



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

ENVIRONMENT FORUM

Meeting Note

Monday 08 September 2025

Venue: Online via Microsoft Teams

14.00 – 16.15

Invited					
Name	Role and organisation	Present	Name	Role and organisation	Present
Emily Askew (EA)	Environment Officer, Black Sluice IDB	Y	Caroline Laburn (CL)	Environmental Manager, Water Management Alliance	Y
Erin Barber (EB)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Y	Sofi Lloyd (SL)	Ecology & Environmental Services Manager, Middle Level Commissioners	Y
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist for Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y (Chair)	Chris Manning (CM)	Environment Advisor, Water Management Consortium	Y
Nick Downing (ND)	Environment & GIS Officer, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Alexandra McNeive (AM)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Consortium	Y
Priscilla Hazelhurst (PH)	CEO, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Apologies	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Charlotte Hipkin (CH)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Apologies	Dan Putteril (DP)	Assistant Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Apologies
Jennifer Horner (JH)	Sustainable Water Management Officer, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Y	Iain Turner (ITr)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Consortium	Y
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Apologies	Diana Ward (DW)	Ecologist for Bedford Groups of IDBs	Y

Ref	Notes
24	Welcome PB welcomed everyone to the meeting. The amended meeting notes of the Forum's meeting on 21 July 2025 were accepted.
25	Water Voles Strategic Licences The Forum discussed the new pilot scheme from Natural England for developers to streamline obtaining a licence for projects affecting water voles in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, bringing together individual licences into a singular 'strategic licence' under which a developer does not need to carry out their own surveys of water voles, would get clarity earlier on eligibility, and mitigation and compensation requirements, and benefit from increased flexibility during some licensed works.

	The group discussed the benefits and disadvantages of strategic licences in relation to IDB operations and the use of a water voles risk zone map of East Anglia to assess licence and compensation requirements. It was noted that the red zones containing stronghold populations of water voles required more mitigation efforts and that these often correlated with IDB managed systems. Group agreed that it was important that IDBs input into the further development and rollout of strategic licences, and noted the involvement of local planning authority ecologists, including Helen Boff. ACTION: CL to keep Forum members informed on progress. Towards project end (June 2026), CL to suggest when IDBs ecologists might want an update on project outcomes.
26	Herbicides for invasive weed control The Forum discussed general concerns that IDBs face regarding the use of herbicides from members of the public, and from some recently appointed board members to IDBs who were seeking for their IDB to entirely abolish the use of herbicides. They discussed situations where relying only on physical control, introduced other risk factors, such as when controlling invasives like floating pennywort, and areas that are difficult to safely access. The consensus was that a total weed control strategy is needed, balancing physical and chemical methods, particularly in the case of invasive species. A targeted approach that minimised spraying should be promoted. The Forum discussed the form AqHerb01: Agreement to use herbicides in or near water, which must be returned to the EA before use. In relation to record keeping a disparity exists in EA recording requirements, which may become more site specific in future audits. Users are meant to call in before use – risk of losing flexibility under new audit format. Restrictions also require permission from Natural England for use near to SSSIs. The Forum also noted requirements to register as a professional user of plant protection products (PPPs), and rules on herbicide storage. ACTION: IM to share a draft statement on glyphosate, based on ADA’s previous public position published in March 2017. Draft statement to be shared with ADA Environment Forum, ADA Technical & Engineering Forum, and ADA Policy Committee prior to any decision to publish.
27	Water Level Management Plans Ahead of a meeting scheduled with Natural England on WLMPs, the Forum discussed how updated guidance and a template would be a good idea given that the existing guidance for WLMPs dates from 1994, with supplementary guidance in 1999 and 2004. The Forum sought to address clarity on: • the purpose of WLMPs focusing on SSSIs, • how WLMPs fit alongside protected site plans and species recovery plans, • the level of detail within WLMPs, and consequent cost of producing them, • whether individual WLMPs should be written for individual SSSIs, or for a collection of sites within a catchment area, • building climate resilience into new plans, • whether WLMPs should cover wider considerations, such as peat soils, water quality, within and outside of designated sites,

	• utilising modern tools to prepare WLMPs including GIS data. ACTION: <i>Forum members to share good examples of WLMPs.</i> The Forum discussed financing the cost of producing multiple WLMPs every five years. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust were leading on producing some WLMPs. It was noted that there is conflicting views on what is sufficient detail and information to be included within WLMPs. Forum members sought for Defra/NE to determine what needs to change and what is sufficient within a WLMP.
28	Chinese Mitten Crab The Forum discussed a system being developed to filter out mitten crabs from the eel pass at St Germans Pumping Station. A free passage system for eels without such a system would allow passage by the crabs. Within the present system crabs are also eating the eels within the pass, thus necessitating extraction. There is evidence of physical damage to channel embankments, juvenile crabs cluster together, when they are adult, they try and establish territory and burrow into the bank. Mitten crabs were becoming more prevalent within the Trent system with consequent evidence of embankments slumping. Welland & Deepings IDB had been part of a trapping study with the local Wildlife Trust and Natural History Museum, however very few had been caught to date. Research around mitten crabs was limited with further evidence needed. ACTION: <i>IM to invite Dr Paul Clarke from the Natural History Museum, who has led on research into Chinese mitten crab within the Fens, to speak at the ADA Environment Day 2026.</i>
29	AOB a. Beaver. IM requested a representative to represent IDBs at national beaver meetings, but no responses. A local beaver advisory group was meeting in Sussex in early October. Natural England were receiving proposals for wild releases across England, several of which were in the southeast. The Forum were not satisfied with Natural England responses to queries regarding engaging with IDBs at an early stage to understand the risks associated with expressions of interest for beaver releases. b. Nature Recovery Strategies. The Forum discussed progress, frustration that no eel species plan was included in Somerset despite the Levels' importance for the species. Forum members were interested to see what NRS consultations highlight.
	Next meeting Online Monday 01 December 2025, 14:00-16:00.
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