

# A Vision for Internal Drainage Boards in England and Wales





Vernatts Drain, Welland and Deepings IDB (Source: Stan Pywell)

## Introduction

The Vision aims to help promote the greater public awareness of the wide ranging functions provided by IDBs. It sets out a series of statements affirming what IDBs will do now and in the future to sustainably manage water levels. The document meets the requirements of Workstream A6 from the Defra Review of IDBs and has been developed on behalf of the IDB community by the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA).

The Vision has been endorsed by all 116 IDBs in England and Wales:

- Ainsty IDB
- Airedale DC
- Alconbury & Ellington IDB
- Ancholme IDB
- Axe Brue IDB
- Bedfordshire & River Ivel IDB
- Benwick IDB
- Beverley & North Holderness IDB
- Black Drain DB
- Black Sluice IDB
- Bluntisham IDB
- Braunton Marsh IDB
- Broads IDB
- Buckingham & River Ouzel IDB
- Burnt Fen IDB
- Caldicot & Wentlooge Levels IDB
- Cawdle Fen IDB
- Churchfield & Plawfield IDB
- Conington & Holme IDB
- Cowick & Snaith IDB
- Curf & Wimblington Combined IDB
- Danvm DC
- Dempster IDB
- Doncaster East IDB
- Downham & Stow Bardolph IDB
- Early & Salterforth IDB
- East Harling IDB
- East of Ouse, Polver & Nar IDB
- East Suffolk IDB
- Euximoor IDB
- Feldale IDB
- Foss IDB
- Goole & Airmyn IDB
- Goole Fields IDB
- Haddenham Level DC
- Holmewood & District IDB
- Hundred Foot Washes IDB
- Hundred of Wisbech IDB
- Isle of Axholme & North Nottinghamshire WLMB
- King's Lynn IDB
- Kyle & Upper Ouse IDB
- Lakenheath IDB
- Lindsey Marsh DB
- Littleport & Downham IDB
- Lower Medway IDB
- Lower Severn IDB
- Lower Wye IDB
- Manea & Welney DDC
- March & Whittlesey IDB
- March East IDB
- March 3rd District DC
- March 5th District DC
- March 6th District DC
- Molverley IDB
- Middle Fen & Mere IDB
- Middle Level Commissioners
- Mildenhall IDB
- Muston & Yedingham IDB
- Needham & Laddus IDB
- Nightlayers IDB
- Nordeph IDB
- Norfolk Rivers IDB
- North East Lindsey DB
- North Level District IDB
- North Somerset Levels IDB
- Northwold IDB
- Old West IDB
- Ouse and Derwent IDB
- Ouse & Humber DB
- Over & Willingham IDB
- Padnal & Waterden IDB
- Parrett IDB
- Powysland IDB
- Ramsey IDB
- Ramsey 1st (Hollow) IDB
- Ramsey 4th (Middlemoor) IDB
- Ramsey Upwood & Great Raveley IDB
- Ransonmoor District DC
- Rawcliffe IDB
- Rea IDB
- Reedness & Swinefleet DB
- River Lugg IDB
- River Stour IDB
- Romney Marsh IDB
- Rye IDB
- Sawtry IDB
- Scunthorpe & Gainsborough WMB
- Selby Area IDB
- Southery & District IDB
- South Holderness IDB
- South Holland IDB
- Sow and Penk IDB
- Stoke Ferry IDB
- Strine IDB
- Stringsides IDB
- Sutton & Mepal IDB
- Swaffham IDB
- Swale & Ure IDB
- Swavesey IDB
- Thornton IDB
- Thorntree IDB
- Trent Valley IDB
- Upper Medway IDB
- Upper Witham IDB
- Upwell IDB
- Waldersey IDB
- Warboys Somersham & Pidley IDB
- Waterbeach Level IDB
- Waveney, Lower Yare & Lotheringland IDB
- Welland and Deepings IDB
- White Fen District DC
- Whittlesey IDB
- Witham 1st District IDB
- Witham 3rd District IDB
- Witham 4th District IDB
- Woodwalton DC

## About ADA

The Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) is the membership organisation for water level management authorities in the United Kingdom, with over 230 members and associate members. ADA is recognised as the national representative for IDBs (in England and Wales).

