



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

POLICY COMMITTEE Minutes

Thursday 22 January 2026
Venue: Kings College, The Strand
10.40 – 15.00

DRAFT

Invited					
Name	Role and organisation	Present	Name	Role and organisation	Present
Charles Mills (CM)	Committee Chairperson, Deputy Chair, ADA	Y	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Ed Johnson (EJ)	Committee Secretary, Committee Deputy Chair Chief Engineer, Witham Fourth District IDB	Y (online)	Nicola Oldfield (NO)	Chief Engineer, Middle Commissioners	Y
Mhari Baldwin (MB)	Lowland Resilience Manager Environment Agency	Y	Oliver Pantrey (OP)	Clerk, Upper Medway IDB	Apologies
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist, Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium	Y (online)	Richard Powell (RP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Eastern) RFCC	Y (online up to 59)
Robert Caudwell (RC)	Chairperson, ADA	Y	Iain Sturdy (IS)	Chief Executive, Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium	Apologies
Matthew Harrison (MH)	Flood & Water Manager, Lincolnshire County Council	Apologies	Innes Thomson (IT)	Chief Executive, ADA	Y
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Y	Carol Tidmarsh (CT)	FCERM Team, Defra	Y
Sallyanne Jeffrey (SJ)	Chief Financial Officer & RFO, Water Management Alliance	Y (online)	Lu Webb (LW)	Principal Adviser Flood & Coast, Natural England	Apologies
Steve Larter (SL)	Finance Director, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Apologies	In attendance		
David Letellier (DL)	Head of Operations South Wales Central, Natural Resources Wales	Apologies	Laura Lamb (LL)	Membership Officer, ADA	Y
Andrew McGill (AMG)	Chief Executive, Water Management Consortium	Y (online)	Sheena Engineer (SE)	FRAPs Manager, Environment Agency	Y (from item 61 onwards)
Andrew McLachlan (AMN)	Chief Executive, Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards	Y (online)	William Riley (WR)	Senior Consultant, ICF	Y (online for item 61)

Ref	Minutes
68	<p>Welcome and apologies</p> <p>All apologies were noted as indicated above.</p>
69	<p>Declarations of interest</p> <p>None.</p>
70	<p>Minutes of previous meeting</p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting 10 September 2025 were approved.</p>
71	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>57a. IM/LL organised a meeting on 21 October 2025 with representatives from IDBs, EA, NE, Broads Authority and Defra to discuss the future role of Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs), with a follow up meeting to be held on 23 February 2026</p> <p>57b. IM circulated a draft position statement on Glyphosate. He has received a range of feedback from IDB environment officers and engineers.</p> <p>Action: <i>IM to revise and circulate updated paper on glyphosate following comments received.</i></p> <p>67. SJ updated the committee on a recently funded scheme, with a procurement tender in place for WMA IDBs and pumping stations. It led to a discussion on AMC meeting in working group, he will check if it is scheduled and update the Committee.</p>
72	<p>ADA Forum updates</p> <p>a. Environment Forum</p> <p>PB provided an update on the Environment Forum meeting held on 01 December 2025, summarising the key topics discussed:</p> <p>WLMPs: Discussions at the meeting on 21 October 2025 with the EA, NE and Defra highlighted interest in refreshing the guidance. The EA has identified local funding in Somerset for WLMPs.</p> <p>Beavers: Sam Nicholson, Senior Advisor for Flood Risk & Beavers from the EA had given a presentation covering their distribution, management techniques, and how impacts can be reduced. Defra has commissioned a study on beaver impacts. Licensing, reporting requirements under the CL51 licence were also discussed. PB represented ADA at the second NE workshop on developing a Long-Term Beaver Management Plan, with the next stage being a survey.</p> <p>Floating Pennywort: In the recent National Group Meeting it was confirmed there is no funding for delivering the National Strategy for Floating Pennywort. PB said management of floating pennywort on privately owned watercourses remained a particular challenge and unsatisfactory. Knowledge was shared on reducing damage to pumps, outcomes to date, and preventing escapement from freshwater systems. This had raised the profile of eel passage work, with involvement from several other boards.</p>

EJ asked a question regarding refreshing IDB Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). Five-year targets had been set by a number of IDBs in 2021 and will need refreshing. On reporting, IM and PB advised that progress should be reported to boards annually and publicly at the five-year point. IM said that BAP guidance published by ADA in 2020 remains appropriate to support this process and ADA does not plan to update it at this time. BAPs may be discussed at future Environment Forum meetings. IDBs should also consider Local Nature Recovery Strategies in updating their BAPs.

