



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	Sofi Lloyd (SL)	Ecology & Environmental Services Manager, Middle Level Commissioners	Y (Chair)
Erin Barber (EB)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Y	Chris Manning (CM)	Environment Advisor, Water Management Consortium	Apologies
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist for Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y (Policy Forum Rep)	Alexandra McNeive (AM)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Consortium	Y
Nick Downing (ND)	Environment & GIS Officer, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Priscilla Haselhurst (PH)	CEO, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Y	Dan Putteril (DP)	Assistant Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Y
Charlotte Hipkin (CH)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Alliance	Y	Iain Turner (ITr)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Consortium	Y
Jennifer Horner (JH)	Sustainable Water Management Officer, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Y	Diana Ward (DW)	Ecologist for Bedford Groups of IDBs	Y
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Y (partial)	In Attendance		
Caroline Laburn (CL)	Environmental Manager, Water Management Alliance	Y	Elly Andison (EA)	Senior Advisor (Beaver Team), Environment Agency	Y
Laura Lamb (LL)	Membership Officer, ADA	Y	Samuel Nicholson (SN)	Senior Advisor: Flood Risk and Beavers, Environment Agency	Y

Ref	Notes
30	<p>Welcome</p> <p>SL welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>
31	<p>Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs)</p> <p>An initial WLMP stakeholder meeting had been hosted by ADA on 21 October with Defra (floods and peatland teams), IDB, Natural England, Broads Authority, and Environment Agency staff present. The meeting sought to address clarity on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the purpose of WLMPs focusing on SSSIs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. <p>Further discussion continued around what a modern plan should aim to achieve and making sure plans are flexible enough to respond to changing environmental, social, or political contexts.</p> <p>DW noted that she was disappointed not to attend.</p> <p>A follow up meeting has been agreed for 23 February and it was noted that other Natural England professionals with expertise relevant to protected sites would be engaged to participate.</p>
32	<p>Beavers</p> <p>Samuel Nicholson gave a presentation relating to wild release and management of beavers.</p> <p>The presentations summarised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Environment Agency's approach to return beaver, where it sought to produce resilient ecosystems. How they may slow the flow of water, improve water quality and the complexity of the wetlands that they create with record number of pollinators. • Challenges with beaver and human infrastructure and landscape. • Unlicenced and licenced action impacts presented. • Of 39 applications for further licenced wild releases, nine applications have been brought through to the next stage, to provide a detail proposal. • The Environment Agency is working on a Beaver Manual, with an aim to publish in summer 2026. <p>Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management plans for making space for beavers is costly, are Defra prepared to fund it? <p>SN reported that Defra had commissioned ADAS to conduct a Beaver impact assessment 2025-26 to inform the economic assessment within a future Long Term Management Plan for beavers in England.</p> <p>The group discussed the economic assessment and how IDBs could support it. SN requested that IDBs provide data to assist, and there was a discussion around how the EA should request the data to be consistent. It was noted that funding for management needs to be taken into the account, and protections for vulnerable areas as these could result in significant costs.</p> <p>SN reported that there would be some structured interviews coming up, so ADAS could speak to ADA and River Stour IDB, who have direct experience of beavers in their district.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Is there confidence that reimbursements will happen if there is damage from beaver

	<p>dams/burrows?</p> <p>This is a topic for the economic assessment by Defra. SN noted that there is already substantial equivalent experience with badger sets in embankments. However, the Forum noted that this was not the experience in Kent or the Netherlands given that beaver burrowing begins below the water line, and often breach the crest of embankments, substantially increasing the risk of piping and embankment failure.</p> <p>3. A query on imaging of beavers and that thermal imaging and asset surveys are quite expensive and niche. If there were scope to broaden the programme to include a wider survey of assets, this could help identify other issues for IDBs that have previously been cost-prohibitive.</p> <p>The answer was that thermal imaging is being discussed and raised in the assessments.</p> <p>4. How were IDBs notified on expressions of interest for beaver release?</p> <p>Natural England informed the Environment Agency and the National Beaver Forum. Natural England did not directly engage with local IDBs and refused to hear from local IDBs at the initial expression of interest phase, despite the local Environment Agency teams requesting the local IDBs for information on relevant flood risk management in the vicinity. Of the nine that they have offered to progress to detailed proposals they will need to do stakeholder engagement and consult more widely at a catchment scale.</p> <p>5. Will the stakeholder engagement be spearheaded through a beaver group?</p> <p>SN reported that Natural England will be the lead organisation for this and the Environment Agency are a stakeholder.</p> <p>6. The group discussed first year of beaver licences, and whether licence holders need to submit returns, including nil returns?</p> <p>The answer was yes and a template return would be shared amongst the group.</p> <p>Action: SL to share a template beaver licence return amongst the group.</p>
33	<p>ADA Policy Representatives</p> <p>IM gave an overview of the list of people that had been compiled for the ADA Policy Committee to provide a list of officers (mostly from IDBs) to represent ADA and IDBs on several policy areas. A draft shared with the Policy Committee at their September meeting is approved and the Environment Forum was asked to provide any other key topics and volunteers.</p> <p>It was agreed to add eels and natural flood management as topics, and to separate out protected species into water vole and badger (licencing) as specific topics</p> <p>It was noted that there was some frustration around engagement on eel passage with the Environment Agency and the REDEEM project with unrealistic timescales set for conducting the research.</p> <p>Action: It was agreed that the list of Policy Representatives will be published by ADA online and the Forum will be engaged on updates periodically.</p>
34	<p>Badger exclusion</p> <p>IT informed the forum of a recent badger exclusion when a badger did not wish to leave the sett. This led to discussion on the known rules around 21 day exclusion terms. During a sett closure, an external contractor had their own take on the 21 day exclusion period, Natural England wording on the licence is around badgers accessing the sett. IT tried to get</p>

	clarification of this with Natural England, the response was that it is a grey area.
	Next meeting Monday 13 April 2026 at 14.00.
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