Established in 1937, ADA was created to watch over and support the interests of drainage authorities at a national and parliamentary level, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and discussions, and to disseminate information of common interest.

Members include Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Regional Flood & Coastal Committees (RFCCs), and the Northern Ireland Rivers Agency.

ADA also has Associate Members who are Local Authorities, consultants, contractors and suppliers to the water level management industry. Visit [www.ada.org.uk](http://www.ada.org.uk) for more information.



## Why do we need a Vision?

The flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) framework within which Internal Drainage Boards operate relies on a strong partnership of organisations working together.

Under the Flood and Water Management Act (2010) Unitary and County Councils are providing local leadership and coordination as Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA). The Environment Agency is providing the national overview of FCERM and focusing its own capital and maintenance activities on reducing the risk of flooding to people and property.

Internal Drainage Boards are working within this new operating environment; helping partners deliver new duties, operating in a manner consistent with National and Local FCERM Strategies, and helping to build new and maintain existing infrastructure, whether their own, or for other risk management authorities.

To build strong and effective local partnerships, risk management authorities and the wider public must have confidence in what each partner represents and what their aims are. It is clear that IDBs embody the voluntarism and community participation that should be expected of valued local public services. IDBs have a long history in delivering close management of water levels for the sustaining and protection of people, property, land, infrastructure and the environment.

The new arrangements provide an opportunity for the strengths of the IDB model to be fully integrated into the partnership approach used to deliver the high-quality FCERM service that is central to Government's plans.

## Enhancing IDB capacity

In July 2010 Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries stated his support for the work that IDBs undertake in managing water levels; reducing flood risk for local communities, business and infrastructure; and enhancing valuable wildlife habitats. He stated that IDBs have an "important role to play in flood and water level management, both supporting Lead Local Flood Authorities and delivering on wider responsibilities such as [land] drainage."

Therefore, it is critical that IDBs are of sufficient size to play such a part, and that their boundaries reflect, as far as possible, hydraulic processes.

Boards across the country are becoming larger units able to provide the necessary critical mass of expertise, resilience of organisation, financial

sustainability, and transparent governance of resources that will bring greater cost-effectiveness to the services they deliver for their communities as originally detailed in the Defra Review of IDBs Implementation Plan. This has seen the number of IDBs in England and Wales consolidate in number from 175 in 2007 to 116 in 2012.

Through IDBs building in capacity and working together, the IDB community is well placed to take on an enhanced, locally focussed, catchment wide role as the operating authority of choice for all members of local partnerships.

## The Vision

Our Vision is for IDBs to make a significant contribution to the sustainable use of parts of England and Wales with special drainage needs. IDBs should deliver an efficient, cost effective service and be recognised as key participants of the FCERM community providing water level management on a daily basis to the catchments they serve and assisting their partners.



Vitality, IDBs should be valued for the role they play in helping deal with some of the human and environmental challenges of the 21st century, and in improving and sustaining our quality of life.

### IDBs must:

- Be recognised as competent FCERM authorities
- Play a full part in local partnerships
- Have a distinct role working with other relevant authorities
- Strive to become 'delivery partner' of choice for Lead Local Flood Authorities and partners
- Build capacity and adjust to deal with new challenges
- Adapt to climate change impacts



## Role of an IDB

### Water level management

IDBs believe in the principles of sound water level management through the close management of water levels – in watercourses and the surrounding landscape – for the purpose of reducing the risk from flooding and for sustaining all land uses and the environment.

