



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

Final Approved

ADA Business Plan 2026 – 2029

Content	Page
Role, Function, Vision, & Purpose	2
Organisation	3
Key Business Drivers	4
- Membership	5
- Representation	5
Supporting Resources	6
- Staff	6
- Finances	8
Strategic Activities	10
Strategic Objectives 2026 - 2029	12

Role

ADA is the membership organisation for drainage, water level and flood risk management authorities in the United Kingdom, with approximately 230 members and associates. Our members include Internal Drainage Boards, Regional Flood & Coastal Committees, Local Authorities and National Agencies, as well our Associate Members who are contractors, consultants and suppliers to the industry.

Function

Established in 1937, ADA's function is to watch over, support and promote the interests of drainage, water level and flood risk management authorities at a national and parliamentary level, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and discussions, and to disseminate information of common interest. ADA's water level management community is built upon interaction and connections made between our members.

Vision

To shape the future of water level management, connecting land, water, and people who manage water, to deliver climate resilience, sustainable natural value, and better places.

Purpose

Our purpose is to champion and campaign for the sustainable, collaborative delivery of water level and catchment management, offering guidance, leadership and support to water level management in the UK, whilst informing members of the public about our members' essential work.

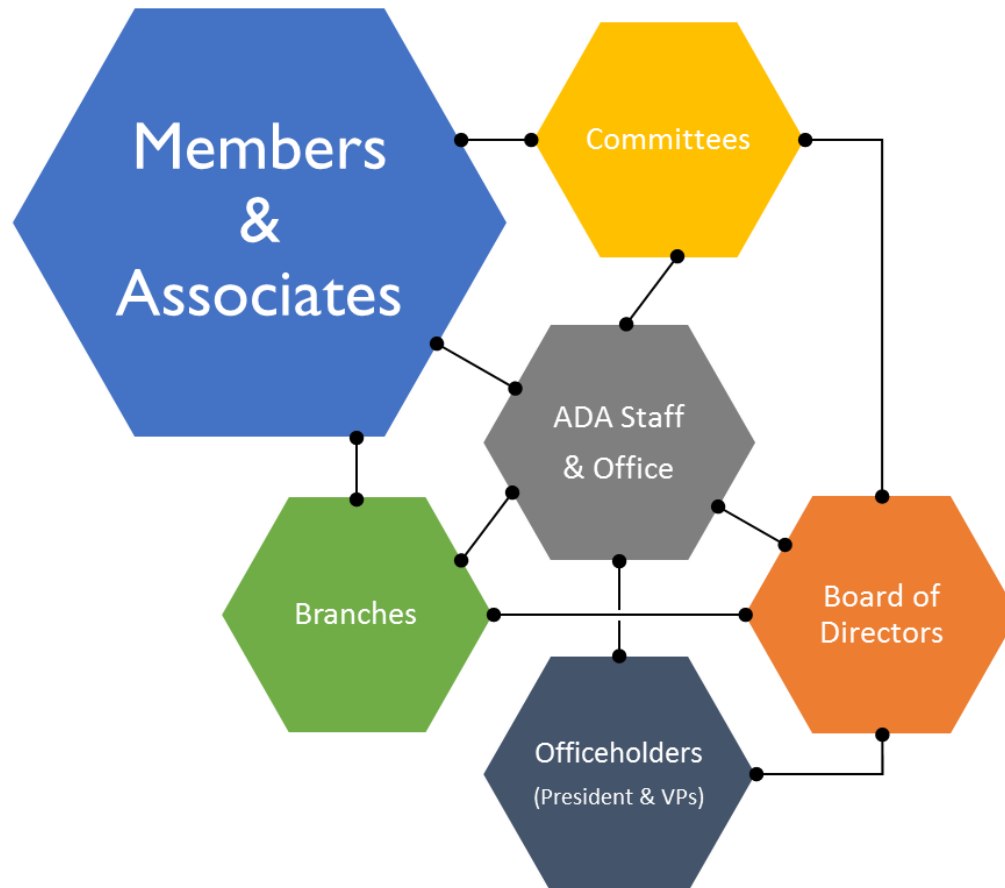
ADA works on behalf of the majority of its members to influence the Government, especially Defra and its agencies to help influence, understand and act appropriately in relation to water level management in the UK.

