



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

ENVIRONMENT FORUM

Meeting Note

13 January 2025

Venue: Online via Microsoft Teams

13.00 – 15.00

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
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist for Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y (Chair)	Sofi Lloyd (SL)	Ecology & Environmental Services Manager, Middle Level Commissioners	Apologies
Nick Downing (ND)	Environment & GIS Officer, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Chris Manning (CM)	Environment Advisor, Water Management Consortium	Y
Priscilla Haselhurst (PH)	CEO, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Y	Alexandra McNeive (AM)	Ecologist, LMDB	Y
Charlotte Hipkin	Ecologist, WLMA	Y	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Jennifer Horner	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 Ely and Bedford Groups of IDBs	Y

Ref	Notes
18	Himalayan Balsam Iain Turner informed how the Trent Valley area is experiencing issues with Himalayan balsam growing abundantly. Homeowners have accused of willful spread and challenged it legally. Surveys have been done. The operations team are saying they do not have the resources to treat the problem. Desilting work went ahead and the balsam spread. There are local groups saying the desilting has made it worse. ITr asked where do they stand legally as we are maintaining it but is it an issue? The group discussed how tricky it is to deal with. CM suggested they pull it, which can be effective but labor intensive and said there is a rust that has been developed. Some of the Kashmiri types will not be impacted by the rust. The group agreed it is a good idea to have a conversation with the landowner about spraying and topping it. In Bedfordshire wildlife trusts are pulling it in SSI's with great success. It is a good idea to cut it. Cutting it before it flowers, before its first node, to have the most impact. CL explained unless you cut it early you are going to have seeds, important to wash down well to not take to another site. In her area Boshier and wash down equipment is used by the op's guys. The group discussed the importance of biosecurity policy and following it, a plant and works committees, the importance of spray equipment and how it would be difficult to bring a legal challenge.

	Canals and river trust link on how to manage Himalayan Balsam Invasive Species Canal & River Trust
19	Beaver Licence (CL51) – Usability Caroline Laburn asked have we all looked at the licence? An observation is that it seems complicated unlike the badger and water vole licence. Romney Marshes IDB area is prolific with releases but they are were not consulted by Natural England. NE seem to be kicking the can down the road. You could say NE are acting recklessly and less than objectively. The group discussed the following; • CL expressions of interest have been put in and there will not be anymore. They are with NE/EA. • There is no risk assessments by Defra as you would expect. • Local water boards in Europe have more power. • Romney Marshes Wildlife trust applied for releases, the IDB does not have a policy on beavers, it may impact special levy increases if there is not a commonsense approach now. • Pete Downing will be using it so is he someone that can be talked to and see what they are dealing with, He plays down the costs, structures have been damaged, debris ended up going up a pump. He plays it down the costs. • CL found out about expressions of interest in her area from her local wildlife trusts. Burrowing is the biggest issue on the IDB's area. They are incredibly mobile. At Knepp beavers had made an impact by putting a dam over a lake which had raised the water level by 40cm, at this point you are relating to reservoirs of water. The fenced beavers will not be kept in and there is silence from NE. Animals that are out there are part of the environment now. • Where are the expressions of interest at with NE? Have the IDB's stated our case. • Action: For the group to go through the license line by line.
20	Is there a de minimus number of newspapers for publishing “Statements of intent not to undertake an EIA”. • ITr 'Where are we with EIA's'. He is concerned that it is not reaching far enough, his board hit 5 figures last year. Can we go on social media? • RM said that for drainage improvements, repairs not an improvement, so does not require formal notice. The reforming is what they put in there. • CM noted we were promised environmental reports by Boris Johnsons government and asked if the group do local newspaper and on-site notice? The principle is we need to engage with the public, contact the people directly and notice on site. • The group said one newspaper, website and on site. Refer to chris's link for the 2017 latest edition.
21	Water vole strategic licensing pilot

	Launched on 16th June ongoing one year pilot. The strategic licensing approach for managing water voles on site for IDB'S in East Anglia and other areas. NE using a landscape approach to where water voles are, and the impact on the populations. The red band of the three colour zones, means business as usual and undertake class license, an amber zone displacement is recommended and contribution to off site compensation and the same in the green zone. The zones are based on habitat. You are to apply to Natural England and they will look at where your site is. You need to contribute to the mink project. Similar to crested newt procedures. DW referred to the latest ADA gazette the article about water vole habitat and PSCA'S on main river. She summarized how the EA takes a cautious approach. She explained how it is unclear on where the responsibility lies. She expressed the importance of the EA licence and how it is different from the CL24 licence and referred to self-reporting. The chair suggested the group should read the article.
22	WLMP- LMIDB's trial experience PH gave an update on her project, the tender process and the way it has changed in ambition and method. The previous plans were static, now taking a whole district approach, integrating flow monitoring, taking into account what the farmers need for water. They have part funded and funded by heritage lottery. A map of the plan was shown and flow monitoring was talked about. She was asked Any landscape recovery projects in area? Yes there are those projects in our area and making space of nature kent strategic And how are you setting objectives? Objectives are keeping levels high for breeding waders. Looking at how drought will impact the plans. She suspects that to manage it for farmers, that will probably end up with a couple of pumps. Are there pumps in the catchments? Gravity in the pilot projects and pumps in the other projects. IM to set u meeting with defra on wmlp's.
	Next meeting 08/09/2025 14:00-16:00
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