IM reported that the ADA Environment Day would be held on 04 February 2026 with speakers from across academia and practitioners in both the UK and the Netherlands. Sarah Fowler from the WWT would be the keynote speaker.

b. Technical & Engineering Forum

EJ provided an update on the Forum's meeting held on 15 January 2026, summarising the key topics discussed:

Electricity standing charges: Fixed charges remained high for IDB pumping stations and concerns about further increases continue.

Floating pennywort: Spreading within the River Witham and increasingly problematic, with risks to the lowland system's operation.

Glyphosate: Concerns about long-term availability of glyphosate for use, particularly against invasive species, noting that mechanical alternatives were not always effective. PB will share the European Commission's stance on glyphosate that current evidence does not show it is carcinogenic, though floating pennywort shows resistance. New tools offer encouraging results, and tighter controls remain possible.

Badgers: As part of the badger licencing conditions, map now must be sent with the notifications. Some Board are finding this onerous and time consuming.

Asset Management: EA now providing Board with access to AIMS to that clarification of asset ownership can be defined swiftly. Boards concerned that there are FCERM Assets out there that nobody is taking responsibility for and these are increasing flood risk. It is also believed some of these assets used to be EA maintained, they are now not and Boards are picking up some responsibility as nobody else is.

Eel exemptions: The EA have been behind with issuing the updated exemptions, the EA planned to issue more site-specific exemptions rather than the generic ones used in the past. Exemptions timeframes are now in line with the Capital programmes where the site will be refurbished and become eel regulation compliant

	<p>Enforcement issues: IDBs had seen a rising number of public complaints, it appears that Boards are experiencing more push back on the implementation of the byelaws and resistance to the enforcement action taken. This is resulting in time consuming complaints and local government ombudsman investigations</p> <p>Flood funding guidance: Boards are concerned that there will be delays to the April release of the new flood funding guidelines and documentation. Many Board's have projects sat waiting to progress when the guidance is released.</p>
	<p>Main river maintenance</p> <p>a. ADA Main River Maintenance Position statement</p> <p>IT explained the ADA position statement on main river maintenance, which had been produced following discussions between ADA Branch Chairs. In Somerset the Environment Agency were consulting further on proposals to withdraw from maintaining several stretches of main river. There was a discussion about why assets are not treated as health and safety concern area.</p> <p>IT suggested that a ten-year programme of refurbishment for lowland main river systems could provide a mechanism to allow the condition of key main rivers to be recovered. The committee discussed this subject and said it was worth exploring nationally. MB reported that Defra and the EA will be looking into the potential for RMAs to be considered as 'trusted partners' but this is currently with a 'nature recovery' focus.</p> <p>b. De-maining and PSCAs</p> <p>MB reported that James Addicott's Engineering Policy team at the EA were looking at this with their Wessex Area team.</p> <p>There was agreement that trusted partnership and ascent arrangements should be developed for working with RMAs to deliver watercourse maintenance works. Needed to find means for trialling main works to demonstrate what a trusted partner scheme could look like.</p> <p>By way of an example, AMN highlighted the extent of willow trees growing out of flood defences along the River Don and impeding public safety. SJ mentioned a recent meeting of Norfolk Rivers IDB where de-maining was a hot topic, specifically related to the River Hun.</p> <p>Asset condition and investment prioritisation was raised, noting the sustained decline in asset condition. Available national funding is limited, requiring difficult prioritisation decisions. The scale of deterioration reflects long-term funding constraints rather than a lack of need. If sufficient funding were available, many of the required interventions would already be underway. Given this, it is essential to use all available delivery and funding mechanisms to maximise the benefits of investment.</p>

