstanding candidate artificial and heavily modified water bodies. (October – March 2008)

Hydromorphology mitigation measures trials

We routinely apply actions, or measures to mitigate against hydromorphological pressures, but we need more evidence of the real impacts of these measures, particularly on the biological quality elements we will use to classify water bodies. Work has started on identifying trial catchments for testing the effectiveness of mitigation measures for hydromorphology - these are ”opportunistic” case studies/trials to test the effectiveness of restoration/ mitigation measures. We hope to increase confidence that measures can deliver benefit and be cost-effective. We are asking our regions to identify trials and pilot studies to carry out these trials.

Hydromorphology mechanisms to deliver the Water Framework Directive

In our June 2007 response to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' consultation on hydromorphology mechanisms to deliver the Water Framework Directive we highlighted that the Environment Agency lacks adequate powers to deliver the environmental objectives of Water Framework Directive. We identified a weak regulatory control of new activities causing damage to hydromorphological conditions and a lack of powers and dedicated funds to deliver hydromorphological improvements (restoration activities).

We are now engaged in internal and external discussions with Defra on different legislative options to close these identified gaps in our powers. These discussions include a review of the suitability of consenting regimes (via Land Drainage Act and Water Resources Act) and the current and future responsibilities of the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards in respect of these regimes.

We are also engaged with Defra in scoping options for the funding and administration of a possible Catchment Restoration Fund.

For more information please contact: Jonty Gibson at Jonathan.Gibson@environment-agency.gov.uk

Digital Best Practice Manual

Currently, there is no single source of information on the effectiveness, costs and ecological benefits of mitigation measures for flood risk management and land drainage activities on heavily modified water bodies. To resolve this issue, a best practice digital manual is being put together by a joint Hydromorphology-Flood Risk Science project.

To date, the project has reviewed the scientific evidence base for all mitigation activities undertaken on rivers, estuarine and coastal water bodies. This information will be developed into a high level assessment tool (or checklist) for existing flood risk management and land drainage systems to allow a quick identification of where there is scope to reduce the impacts of such systems on habitat quality.

The next stage of the work is the development of a more detailed assessment tool for new flood risk management and land drainage schemes to determine whether proposals

represent good environmental practice and where mitigation options would significantly reduce the proposal impacts. This tool will be complemented by a series of detailed guidance sheets on each mitigation option and will include information on cost effectiveness and ecological benefits.

For further information, please contact the Hydromorphology team Lucy.Bolton@environment-agency.gov.uk or the Flood Risk Science team Jacqui.Cotton@environment-agency.gov.uk

European Centre for River Restoration Conference

Dave Corbelli represented Hydromorphology and Flood Risk Management at the European Centre for River Restoration Conference in Venice in June. The main aim was to promote the Best Practice Digital Design Manual for Flood Risk Management and Land Drainage Activities as part of a workshop to address data storage and availability on "good practice" river restoration in Europe. There were representatives from across Europe and the USA.

The project was well received and interest noted in developing something similar at a European level, building on and linking to the European Commission's Common Implementation Strategy Hydromorphology activity. It was agreed that the European Centre for River Restoration supported by the UK River Restoration Centre and the Environment Agency would assess the potential of developing a European Union LIFE bid building on the UK model for such an initiative, next call for bids is Autumn 2008.

Further information is available at www.ecrr.org.

Priority substances

Priority substances update

The last piece in the Water Framework Directive puzzle fell into place in June with agreement in European Parliament on the Environmental Quality Standards Directive. This directive, which effectively replaces the Dangerous Substances Directive (DSD)(76/464/EEC), provides a list of environmental quality standards for the list of 33 Priority and Priority Hazardous Substances agreed in 2001 (2455/2001/EC).

Compliance with Environmental Quality Standards for the priority and priority hazardous substances forms the basis of Good Surface Water Chemical Status. This is similar to the approach used currently under the Dangerous Substances Directive.

Formal negotiations on the proposal for a daughter directive under Article 16 of Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) were effectively concluded in Strasbourg on 17th June when a second reading agreement was reached between European Parliament and Council of Ministers under "Co-decision". This process entails consideration by both European Union Council of Ministers and Parliament to agree a mutually acceptable text.

Slovenia, the European Union President, has worked hard behind the scenes to achieve this agreement which represents a considerable success for the UK, in that the final directive broadly reflects the European Union Council Common Position text and delivers a pragmatic risk-based approach to standards setting. Under this agreement compliance with these Environmental Quality Standards values and the further objectives on progressive reduction, cessation and phase out for discharges, emissions and losses are all subject to Water

Framework Directive Article 4 exemption provisions which apply to technical infeasibility and/or excessive costs.

For more information please contact John Batty at john.batty@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency Water Framework Directive Programme
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