



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes

Monday 12 May 2025

Venue: Westminster Kingsway College, 76 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PD
10.40 – 15.00

FINAL

Invited					
Name	Role and organisation	Present	Name	Role and organisation	Present
Charles Mills (CM)	Committee Chairperson, Deputy Chair, ADA	Y	Nicola Oldfield (NO)	Chief Engineer, Middle Commissioners	Y
Ed Johnson (EJ)	Committee Secretary, Committee Deputy Chair Chief Engineer, Witham Fourth District IDB	Y	Oliver Pantrey (OP)	Clerk, Upper Medway IDB	Y (online)
James Addicott (JA)	Manager Engineering – Policy, Environment Agency	Y	Richard Powell (RP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Eastern) RFCC	Apologises
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y	Iain Sturdy (IS)	Chief Executive, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y (online)
Robert Caudwell (RC)	Chairperson, ADA	Y	Innes Thomson (IT)	Chief Executive, ADA	Y
Matthew Harrison (MH)	Flood & Water Manager, Lincolnshire County Council	Y (online)	Carol Tidmarsh (CT)	FCERM Team, Defra	Y
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Y	Lu Webb (LW)	Water for Nature Programme, Natural England	Y
Steve Larter (SL)	Finance Director, Witham & Humber IDBs	Y (online)	In attendance		
David Letellier (DL)	Head of Operations South Wales Central, Natural Resources Wales	Y	Eddy Poll (EP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Northern) RFCC	Y
Andrew McGill (AMG)	Chief Executive, Water Management Consortium	Apologises	Mhari Baldwin (MB)	Lowland Resilience Manager, Environment Agency	Y
Andrew McLachlan (AMN)	Chief Executive, Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Krzysztof Dabrowski (KD)	Beaver Technical Specialist: National Beaver Team, Environment Agency	Y (online, for item 47)
Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y	Laura Lamb (LL)	Membership Officer, ADA	Y

Ref	Minutes
40	<p>Welcome and apologies</p> <p>All apologies were noted as indicated above.</p> <p>Phil Brewin (PB), Ecologist to the Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium was welcomed to the Committee as the appointed representative of the ADA Environment Forum, taking over from Diana Ward.</p> <p>Mhari Baldwin (MB) Lowland Resilience Manager at the Environment Agency was welcomed to the Committee. MB would be taking over from JA as the Environment Agency's nominated representative on the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee extended its thanks to JA for his time on the Committee.</p> <p>Eddy Poll (EP) was welcomed to the meeting, deputising for Richard Powell representing RFCCs.</p>
41	<p>Declarations of interest</p> <p>None.</p>
42	<p>Minutes of previous meeting</p> <p>Minutes of the ADA Policy Committee meeting on 22 January 2025 were tabled, these had previously been approved by correspondence by the Committee.</p>
43	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>None.</p>
44	<p>ADA Forum updates</p> <p>a. Environment Forum</p> <p>PB gave an update from the ADA Environment Forum. Environment Forum members were keen to clarify the future purpose for Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs), and sought update guidance that had not changed since the early 2000s. Natural England and Defra had been the previous custodians of the guidance and direction for WLMPs. The Committee agreed with the Forum that WLMPs needed to be broadened to integrate water level management across a lowland catchment area, covering multiple SSSIs, and other environmental pressures such as lowland peat soils. Having separate plans for different sites or different types of environmental pressures were inefficient and less effective. It was also noted that there was no funding at present for updating these plans or maintaining existing infrastructure for conserving the water environment. PB noted that water level managers needed to look at the water stress effects on protected sites to see what future water management planning was needed, however this was weakened by not knowing a site's condition as there had been no assessment of sites for some time.</p> <p>Action: IM to share example WLMPs with CT.</p> <p>Action: LW, PB and IM to discuss WLMPs as a group and bring in CT at a later date.</p>