### Areas of special flood risk

Low-lying areas of England and Wales require the daily close attention of specialist local water level management bodies to actively manage and reduce the risk of flooding, and to ensure that the current land use, inhabitation and ecology is enabled to continue into the future.

These are areas that the Medway Letter sought to set boundaries for in 1933; in the 21st Century we should be building upon this solid foundation:

*'The areas which may be brought within the limits of drainage districts are those which will derive benefit or avoid danger as the result of drainage operations'.*

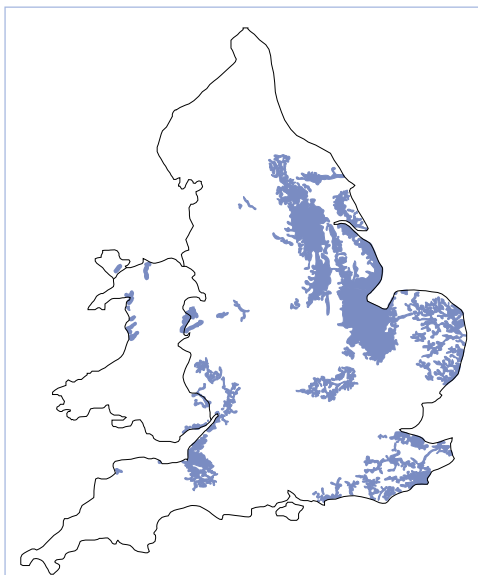
The Medway Letter (1933) in describing IDB Drainage Districts.

### Catchment basis

Water level and flood risk management on a catchment basis should determine any strategic approach to flood risk management. This is a principle supported by the Water Framework Directive and Defra's Future Water (2008) strategy and upheld by Internal Drainage Boards in England and Wales, Waterschappen in the Netherlands, Consorzi di bonifica in Italy and by other water level management authorities in many other countries across Europe.

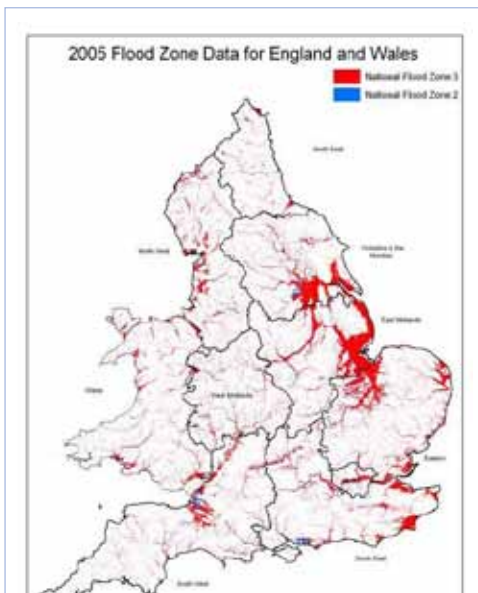
### IDBs will:

- Carefully manage water levels within their drainage districts for:
  - land drainage
  - flood risk management
  - irrigation
  - environmental benefit
- Work within hydrologically defined catchments
- Operate for the benefit of all ratepayers in their districts
- Be recognised as the land drainage authority within their districts



Geographical distribution of IDBs in England & Wales

(Source: Sharon Grafton, ADA)



Indicative Flood Risk Map for England & Wales, based on Flood Zone 2 maps by EA

(Source: Sharon Grafton, ADA)

## Purpose

IDBs cover 1.2 million hectares of England (9.7% of England's total land area) and 28,500 hectares of Wales (1.4% of Wales' total land area), 90% of the indicative flood map zone 3 for England and Wales. 24 of the county councils in England include one or more IDB in their area as do six metropolitan districts, and 109 unitary authorities or district councils.

IDBs are geographically concentrated in the Fens of East Anglia and Lincolnshire, Somerset Levels, Kent marshes, Trent valley and Yorkshire covering growth areas such as the Thames Gateway and Milton Keynes, and existing developed areas around Avonmouth, East Midlands and the Humber Estuary.

