



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

POLICY COMMITTEE Minutes

Wednesday 10 September 2025

Venue: On Microsoft Teams

10.40 – 14.30

FINAL

Invited					
Name	Role and organisation	Present	Name	Role and organisation	Present
Charles Mills (CM)	Committee Chairperson, Deputy Chair, ADA	Y	Andrew McLachlan (AMN)	Chief Executive, Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards	Y
Ed Johnson (EJ)	Committee Secretary, Committee Deputy Chair Chief Engineer, Witham Fourth District IDB	Apologies	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Mhari Baldwin (MB)	Lowland Resilience Manager Environment Agency	Y	Nicola Oldfield (NO)	Chief Engineer, Middle Commissioners	Y
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y	Oliver Pantrey (OP)	Clerk, Upper Medway IDB	Y
Robert Caudwell (RC)	Chairperson, ADA	Apologies	Richard Powell (RP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Eastern) RFCC	Y
Matthew Harrison (MH)	Flood & Water Manager, Lincolnshire County Council	Y	Iain Sturdy (IS)	Chief Executive, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Apologies
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Apologies	Innes Thomson (IT)	Chief Executive, ADA	Y
Sallyanne Jeffrey (SJ)	Chief Financial Officer & RFO, Water Management Alliance	Y (from Item 60)	Carol Tidmarsh (CT)	FCERM Team, Defra	Y
Steve Larter (SL)	Finance Director, Witham & Humber IDBs	Y	Lu Webb (LW)	Water for Nature Programme, Natural England	Y
David Letellier (DL)	Head of Operations South Wales Central, Natural Resources Wales	Y	In attendance		
Andrew McGill (AMG)	Chief Executive, Water Management Consortium	Y	Laura Lamb (LL)	Membership Officer, ADA	Y
			Johnathan Austin (JA)	Regulatory Manager, Environment Agency	Y

Ref	Minutes
53	Welcome and apologies All apologies were noted as indicated above. Sallyanne Jeffrey (SJ) was welcomed to the meeting in the afternoon. CM confirmed the appointment of SJ to the Committee. SJ represents ADA on the Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP), formerly JPAG.
54	Declarations of interest None.
55	Minutes of previous meeting Minutes of previous meeting on 12 May 2025 were approved.
56	Matters arising ADA is scheduling a meeting in October to discuss the future role of Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs).
57	ADA Forum updates a. Environment Forum PB provided an update from the Forum's meeting on 08 September 2025: • Discussion on the development of a strategic licence for work that affects water voles is being trialled in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. A streamlined approach is welcome, but IDB environment officers believe there are several issues that need to be resolved before it becomes formal policy. They have expressed an interest in being involved at an early stage so that concerns can be raised and addressed before it is final. • Discussion on herbicide use. PB had sought advice from Environment Agency colleagues, around the use of glyphosate for invasive species management. A key point was ensuring that prevention measures are prioritised so that invasive species do not become a widespread problem in the first place, reducing the need for heavier interventions later. A mix of measures are needed. • The Forum highlighted that the guidance on WLMPs currently in circulation from the 1990s and 2000s do not reflect present-day challenges or policy priorities. There is an interest in understanding what Defra and Natural England may be expecting in relation to protected site improvement plans, whether these will be produced to support local delivery, and how plans fit with landscape recovery projects. Overall, the discussions reflected both the opportunities and the challenges of integrating water management, biodiversity strategies, lowland peat, and invasive species control into a coherent approach that supports environmental recovery whilst remaining practical. • CT said that Defra are happy to work with ADA on WLMPs. CM said that the York Consortium of IDBs would like to see plans covering more than five years so costs can be spread. Action: IM to schedule a meeting on WLMPs.

	b. Technical & Engineering Forum Meeting notes from the Forum’s meeting on 10 July 2025 had been circulated. Action: IM to draft a statement on Glyphosate for the officers of the Policy Committee, Environment Forum, and Technical & Engineering Forum to discuss. Statement to remain confidential to those groups until final version published.
58	Flood Risk Activity Permits Johnathan Austin (JA), Regulatory Manager within the Environment Agency was invited to present on the topic of Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAPS), which were integrated into the Environmental Permitting Regulations in April 2016. • He shared updates on Defra’s guidance regarding dredging and silt removal from main rivers. Importantly, this guidance is not limited to IDBs but applies to anyone undertaking such activities. It sets out what is considered a protected undertaking and contains a range of clauses that need to be carefully followed. If works are being carried out under risk management responsibilities, organisations should still seek their own legal advice to ensure compliance. • The EA’s Permitting Service runs a Priority Tracked Service for FRAPs for major projects, although Operational Areas (Local Offices) still provide preapplication advice. Recently operational re-structure recovering from a performance dip – will be fully resolved by November, and applications are expected to typically be processed in 8 to 9 weeks. • Looking ahead, the EA plans to undertake a review of its exemptions, assuming that the EA is granted new powers following the Defra Consultation on Exemption reform earlier in 2025. The EA are looking to consult on the use of standard rules to simplify their regulatory framework. Internally, the EA is also examining its use of risk bars to ensure greater consistency across regions. • The EA have additionally drawn on international experience, reviewing Dutch guidance and exploring regulatory practices across Europe to benchmark and refine their approach. Questions a. Referring to the permit process and bore holes which significantly held up pumping station work. JA confirmed the reasons for past delays and how they are improving standard rule-based exemptions. There was discussion how the trusted partner concept from the recent Corry Review, may need to be expanded, a conversation that is live with Defra right now. For example, it could be on the basis on showing good regulatory compliance. b. How long can an IDB expect to wait for a FRAP? Examples were given of IDBs being quoted 26 weeks has meant schemes have been in jeopardy. JA confirmed that the time scales have been addressed will change dramatically in coming weeks. c. A question on how in Kent, where beavers are digging into main riverbanks, the FRAP process for beavers has been drawn out so is there more agile system for beavers? JA confirmed some items may become no exempt when they are reviewing exemptions.