	<p>b. Technical & Engineering Forum</p> <p>EJ reported that there had not been any meetings of the ADA Technical & Engineering Forum since the previous Policy Committee meeting.</p>
45	<p>Drainage Districts in Wales</p> <p>DL gave a presentation on the internal drainage districts administered by Natural Resources Wales. There was an overview of the organisation’s responsibilities, a geography of the drainage districts in Wales, and talked around the challenges of funding, flood and drought and procurement limits and delays. DL spoke on opportunities such as ADA membership and sustainable farming scheme. He took questions on rates and levies, the history of the abolition of drainage boards in Wales and how Natural Resource Wales has taken the lead.</p>
46	<p>Lowland Peat</p> <p>IM presented to the Committee on the successful completion of LAPSIP with IDBs completing 20 small infrastructure pilot projects funded by Defra that benefit water level management for lowland peat soils. The projects saw water management infrastructure installed capable of providing more control of water levels during dry periods to assist with the preservation of peat soils. IM gave an overview of the report written by ADA for Defra on project findings, summarising the key successes, challenges and opportunities identified.</p> <p>IM reported that he was discussing next steps with Defra. A potential new grant scheme for retain water safely for lowland peat soils would likely to be open to IDBs and other organisations, and enable projects to be completed over a slightly longer period of time. Consequently, it is likely to be more competitive and project will need to demonstrate carbon savings.</p> <p>JA recognised the work of ADA towards this project having been a member of the LAPSIP steering group, and gave thanks.</p>
47	<p>Beavers</p> <p>JA introduced Krzysztof Dabowski (KD), Beaver Technical specialist from the Environment Agency’s National beaver team. KD gave a presentation around beavers following Defra’s policy update of 28 February 2025, setting out its approach to the wild release and management of beavers in England.</p> <p>KD highlighted how beavers benefit the landscape and how Natural England have drawn up a licensing framework underpinned by a five-step approach to address the need for management. He discussed the challenges where beavers burrow, forage, and dam and the importance of living alongside them as a European protected species. Measures being trialled in other European countries to mitigate these impacts, such as embankment designs and refugia mounds that beavers can burrow within during periods of high water.</p> <p>KD explained that resources were in development through an infrastructure sub-committee convened by the Environment Agency from the National Beaver Management Forum. This would include a manual of engineering techniques relevant to RMAs.</p> <p>KD answered questions on how engineers and landowners could manage issues using the frameworks and funding on offer including insurance. He explained how some immediate actions are permitted if conditions are met, such as removing a dam</p>

	<p>if less than two weeks old, after which the class licence framework can be utilised. He answered questions on the breeding cycle; beavers are classed as slow breeders with one litter of on average two to three kits per year.</p>
<p>48</p>	<p>Updates:</p> <p>a. Defra</p> <p>CT reported from Defra that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there has been a reorganisation within Defra’s Floods & Water Directorate, which sees Laura Lutkoski having oversight of the EA sponsorship team and inland waterways and navigation, the team name will change. • Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary, is leaving Defra. David Hill, Director General is stepping in on an interim basis, prior to recruitment of a permanent replacement. • The Spending Review for beyond 2025-26 continues with negotiations with HM Treasury. • The consultation on the flood funding review would be issued shortly. • On local audit, MHCLG will look to increase the smaller authorities threshold in the summer, something that had been sought by IDBs and ADA. • A Westminster Hall debate on flooding planning and developer responsibilities was to take place on 13 May. • The IDB rating statutory instrument was close to being finalised and would be shared with ADA. Defra’s aim remained to lay this before Parliament in the Autumn. • The consultation on Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) was to close on 03 June. ADA and some IDBs attended a stakeholder event on 30 April. • The project specification for a Defra research project on IDB funding project had been shared with ADA and the LGA IDB Levies SIG, comments had been taken on board. The project would go out to tender in the summer and the project will run for one year. <p>b. Environment Agency</p> <p>JA gave an update from the Environment Agency (EA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total government investment in FCERM across 2024/25 and 2025/26 is £2.65 billion. The schemes would better protect 52,000 properties from coastal erosion. There is a £140 million investment programme for prioritised projects, including IDB schemes. • Defra’s IDB Storm Recovery & Asset Improvement Fund for modernising and upgrading IDB assets of £75 million was bolstered in March with an additional £16 million. This brings the total budget for Tranche 2B to £35 million for spending during the 2025/26 financial year and the total fund budget to £91 million. • EA had an encouraging meeting in January about higher land water contributions, and the matter is going to go to EA’s Board of Directors for review. The previous RFCC payments bridged the gap but are not sustainable.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Environment Agency has recently published updated national flood risk assessment maps, including the National Flood Risk Assessment (NaFRA2) and the National Coastal Erosion Risk Map (NCERM). These new maps provide more detailed and accurate information about flood risk from rivers, the sea, and surface water, incorporating climate change projections. • The EA has published a new one year business plan with three priorities, which includes FCRM, natural flood management, incident response. The EA2030 corporate strategy goals are for: healthy water, land and air supporting nature’s recovery, sustainable growth and a nation resilient to climate change. • Alan Lovell is to step down as Chair of the EA, and the process of recruitment for his successor has begun. • There were continued delays in approving Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAPs), and advice had been issued that RMAs should highlight at the earliest possible opportunity where FRAPs may be required in order to progress with FCERM projects or indeed IDB fund projects. <p>The Committee discussed PSCAs, and that the additional £16 million was targeted towards rural schemes having been derived from the agricultural part of Defra’s budget.</p> <p>c. Local Authorities</p> <p>MH gave a local authority update following recent local government elections. For Greater Lincolnshire this presented a different political landscape with a mayor, and nationally the prospect of local government reorganisation. Non-statutory guidance for Section 19 investigations under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 had been published by Defra to bring consistency and managing expectations of what can be achieved from these reports.</p> <p>MJ summarised that devolution, combining authorities and a mayor, as well as organisational staffing changes were a focus in Sussex. MJ noted that with many local authorities looking at funding they were looking at choices between membership of ADEPT, ASA and ADA. Funding reductions on maintenance by the EA were an issue as was the unresolved decision on the future of the River Arun Internal Drainage District.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the importance of having a debrief between RMAs after a flood event through the Section 19 process alongside the need to engage with the wider public.</p> <p>IT closed the updates by concluding the value that ADA finds in partnering with ASA, ADEPT and NALC. There was currently a vacancy for a local authority appointed director on ADA’s Board.</p>
49	<p>Policy Committee Priorities</p> <p>EJ summarised the work streams that were currently in motion by ADA. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDB Ratings Group, • Version 2 of the ADA Good Governance Guide for IDB Board Members • Development planning advice in relation to commuted sums.