	<p>Investment should be targeted where there is clear local authority support, to improve deliverability and value for money. Further clarity is required on whether this approach would displace or reduce local levy contributions.</p> <p>There is a strong case for prioritising designated sections of main river in critical condition, where failure risks are highest and intervention is most urgent.</p> <p>IM summarised discussions at the Rural Flood Resilience Partnership (RFRP), which had been tasked by the Ministerial Flood Resilience Taskforce to look into main river maintenance. The RFRP would reply that it had four related actions within its action plan to look at riparian maintenance guidance and support. There was other work being undertaken by the EA (James Addicott) related to PSCAs and de-maining process guidance that the EA was engaging with ADA and the NFU on. However, the Partnership recognised that it was not the appropriate forum to discuss policy and investment on main river maintenance. Thus there was a significant gap that the working group established by the Flood Resilience Taskforce should address, to understand the condition of lowland watercourses, and the investment and policy needed to rectify this. The EA were drafting a reply back to the Flood Resilience Taskforce from the RFRP.</p>
<p>59</p>	<p>Electricity Standing & Capacity Charges</p> <p>IM tabled briefings from IM and SL on the impact of massive increases in fixed electricity charges for flood risk and water level management pumping stations.</p> <p>Ofgem met with ADA and Defra colleagues on 07 November 2025 to discuss the situation. Ofgem were aware there were peaky users, and had investigated through DCUSA a potential solution (DCP-412). Ofgem had looked at 30 IDB pumping stations and had found that the solution would not be applicable to many of these either owing to them not having half hourly meters fitted, or because the pumping stations used a fraction of their supply capacity. However, it was noted that Ofgem may not have looked at data from during the severe storm conditions of winter 2023/24, when electricity usage would have been significantly higher.</p> <p>Ofgem want to further understand the situation across pumping stations in England, and operators' views on how flood risk should be considered in policymaking regarding the setting of fixed costs (standing charges and capacity charges). Ofgem had requested that ADA seek the details of the MPAN number for every pumping station in England to facilitate Ofgem's study and seek an equitable solution. ADA requested from IDBs and received these for 620 IDB pumping stations, the Environment Agency refused ADA's request for data. The IDB data was submitted to Ofgem, who then promptly refused to be able to analyse capacity and usage data for these sites.</p> <p>Consequently, on 20 January 2026, ADA wrote to Michael Shanks, Minister for Energy at DESNZ.</p> <p>The Committee remained concerned at the high standing charges and were eager to see a solution found. The work remained a priority for ADA.</p>
<p>60</p>	<p>IDB Digital Training Academy</p> <p>IT reported that ADA was engaging with NALC and the SLCC for the development of an embryonic digital academy to provide training and governance advice for councillors and board members of smaller public bodies. ADA would aim to create 30-minute</p>

	learning modules on governance and finance, similar to existing health and safety training. The work was pending a successful bid for funding support from the SAAA.
61	<p>IDB Funding Research Study</p> <p>CT introduced the research study that Defra and MHCLG has commissioned ICF to undertake into the funding, costs, values, and benefits of IDBs, following the cost pressures on IDBs from higher energy costs, and lobbying by the LGA Special Interest Group on IDB levies.</p> <p>William Riley (WR) joined the meeting to give an overview of the work undertaken to date, overview of initial findings, and next steps. He explained the general approach to the research, including analysing IDB1 forms and undertaking surveys and interviews. They were looking at five contrasting IDB typologies to capture the variation of the 112 IDBs in England.</p> <p>The data will be collated and feed into scenario modelling and stress testing. Initial findings included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial pressure and reserve levels, 40% reserves less than one year. • Rising capital expenditure, the biggest increase in overall expenditure. • Energy and administrative pressures- energy use and climate impact highest costs drivers and administrative costs with significant rise in 2018. • Efficiencies vary across size and management structures. • Governance gaps are present amongst a small section of IDBs. <p>The committee discussed the survey of IDBs noting that some questions were not effective, such as how often an IDB pumps water rather than how many cubic metres you pump in an average period.</p> <p>Committee members asked about how value for money and benefits for the catchment would be assessed. CT explained ICF would be classified benefits in several different ways across a range of sources, using a 5E's framework looking at: economy, efficiency, effectiveness, evaluation, and equity.</p> <p>Questions were raised about the data collected from IDBs and the sampling of IDBs chosen for analysis.</p>
62	<p>Environment Permitting - FRAPS update</p> <p>Sheena Engineer (SH) provided an update on the steps the Environment Agency had taken to address an extensive backlog of FCERM works awaiting Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAPs), which was delaying and increasing the cost of public works by RMAs.</p> <p>SH reported that ~700 FRAPs had been completed with the exception of ~50 for which the EA regulatory team were awaiting further information. SH reported that going forwards better processes and more resource had been put in place. There was still a need to provide education around what is a good application, and the EA hoped that the government can decide on exemptions so we can move on a next step forward.</p> <p>MJ reported that FRAPs as a local authority are equivalent permits. There has been an issue with cost and quality, response has been frustrating, the lack of accountability has been very difficult.</p>

