



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

ENVIRONMENT FORUM Meeting Note

21 July 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	Environmental Officer, WLMA	Apologies	Sofi Lloyd (SL)	Ecology & Environmental Services Manager, Middle Level Commissioners	Apologies
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	Y	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Apologies
Charlotte Hipkin	Environmental Officer, WLMA	Y	Dan Putteril	Assistant Environmental Officer, WLMA	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 Bedford Groups of IDBs	Y

Ref	Notes
18	Update since last meeting. Phil Brewin's summarised his attendance at the major landowners group meeting, a Natural England and Defra partnership which looks at protected sites. He noted the work on understanding the notifications and using those to tailor the assessment of condition. No update if there is detailed review of notifications. He will keep the group updated. Himalayan Balsam Iain Turner raised how the Trent Valley region is experiencing issues with Himalayan balsam growing abundantly. Homeowners have been accused of willful spread. Surveys have been carried out, and the operations team report they do not have the resources to treat the problem. Desilting work went ahead. 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 still 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. DW noted in Bedfordshire wildlife trusts are pulling it in SSSIs with great success. It is a good idea to cut it. Cutting balsam before it flowers, before its first node has the most impact. It was discussed unless you cut it early you are going to have seeds. It is important to wash down plant very well to not take to another site. The group discussed the importance of biosecurity policy, a

	plant and works committees, spray equipment and how it would be difficult to bring a legal challenge to the IDBs for spreading it. Can cost £15k- £20k to research. Canals and river trust link https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/things-to-do/canal-and-river-wildlife/canal-and-river-invasive-species-eradication-project-2021-2025/eradicating-himalayan-balsam-in-new-eco-friendly-trial CL- to send pictures of WMA on site sprayer to IT.
3	Beaver Licence (CL51) – Usability Caroline Laburn asked if anyone has experience of the licence. Her observation is that it is complicated unlike other wildlife licenses. The group discussed the following: • Expressions of interest have been put in and there will not be anymore. They are with NE/EA. Would it be worth flagging up issues that are being experienced further? • There is no risk assessments for beaver by Defra as you might expect. • Sussex Wildlife Trust applied for release at Romney Marshes and it was noted you may be able to find out about area releases from trusts. The RM IDB does not have a policy on beavers, it may impact special levy increases if there is not a commonsense approach now. • Pete Downing (River Stour IDB) has experience. He may play down the costs but structures have been damaged and debris ended up going up a pump. • 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. • DW noted that at Knepp beavers had made an impact by putting a dam over a lake which had raised the water level by 40cm, and this may have implications under the Reservoirs Act • 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. Action: Keep up to date with EA Beaver Team development. A subgroup could 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”. • IT ‘asked ‘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? • The group discussed how for drainage improvements, repairs are not an improvement, so does not require formal notice. • CM noted that they were promised environmental reports by Boris Johnson’s government. • Do people opt for 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 suggested one newspaper, website and on site is sufficient. Refer to link for the 2017 latest edition. The Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) (Amendment) Regulations 2006
21	Water vole strategic licensing pilot CL informed the group of the Water vole strategic licence, launched on 16th June ongoing one year pilot. The strategic licensing approach for managing water voles on site for IDB’S in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex NE using a landscape approach to where water voles are, and the impact of development on the populations. The red band of the three colour zones will be business as usual for IDBs and undertake class license (CL24), an amber zone displacement is recommended and contribution to off-site compensation and the same in the green zone. The zones are based on a

	largescale habitat map. You are to apply to Natural England and they will look at where your site is. You need to contribute to the mink project. CL will send round details and NE presentation .Gov website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-voles-apply-for-a-strategic-licence ArcGIS Map - https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?panel=gallery&layers=9701dd3b93d641fa9c98be4b56ceab8c DW referred to the latest ADA gazette which included an article about water vole management in relation to PSCA'S on main river. The article contains a number of potentially misleading points. CL24 clearly identifies activities which do and do not require a licence. Irrespective of whether the EA takes a cautious approach and wishes to self report (which may be a waste of police time), the group felt that the IDBs need to work within their own judgement and good practice and be confident in that approach. The EA works under a different licence .
22	WLMP- LMIDB's trial experience Priscilla Hazelhurst gave an update on her project and the way it has changed in ambition and method. The previous plans were static but they are 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 discussed. She explained landscape recovery projects in the area. Their objectives are keeping levels high for breeding waders. They are researching how drought will impact the plans. She suspects that to manage it for farmers, that will probably end up with a couple of pumps. Action: Group/ ADA to set up meeting with Defra on WMLP's.
23	Desilting Techniques Emily Askew wanted to know if people are draining and damning. The group identified • It is not advisable to do everything all at once to protect habitats and be sensitive to margins. PB leaves it as winter level. CL does desilting seasonally and leaves margin on opposite bank and uses WDC assessment before any desilting. • Beds desilts primarily over winter (unless there are access constraints) to an agreed protocol as defined in the Conservation Handbook • Natural England are consulted where impacts likely for SSSI/ N2K sites and respond with assent as necessary. • It is best to walk through the passage the day after to check the eels or better to have man and bucket on site to repatriate. DO monitor often required. • The need for badgers to be properly considered was identified. • The cycle of doing it depends entirely on the area. • It depends on size of area but in some places if soil is soft, banks have been scraped which may cause issue with water voles. • The EA approach of writing to landowners saying they will not do maintenance to main rivers means water is not coming into some sites.
	Next meeting 08/09/2025 14:00-16:00
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