We aim to continually develop and improve our services, by building connections between our members and strengthening our representational role for the benefit of our members and society and ensuring the development and protection of ADA members' interests. In carrying out its work, ADA will elevate its attention to improving its carbon footprint.

Organisation

ADA is governed in accordance with its [Memorandum & Articles of Association](#).

ADA's organisation is represented in the chart below.



Board of Directors - ADA has a Board of Directors who oversee all of the association's activities and future actions. The Board is made up of ADA's Officeholders and Directors.

Officeholders - ADA has a President, Chair, Chief Executive, Company Secretary and Vice Presidents each appointed by the Board of Directors.

Branches - ADA has ten regional branches across England and Wales where members involved in water level management can come together and share ideas with ADA and each other. Each appoints a Director to ADA's Board of Directors.

Committees - ADA has two committees who each meet three times a year to discuss issues and topics affecting our members (Policy Committee) and the running of ADA (Advisory Committee). ADA also has two forums to promote open discussion amongst IDB members on technical and engineering, and environmental matters.

Staff and Office - ADA has six members of staff (five FTE).

Full information about each of the sections can be found on ADA's website at www.ada.org.uk

Key Business Drivers

ADA has identified the principal business drivers as:

- **Membership & Representation**

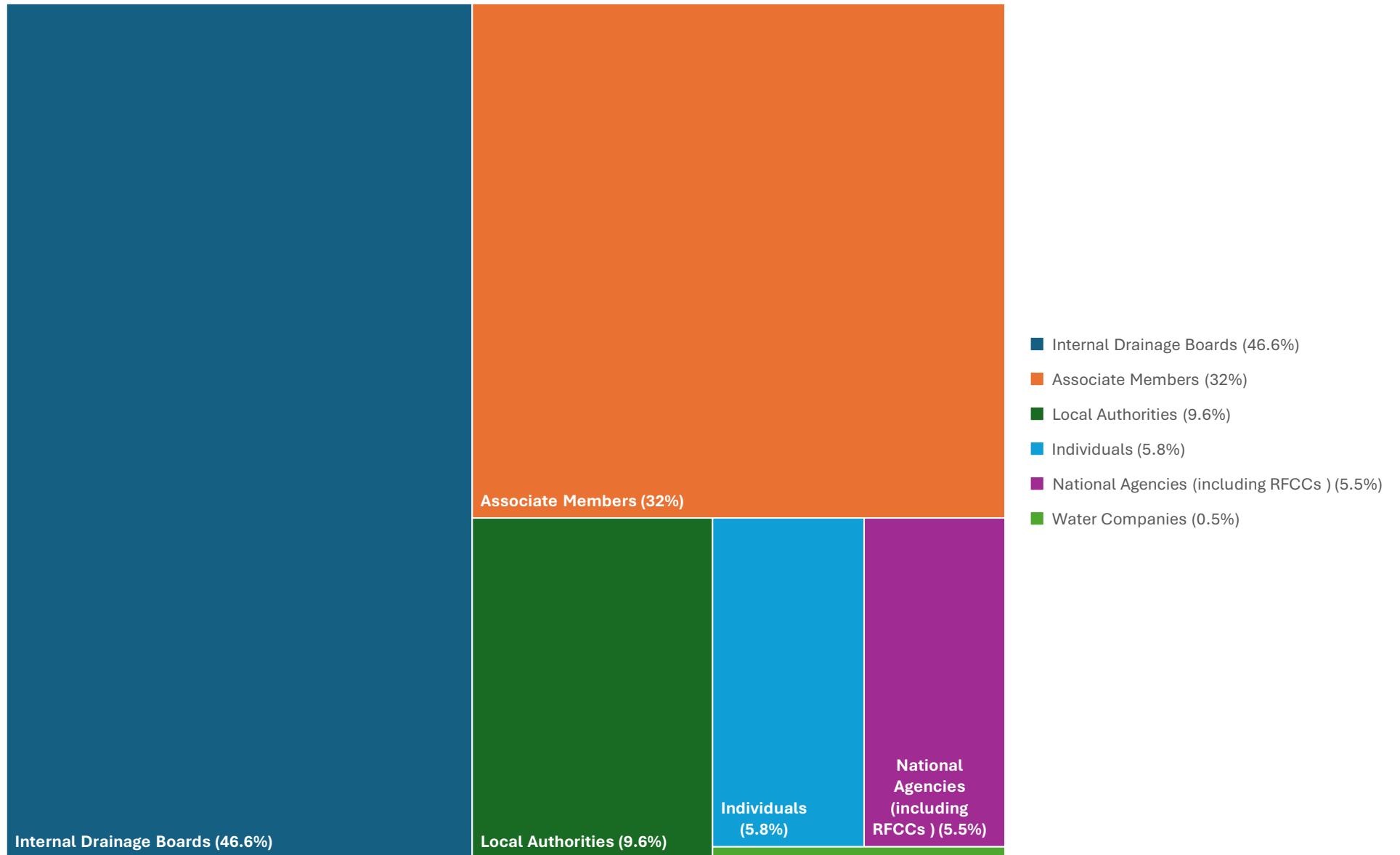
These business drivers must be supported and enabled by staff resources and the strength of ADA's financial position.