Their 570 staff operate and maintain over 500 pumping stations, 22,000 km of watercourse, 174 automatic weed screen cleaners and have a part in providing flood risk management to 879,000 properties. They also have responsibilities associated with 398 Sites of Special Scientific Interest plus other designated environmental areas.

One million hectares of agricultural land occurs within internal drainage districts, including the majority of England and Wales' highest grade and most productive farmland. This puts IDBs at the heart of helping to deliver UK food security. Urban areas within drainage districts contain 870,000 homes. Drainage districts also contain 78 industrial premises of national economic importance and much of the UK's critical infrastructure. Fifty three percent of England and Wales' electricity generating capacity comes from power stations in drainage districts. There are also 1,500 km of railway and 208 km of motorway.



Constructing  
Sluice Refurbishment; South Holland IDB

(Source: Karl Vines)



Maintaining  
Weedboat operating in North Level District IDB

(Source: Andrew Ross)

### IDBs will:

- Through the functions listed above, defend and sustain land use, including inhabitation, agriculture, industry, recreation and natural habitats
- Facilitate and supervise the irrigation and drainage of agricultural land that helps feeds the nation
- Contribute to the security of civil infrastructure within their districts
- Aid the sustainability of rural and urban communities



Managing  
Haddenham Pumping Station, Cambridgeshire

(Source: Sam Edwards)

## Decision making

### Partnership frameworks

To meet local needs and influence policy development, Lead Local Flood Authorities are working closely with other risk management authorities to build management frameworks to facilitate effective coordination between local partners on flooding and drainage. The extensive skills, infrastructure and experience possessed by IDBs leave them well placed to provide the focus for partnership delivery at a local level.

### Supervisory powers

For a risk management authority to be effective within the boundaries they serve, that body requires suitable supervisory powers. IDBs grant consent to and enforce works to maintain the flow at any obstructions constructed in watercourses within their drainage districts. Each IDB also utilises a suite of bylaws to ensure that they have access to maintain watercourses and prevent damage to banks, structures and the water environment.

IDBs' experience of utilising such powers have made them useful partners to Lead Local Flood Authorities, many of whom are using IDBs for consenting and enforcement of obstructions in areas outside of drainage districts on their behalf.

At the same time risk management authorities need to participate in planning and development control processes to reduce the risk of flooding to new and existing developments. IDBs are called on by planning authorities to give impartial advice regarding surface water management and flood risk, especially within areas of significant urban growth. They have experience of working to ensure developments contain sufficient Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) that can be maintained in the future. IDBs will be active statutory consultees to the SuDS approval process created by the Flood & Water Management Act 2010.

This range of supervisory powers provides IDBs with the ability to act proactively to ensure a reduction in flood risk and careful water level management.



### Knowledge sharing

Parrett IDB discussing water level management with Richard Benyon MP and other local partners  
(Source: Phil Brewin)

## IDBs will:

- Share resources and cooperate with other risk management authorities
- Assist with the development of partnership frameworks
- Liaise with all relevant stakeholders, FCERM delivery partners and Government
- Conduct their activities with regard to Local and National Government strategies
- Actively shape and comment on local and regional policy decisions
- Play an active role in development planning decisions within and surrounding their drainage districts



Sustainable Development SuDS for a new housing development in Bridgewater  
(Source: Phil Brewin)



Partnership Working  
Caldicot & Wentlooge Levels IDB reducing flood risk in and around Newport  
(Source: Andrew Ross)

## Representation & finance

### Local Accountability

IDBs strongly believe that flood risk and water level management decisions must be made locally with the assistance of the community served. The importance of local knowledge and accountability must not be overlooked.

Internal Drainage Boards provide the community with the checks and balances to ensure decisions made consider the wishes of the local community. They are enshrined in the philosophy that:

- *'He who benefits – pays'* – IDB Special Levy and Agricultural Drainage Rates.
- *'He who pays gets a say'* – IDB Board representation.