59	Key topics and representatives IM introduced this topic, emphasising that ADA was continuing to prioritise work on a number of policy issues, including: water management for lowland peat with Defra, closer working with ASA, and engagement with the Rural Flood Resilience Partnership. Additionally, there continued to be a number of topical consultations and arising issues. To be effective, ADA sought to share the response to a variety of issues across the Committee’s membership and those involved in ADA’s Forums. IM invited Committee members to review a list of key topics and sought volunteers to lead on discussions and engagement around these topics in the future, as well as representing ADA at meetings on these topics. SL was thanked for his ongoing input on both electricity standing charges and special levies. NO offered to volunteer for carbon reduction and climate adaption. AM and AMc offered to volunteer on de-maining, asset transfers, and PSCAs. PB represents ADA on the Major Landowner Group (for protected sites) and on the GB Floating Pennywort Strategy Group. OP offered to volunteer on health, safety and welfare topics. Action: <i>IM to circulate updated list of topics to seek suggestions and further volunteers. Topics list to be kept under review at least annually.</i>
60	Defra updates CT gave an update: a. Ministerial reshuffle: On the back of Angela Rayner’s resignation, our SoS Steve Reed has moved to MHCLG and we now have Emma Reynolds as our new SoS who has moved across from Treasury and Dame Angela Eagle as new Minister of State replacing Daniel Zeichner. They join Emma Hardy, Mary Creagh and Baroness Hayman. Minister Hardy will remain as our Floods and Water Minister which is great news. She attended the EFRA Select Committee yesterday for a water reform session. b. New Deputy Director: Jonathan Baker become Defra Deputy Director for flood risk, inland waterways and Environment Agency sponsorship on 01 September, having moved from Defra’s Farming and Countryside Programme. c. Cunliffe Report: Independent Water Commission chaired by Sir Jon Cunliffe published their report on 21 July with 88 recommendations on water sector reforms. There is to be a new water ombudsman, new single regulator, which will replace Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate and water-environment related functions from the Environment Agency and Natural England. The government will outline its full response to those recommendations through a White Paper, to be published for consultation later in the year, followed by a new Water Bill to be introduced later in 2026. d. Flood Funding Review: Thanks to ADA and IDBs for their responses to the consultation – received over 350 responses. The team are analysing them and preparing the summary of responses/government response. The new funding reforms will come into effect from next April. e. IDB funding and costs research project: We have now launched the research project which is being led by ICF and Logika. ADA will be on the Project Steering

	Group along with other stakeholders, EA, NFU, MHCLG. Welcome ADA and IDBs input. A survey of IDBs is likely and case studies. Scoping interviews will be scheduled. ADA confirmed that they will try and ensure that the scoping is wide with ICF. f. IDB ratings SI: Defra were still working through some queries and liaising with legal. Once we have the final SI, we will share this with ADA and finalise all the documentation including guidance and then lay the SI. g. Flood Resilience Taskforce: Topics covered in recent meetings included winter readiness and flood funding. Next meeting will look at asset and system maintenance. h. Peat research: Research to better understanding the role of IDBs in reducing carbon emissions from lowland peat soils is almost complete and there will be a dissemination event very shortly.
61	Environment Agency MB gave an update: a. Organisation: Approval given for new team brief and aims, covering: IDB policy reform, statutory instrument, national fund support, payments, and audits. EA resilience group to work jointly with FCERM. b. Farm Recovery Fund scoping on highland water contributions underway, with thanks to IDB colleagues consulted. c. Cunliffe Report: Some recommendations being fast-tracked; Defra preparing final policy and guidance. d. Flood Action Week: 13-19 October will focus on rural communities, with a parliamentary reception on 14 October for winter readiness. e. IDB Storm Recovery & Asset Improvement Fund: 79 projects ongoing, largely on track, with an interim report requested. f. PSCAs: Discussions with Caroline Douglass; EA to update guidance with ADA consultation. There was a question on higher land water contributions and whether paid timely and full amount. SJ said its key that they have an input to show sustainability such as earmarking reserves. It depends on the area team and what their allocation is some will get 100%, some will get 60% and some 0%. Research has been commissioned.
62	Local Authorities MH reported that the funding reform consultation had been broadly well received by LLFAs. Main river maintenance remains confusing with unintended impacts. Local elections have created uncertainty among some local authorities, affecting board structures and levy arrangements after reorganisation. Developers appear to be aligning with the newly published National Standards for SuDS.
63	Natural Resources Wales DL gave an overview of what NRW does and its functions. IT & IM thanked for the work they are doing a lot of issues were sorted due to a support meeting with engineers. Thanks for AMc for the support of finance and guidance.
64	Consultations