	<p>The last of these had been put on hold during recent government reforms to the planning system.</p> <p>Decision: <i>The Policy Committee resolved to focus on taking forward work on helping IDBs to reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience to climate change in lowland areas.</i></p> <p>Suggested outputs included a model carbon policy for IDBs and a new guidance document. Priorities related to carbon emissions were discussed including channel management, fuel efficiencies for plant machinery, and pumping stations. The Committee emphasised its importance to be specific and use recognised methodologies in any advisory manual. Next steps may include a questionnaire to members, and a steering group will compile best practice examples with the objective of how IDBs can be more climate resilient.</p> <p>Action: <i>A working group would be formed to take forwards an IDB Climate Resilience work stream, and develop the planned actions and outputs.</i></p>
50	<p>Consultations</p> <p>IM summarised consultation responses that have recently been made, including a submission to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee’s Flood resilience in England inquiry. IM would be giving evidence in person to that Committee in Parliament on 19 May 2025.</p> <p>There were several open consultations that ADA would be responding to, around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authority funding reform (MHCLG), around how local authorities will retain business rates in the future, • Exemptions reform to the Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) (Defra), around flexibility for moving certain activities between exemptions, and standard permits, • Reform of landfill tax (HM Treasury), in part related to dredged materials although it was clarified that this was unlikely to impact RMA watercourse maintenance activities. <p>The Committee discussed the EPR consultation. AM had circulated a draft response which encouraged the activities of risk management authorities to be covered by a broad based exemption for such essential operations. IM noted that in the Netherlands Water Boards worked under a regulatory system where an environmental code of conduct was agreed for 5 year periods with the Dutch government following public consultation. This still held water boards accountable for their worked but enabled much simpler regulation and even further environmental enhancement, and could be a system that environmental regulators learnt from in the UK.</p> <p>Action:- <i>IM to invite Jonathan Austin, Senior Team leader in River and Asset Regulation at the Environment Agency to attend a future meeting and discuss opportunities for better regulation of watercourse and asset management.</i></p>
51	<p>IDBs as Statutory Consultees</p> <p>IT led discussion on whether IDBs should be given duties as statutory consultees within the planning system for development within their districts in relation to flood risk. This discussion was raised in relation to ongoing reforms to the planning system and its legislation and regulation.</p>

	<p>AM discussed his experience in acting as a statutory consultee when working for a lead local flood authority.</p> <p>CT explained that changes in this area were not imminently likely. Committee were minded to continue to seek evidence on benefits of making IDBs statutory consultees and the practical and cost implications of doing so. But that this change would be a longer term aspiration dependent on smaller IDBs gaining greater capacity.</p>
52	<p>AOB</p> <p>There was a discussion on Chinese mitten crabs (<i>Eriocheir sinensis</i>) and the risk of damage that these pose to watercourse and flood embankments.</p> <p>Action: <i>All to seek feedback as to whether RMAs in their local area had specific concerns regarding Chinese mitten crab causing damage to flood defence assets and systems.</i></p>
	Close

Item 7

ADA Policy Committee – Key topic representatives

Topic	Suggested Committee Member/s	
Beavers	Phil Brewin	
WLMPs	Phil Brewin	
Electricity standing charge reform	Steve Larter	
Utilities		
Audit	Steve Larter /	
Capital FCERM investment		
De-maining/asset transfer		
PSCAs		
Protected species regulation	Phil Brewin	
Lowland peat	Ian Moodie	
IDB1		
IDB ratings reform		
Carbon reduction		
Climate adaptation		
Channel/asset maintenance		
Planning, SuDS and commuted sums		