### Financial security

Long-term certainty of finance is essential to sound water level and flood risk management. Water level management is a daily job, requiring regular action, which must be planned well in advance. In contrast, flood risk mechanisms may only be tested infrequently but must meet the standards demanded of them on these critical occasions. Both activities transcend political and spending periods as currently set out by the Government.

Through mechanisms such as the Special Levy and Agricultural Drainage Rate, an IDB raises secured funds locally for local need. IDB highland water contribution from the EA to IDBs provides funding to contribute to additional water management pressures caused by water from higher in a catchment entering an IDB's Drainage District. The EA precept allows local funds raised by an IDB to finance works essential to the Main River within an IDB's Drainage District. These mechanisms may appear complex but ensure accountability and the appropriate degree of financial security to Internal Drainage Boards.



Capital Investment  
The Middle Level Commissioners' New  
St. Germans Pumping Station  
(Source: David Thomas)



Local Representation  
Farmers discuss water level management  
plans on the Somerset Levels  
(Source: Phil Brewin)

### IDBs will:

- Be representative of the districts they serve through elected and appointed Board membership
- Raise funds locally for water level management: IDB Special Levy, Agricultural Drainage Rates
- Be transparent to local public scrutiny and accountability
- Balance the priorities and stakeholder views within their Districts



Community Involvement  
Learning about the role of IDBs  
(Source: Phil Brewin)



## Environmental issues

IDBs are uniquely equipped to make a vital contribution to the conservation of wetland wildlife; their watercourses provide essential wildlife corridors.

Collectively, IDBs are one of the most extensive managers of freshwaters and wetlands in the country. The thousands of kilometres of IDB ditches and drainage channels are biodiversity-rich networks comparable in conservation importance with hedgerows. IDBs thus have a significant role in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity.

Water level management by IDBs supports distinctive wetland habitats and characteristic landscapes such as the Norfolk Broads and Somerset Levels. Hundreds of wetland plant and animal species that are targeted as priorities under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan can be found in IDB districts – from lichens to wildflowers, insects to mammals. IDB drainage districts host scores of SSSIs and Local Nature Reserves.

IDBs across England and Wales have recently introduced their own Biodiversity Action Plans (IDB BAPs). These plans aim to increase the knowledge of BAP species and habitats within drainage districts and integrate actions that enhance biodiversity into IDB work programmes, particularly for areas outside the boundaries of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.



Available from [www.ada.org.uk](http://www.ada.org.uk)

ADA (in collaboration with Natural England) has produced *The Drainage Channel Biodiversity Manual* to assist IDBs to fulfil their role as custodians of wetlands and watercourses. IDBs have the skills to tackle the challenge of making space for both flood waters and wildlife through the integrated management of drainage catchments.



Biodiversity  
Kingfisher

(Source: Brian Phipps)



Conservation Works

Middle Level Commissioners installing an otter holt on the Old River Nene

(Source: Cliff Carson)



Protected Species

One of a thriving water vole colony,  
Hundred of Wisbech IDB

(Source: Cliff Carson)

### IDBs will:

- Promote the ecological and social wellbeing of their Districts
- Work to help maintain and improve all SSSIs and other designated environmental areas within their districts
- Implement IDB Biodiversity Action Plans
- Work towards reducing and mitigating their climate change impacts

## IDB focus

To realise this Vision we need IDBs to:

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Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*, (Source: Ian Moodie)



# Association of Drainage Authorities

The national representative of IDBs in England & Wales

## Acknowledgements

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Ian Moodie MSci – Technical & Research Assistant

### Cover photo

Source: Cliff Carson, Middle Level Commissioners,  
'Middle Level Main Drain, junction of New Pophams Eau from Three Holes Bridge'

### Please respond to:

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Early morning at South Walsham (Source: Pete Butler)