	a. Flood Funding Reform: IM reported that ADA had responded to the Defra consultation and published its response online. IM thanked Committee members and IDBs for their feedback which helped with the preparation of the response. b. Electricity network infrastructure: consents, land access and rights: The regulator is seeking to streamline the system. IM will write on raising wire heights as capacity increases. Issues include collapsing poles, low clearance, badger sites, and 12-month delays. c. Category 1 responders: Partnerships with voluntary bodies: An ongoing consultation following the Grenville enquiry. No strong interest was raised by the Committee, and ADA would not be responding. d. Local Authorities Funding Reform: Special levy has been reduced, so Witham's consultation response suggested returning to a national approach, exploring the business rate process as a potential funding mechanism. e. Standing Charges – Ofgem: The DCUSA panel, which reviews electricity charging, considered concerns raised to Ofgem. DCP412 was proposed but rejected, so no savings on standing charges will occur. While the uniqueness of boards is recognized, there is no clear solution, and rising special levies are largely due to electricity standing charges. f. Isle of Man: The Department of Infrastructure for the Isle of Man recently contacted ADA with a view to engaging more closely with IDBs and sharing knowledge. Committee members were invited to express interest in hosting an engineering delegation in 2026.
65	Audit - New AGAR Assertion The updated Practitioner's Guide 2025, published by the SAPPP included a new assertion on digital and data compliance related to GDPR regulations and best practice advice for government websites. WCAG standards need to apply across the board. MHCLG and NALC have been pushing this agenda and asking councils to make reforms for gov.uk websites. Auditors could put qualifications in if the websites are not up to new standards. AGAR is going to be redone, and a spreadsheet will be presented which will be an improvement. IT future meeting with SSSA and will ask for the intention of the assertion? When the results are published from qualified status, the driver may be the parish councils. IM reported that the IDB1 form was being updated by Defra and further updates to IDB1 may follow to better align with AGAR and SAPPP guidance.
66	De-maining main river Main river maintenance is being squeezed by falling allocations from EA revenue budgets. A concern that this is leading to pressure on IDBs, and the Somerset River Authority to fill the gap. That stop-gap approach isn't sustainable — it just shifts costs down to local authorities and ratepayers, while increasing long-term flood risk. Example of difficult situation in Wessex demonstrated the issue with the EA serving notice that it intended to cease maintenance operation on certain stretches of main river across the region, most notably impacting the Somerset Levels & Moors. Shift of responsibility, riparian owners are told it's their job, but most lack capacity, skills, or finance. IDBs stepping in, boards divert their own levy/rate income to cover

	essential work, buying emergency pumps, or carrying out de-silting works and embankment repairs. The discussion led onto PSCA reduction, fewer collaborative agreements mean less joined-up maintenance. ADA hopes revenue maintenance can be reviewed, and it was noteworthy that ADEPT and the Department of Transport had highlighted support at the recent Flood Resilience Taskforce meeting. The Highways Agency is also interested in funding flood resilience, and joining up efforts across departments could help. Greater flexibility in existing resources may deliver savings if bureaucracy is reduced. ADA alliances are proving effective, but this is not consistent across all IDBs. A national approach is needed to address flood defence, with a more balanced strategy that brings government funding together rather than being predominantly EA-led.
67	AOB Procurement Act 2023 and IDB Guidance The Procurement Act 2023 which reforms the existing procurement rules for public bodies, came into effect on 24 February 2025. Contracts for IDBs and other public bodies above statutory thresholds are required to follow specified procedural requirements, if they fall below the threshold evidence of internal audits are applicable. AMc summarised the system that Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards are taking to the new procurement rules. They welcome it to be tested by other IDBs and were seeking sponsorship for a legal opinion on their methodology. IT suggested that this may be an area where the SAAA could provide funding support for governance training/guidance to IDBs. Action: IM/AMc to form working group to take this forward, and confirm ADA/SAAA funding for legal advice, before potential dissemination to other IDBs.
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