Membership

ADA's membership is core to the business success of ADA and income from membership fees in 2024 equated to around 63% of ADA's income. If project income from LAPSIP is taken out, that percentage increases to 75%. Whilst the diversification of income is important (and will be covered under the Finances section), membership of the Association must remain a core interest and driver for ADA.

ADA has a range of membership categories and the proportions of each of those categories is shown in the chart below.

ADA Membership Breakdown



ADA's goals for each category of membership in this business period are as follows:

- IDB Membership – to maintain membership levels of IDBs at 95% or higher.
- Local Authority Membership – to maintain membership at current levels (22 members).
- EA/NRW/DFI/RFCC Membership – to maintain membership.
- Other National Members – to maintain membership at current levels (5 members).
- Associate Members – to grow Associate Member income by 5% per year.
- Individual Members – no specific goal set.

ADA will aim to invite between 5 and 7 Vice Presidents who are able to help ADA with the promotion and representation of its members' interests.

Membership Risks

During this Business Plan period the key risks associated with membership are:

- Loss of IDB members as a result of membership fee restructuring
- Loss of other members as a result of external circumstances beyond ADA's control
- Political changes, eg devolution
- Reducing number of IDBs owing to amalgamation, member retention and recruitment, reducing ADA membership subscriptions
- Membership data breach
- Lack of agreement with ASA as to a new membership association for the sector.

Representation

ADA's Members clearly ask that ADA focusses on the promotion and representation of their interests at local, regional and national levels. ADA will therefore aim to appropriately engage with groups, bodies and government departments that are relevant to the business activities and interests of ADA's members.

Supporting Resources

1. Staff & Officers

As of June 2025, ADA employed six members of staff providing coverage across strategic, technical, finance and administrative/membership demands.

Role	Proportion of full time equivalent (FTE)	Business Criticality (1 – 5)
CEO	80% FTE	4
Technical Manager	100% FTE	5
Administration Officer	80% FTE	5
Communications & Publicity Officer	100% FTE	5
Events Officer	50% FTE	4
Membership & Data Officer	80% FTE	4

Business critical roles

Through discussion with ADA's members, committees and Board of Directors, staff roles can be seen at varying levels of business criticality. The list above shows the current consideration of each of the roles, graded on a scale to 1 – 5, where 5 is the most critical to ADA's operations.

Each member of staff is highly valuable to ADA and the business critical ranking does not in any way reflect on that value. It simply identifies where, if ADA was faced with the situation, replacement resource would be essential to the continued functioning of the business.

The three roles identified as essential for business continuity are the Technical Manager, Comms & Publicity Officer and the Administration Officer.

Identified needs

At the end of 2024, ADA addressed the need for additional resource to manage and maintain our membership database information through the employment of a Membership & Data Officer.

Over the recent years, ADA has received increasing demands to provide technical guidance to members and, particularly following the General Election in 2024, to input to Government-led consultations and strategic thinking. In the past, ADA's Committees and their members contributed significantly to this input but with increasing demands on peoples' time, the capacity of Committee members to carry out work has reduced. This places increased demand on ADA's Technical Manager and in recent years, ADA has experienced a bottleneck in relation to the demand and then the supply of outcomes and documents. Whilst the need is identified, there are no plans to add further resource to ADA's staff numbers, ADA will focus on increasing engagement with members to address this gap.

Staff & Officers risks and mitigations

The main risks involve prolonged staff absence or resignation and the potential time which could elapse before finding a replacement solution.

ADA is comfortable that there is a certain degree of interchangeability between staff in what they are able to do in the case of other members of staff resigning or in a prolonged absence. The specialist areas where interchangeability is less straightforward includes the dealing with technical matters and the production of the ADA Gazette.

On technical matters and for Gazette production, ADA would, in the short term, need to rely on out-sourced assistance to maintain service. For Events, Administrative and Membership activities, there is a certain degree of overlap of skills and experience between staff that would allow for those work areas to continue on a reduced basis.

For the CEO, it is assumed that the Chair or one of the Vice Chairs would step up in the short term to cover the role on a reduced basis.

2. Finances

Budgets

The CEO will manage budgets on a 3-year rolling basis. Outline budgets for the next financial year will be presented at July Board meetings and finalized estimates will be presented at October Board meetings.

Operating Costs

Operating costs are made up of a series of fixed overheads and variable costs. The largest single fixed cost is for staff, representing around 75% of ADA's 2024 operating costs (excluding project costs). Operating overheads (cost codes 4201 to 4250) represent around 12% of total operating costs (again, excluding project costs).

Apart from routine computer hardware renewals such as laptop replacements, there are no other planned equipment or asset investments planned in this business period.

ADA's Office accommodation continues to match our immediate needs, assisted by ADA's flexible working policy meaning that the office is rarely at capacity. The current office could allow for one more additional member of staff. At around 4% of our operating costs, ADA's office costs are considered good value for money and there are no immediate plans to change offices during this business period.

Income

Income comes from the following principal sources:

- **Membership fees**, represent the single largest income source, representing around 75% of ADA's 2024 income (excluding project income). In the past 3 years (2021 to 2024), ADA's membership income has increased by about 13.5%. This has allowed ADA to move from a deficit position into a balanced/ surplus position. However, with an additional member of staff engaged in late 2024 and allowing for inflation, membership income will be required to rise to cover costs.

- **ADA Gazette advertising**, income from advertising has been static for the last business period and for this business period, growth in revenue is only expected to match inflation.
- **Sponsorship** has provided income to contribute towards the costs of ADA events in recent years, including the ADA Flood & Water Conference and ADA Environment Day.
- **Bespoke projects**. These have included work for Defra regarding the running of the Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilot programme.

Excluding allowance of any additional income from sponsorship or bespoke projects and maintenance of staff numbers at current levels, this business plan needs to assume a year-on-year 6.5% increase in membership and advertising fees to continue to maintain a balanced budget.

Treasury

In 2024, ADA invested part of their reserves into two separate savings plans which have provided good returns of around 4% on £80,000 invested. A further £30,000 has been moved from cash reserves into those investments in early 2025. This Business Plan will operate to the following principles:

- Having at all times an operating immediate-access cash reserve able to cover a minimum of 6 months operating costs.
- Further investing any surpluses to that cash reserve at the end of each financial year.

Strategic Activities

Promotion/representation of member interests

With due consideration of the position of the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, the Department for Infrastructure(NI) and English Regional Flood & Coastal Committees, many members have made it clear that one of ADA's primary functions should be the promotion and representation of their interests at regional and national levels. ADA will therefore aim to appropriately engage with groups, bodies and government departments that are relevant to the business activities and interests of ADA's members.

IDB Amalgamations

Several groups of IDBs are considering driving forward a programme of amalgamations in the light of the operational and financial challenges experienced during the winter of 2023/24. ADA commits to providing those IDBs with strategic support and liaison with the EA and Defra to help streamline and simplify the process where possible.

Revision to membership fee structure

The membership of ADA is changing as a result of a variety of factors and in order to respond to that evolution, ADA will require to adjust the current membership fee structure. This business plan commits to reviewing and introducing a new membership fee structure with the simple intention of maintaining membership income at equivalent levels between the current system and any new system agreed. ADA will aim to review and introduce a new structure by 1st January 2027.

Publication of the Good Governance Guide update

The first edition of the Good Governance Guide for Internal Drainage Boards was published in 2018. ADA has published a second printed version of the Guide and as part of this Business Plan, ADA commits to the publication of a fully interactive online version of the Guide.

Collaboration with ASA

In November 2024, ADA and ASA signed a collaboration agreement with the intention of working towards an integration of both Associations, working under one business platform. As part of this ADA Business Plan, ADA will develop and agree a joint Business Plan with ASA for formal adoption with each Association's members. ADA will aim to work towards reach a joint agreement with ASA, with a view to putting a formal plan to their respective members at Annual General Meetings in the autumn of 2026.

Strategic Objectives 2026 - 2029

Having reviewed the Key Business Drivers and Strategic Activities, the following objectives have been set to help measure and monitor progress by ADA.

REF	DETAIL	HOW OBJECTIVE WILL BE ACHIEVED	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBILITY
S1	ADA to develop strong and productive organisational relationships and partnerships that lead to the enhancing of ADA's standing and reputation. As appropriate with: • politicians and parliament, • government, and their regulators and agencies, • water management asset owners, • professional institutions and societies, • Universities and Research organisations, • Non-Governmental Organisations, • Other organisations with related interests.	Meetings with a range of politicians from across the principal parties. Continue to provide secretariat support with CIWEM to the APPG for Sustainable Flood & Drought Management, with at least 3 APPG meetings per year. Meet RFCC chairs once per year. Routine liaison with the national agencies, including monthly meetings with the EA's primary point of contact. Senior meeting with EA Chair/CEO/FCERM Board Member twice per year. Liaise with government departments, notably Defra, MHCLG, Cabinet Office, including 4 meetings per year with Defra. Updates provided to the ADA Board and members, via written communications and ADA Branch meetings.	Ongoing	Board/Chair/CEO/ President/Vice Presidents/Tech. Manager/

		Explore and develop potential collaborative working arrangements with other organisations. Including with: ADEPT, CIWEM, CLA, CRT, ICE, LGA IDB Levy SIG, National Flood Forum, NFU, Natural England, NSFA, Rivers Trust, SAAA, UKIA, WRE, Universities.		
S2	ADA to influence national policy decision making within the flood risk and water management sector. Particularly in relation to: • watercourse and asset maintenance and management, • water resources, • surface water and sustainable drainage (SuDS), • lowland landscapes, and • IDB governance, resilience, and legislation.	Continued engagement with key partnerships and strategies, notably: Fens 2100+, Rural Flood Resilience Partnership (RFRP), Public Sector Cooperation Agreements (PSCAs), lowland peat soils, Water Resource East (WRE). Monitor and respond to all relevant high-impact consultations and strategic initiatives, seeking the views of members, notably: Flood funding reform consultation. Through engagement with: • Other organisations (see S1) • Communications activities (see S7)	Ongoing	Chair/CEO/ Tech. Manager
S3	ADA to create a sustainable membership fee structure for the future.	Review and revise the membership fee structure to ensure the association 'offer' is fit for purpose in light of: changing membership of ADA, future IDB amalgamations, different sizes of associate members, functions of other RMAs, and integration with ASA (see S4). Ensure that the review of membership fees and structure is undertaken with the engagement and collaboration of the membership.	ADA AGM 2026 (Nov/Dec 2026)	Board/Chair/CEO/ Tech. Manager

		Update membership fee structure with broad support of existing membership (e.g. 95% of IDBs in membership) Ensure that the membership offering is tailored to the relevant membership categories. Clear set of membership benefits for each category of membership. Seek increased membership from local authorities and associate members.		
S4	ADA to integrate with the Association of SuDS Authorities (ASA) to create a broader inclusive association for UK Flood & Water Authorities.	Develop joint working agreement beyond the existing Memorandum of Understanding between ADA and ASA. Set up a new association into which both ASA and ADA will transition when mutually agreed. Establish clarity of activities, roles and responsibilities within the new association. Retain space for different distinct membership types within the new association, with continued engagement and representation of ADA/ASA members and their interests. Achieve broad support from existing ADA and ASA members for any proposed changes, including a new name for the association. Seek to build greater long term financial security and resources for ADA/ASA.	01 January 2027	Board/Chair/CEO

S5	Strive towards a balanced budget for ADA.	Check balance between ADA income and expenditure and make sure this is no more than 5% away from budgetary target. If so, variance is reported to Advisory Committee and Board and is actively investigated. Use sensitivity analysis to check trends and reliability of income streams.	31 December 2028	CEO
S6	Focus on ADA staff development and wellbeing as the business's key asset.	Fully introduce and apply agree staff pay and conditions policy. Encourage staff members to attend site visits and ADA Branch meetings Staff members to contribute to press/publicity articles and news items	Ongoing	Board/Chair/CEO
S7	Increase ADA press, publicity activities, and strategic public outreach.	Sustain ADA's existing means of membership communication through the ADA Gazette (quarterly magazine) and ADA News Stream (bi-monthly e-newsletter) Target ADA communication through a greater variety of channels (e.g. podcasts, LinkedIn) to reach a broader audience. Create a clearer purpose and strategic narrative for communicating within the public arena around flood and water management.	Ongoing	CEO/Tech. Manager
S8	Increase collaboration and engagement with ADA members.	The following measures have been suggested to boost member engagement with key policy topics:	31 December 2028	CEO/Tech. Manager

		Prioritise and streamline workflows - Establish clear priorities for ADA's technical guidance efforts. Leverage Technology – Implement digital tools such as document automation, AI-driven research assistants, and centralised knowledge management systems to reduce manual workload and accelerate document production. Enhance Committee Engagement – Reshape board/committee roles to maximise input while respecting time constraints - put in x number of expected hours. Utilise virtual advisory groups, and existing knowledge-sharing forums. Expand External Collaboration – Partner with academic institutions, industry experts, and research organisations to share workloads. External contributors can provide insights and expertise without requiring additional ADA staffing or costs? Develop a Volunteer Network – Engage subject-matter experts and retired professionals willing to contribute on a part-time, advisory basis. This could provide valuable insights while alleviating pressure on existing staff.		
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		Improve Communication Channels – Strengthen engagement with stakeholders to set realistic expectations about response timelines and available capacity. A transparent approach may help manage external demands more effectively.		
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