	<p>The alignments to partners such as Natural England, which have timelines so there could be a more joined up approach. Alignment with the planning applications is fundamental, they do have to undertake complex activities trying to understand the environment.</p> <p>The Committee felt that a 28-day response requirement would help the EA to focus on what the most important factors were in issuing a FRAP.</p> <p>IM highlighted that environmental permitting was not the regulatory model used in other European countries, notably the Netherlands, where water management authorities have collaborated to develop a common set of terms and conditions that they follow, and under which they do not have to seek consent or permission for every action related to works on a watercourse (habitats and species, waste, flood risk etc).</p> <p>There remained concerns from the Committee that the environmental permitting framework was not sustainable in the long term for those public bodies frequently undertaking works on watercourses to reduce flood risk and environmental harm.</p>
63	<p>Artificial Intelligence</p> <p>EJ informed the group of meeting of the European Pumping Station Network in Birmingham that shared knowledge of fish friendly pumps for people operating them. EJ noted that AI was being used for monitoring fish passage. It demonstrated how AI was becoming increasingly applicable within the water sector, and should be on our radar to boost efficiency.</p>
64	<p>Defra update</p> <p>CT provided an update:</p> <p>a. Water Reform White Paper: Published on Tuesday 20 January, the White Paper sets out the government’s proposed reforms for the water supply and sewerage sector. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a new single regulator with a Chief Engineer to provide technical expertise. • new ‘MOT’ checks on water infrastructure • no notice’ inspections on key water company assets • regional planning - bringing councils, water companies, farmers, and developers together to deliver local plans to tackle river pollution, water resources and housing growth. • senior accountability to ensure water bosses are directly accountable for the service customers receive. <p>b. Defra water team: The water team within Defra has expanded so much that a new Directorate has been created. The current Flood & Water Directorate will change to the Water Regulator & Resilience Directorate. Sebastian Catovsky will remain its Director.</p> <p>c. National Planning Policy Framework consultation: The government is currently consulting on a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that includes clearer, ‘rules based’ policies for decision-making and plan-making, designed to make planning policy easier to use and underpin the delivery of faster and simpler local plans. The consultation includes a dedicated chapter on planning for flood risk and coastal change. The consultation will remain open until 10th March 2026.</p>

	<p>d. IDB property valuation statutory instrument (SI): Defra were waiting for Ministers to reply on the final substantive change to the draft SI. Once a decision had been received, Defra floods colleagues would work with their legal team to finalise the SI, seek internal clearances to proceed, and will then be able to lay the SI before Parliament.</p> <p>e. IDB reconstitution orders: Defra would shortly be making SIs for the formation of the Upper Ouse Water Management Board (amalgamating the three IDBs within the Bedford Group) and North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board (amalgamating North Kent Marshes IDB and Lower Medway IDB). Both Orders should come into force on 01 April 2026.</p> <p>Three other draft orders were advertised before Christmas to reconstitute: Goole & Airmyn IDB, Ouse & Derwent IDB, and Waveney, Lower Yare & Lothingland IDB. Defra expected these to be made in February 2026.</p> <p>Defra are awaiting draft orders for amalgamating Euixmoor IDB with March West IDB, and for reconstituting Warboys Somersham & Pidley IDB, Connington & Holme IDB, and Ramsey IDB.</p> <p>f. IDB1 reports: Defra had included a new question in the 2025 return – Q27 on length of ditches maintained to understand how many times IDBs are maintaining the ditches. Further information for IDBs had been prepared by Defra to clarify this question.</p> <p><i>Action: A query was raised regarding guidance for the new flood funding formula. CT to report back to the Committee.</i></p> <p>[Post meeting note: CT had checked up on guidance for the new flood funding formula. The EA were working up the guidance and it should be available prior to April 2026. The EA would host webinars to share more information with RMAs.]</p>
65	<p>Environment Agency update</p> <p>MB gave an update:</p> <p>a. Flood Action Week (13–19 Oct 2025): The EA’s Flood Action Week raised awareness of flood risks, with partner pack downloads up on last year, 12 press releases, and 80+ social posts generating 180,000+ views. Local stories highlighted community impact, and a parliamentary reception engaged MPs and Peers. Ministers and staff visited flood and coastal schemes.</p> <p>b. Property Flood Resilience Review: The FloodReady Report (16 Oct 2025) identifies ways to speed up uptake of practical, affordable property flood resilience measures. A leadership group will drive key actions with stakeholders and report progress to the Flood Resilience Taskforce.</p> <p>c. Upgraded Flood Warning System (21 Oct 2025): The EA launched its upgraded Flood Warning System and Get Flood Warnings service, reaching over 2.6 million customers. The public, organisations, and responders can now register and customise alerts. New NaFRA data provides more detailed flood risk information to support both systems.</p> <p>d. Drought: National drought conditions improved with heavy November 2025 rainfall after the driest spring in 132 years. The National Drought Group (8 Dec 2025) highlighted how science and collaboration are strengthening resilience into 2026. Planning continues, as insufficient winter rain could worsen drought next year, affecting nature, agriculture, and navigation.</p>

	<p>e. Weather outlook: The latest three-month outlook by the Met Office, published on 22 December 2025 showed a higher-than-normal chance of wet weather, with impacts from wind and rain more likely later in the period.</p> <p>f. Flood & Coast 2026: The annual conference and exhibition would take place from 9-11 June 2026 at the Exhibition Centre Liverpool. The Environment Agency will be one of four strategic partners for the event, alongside ADA, ASA, and the Rivers Trust. Key highlights for the event include the Environment Agency Excellence Awards and Women in FCERM Awards taking place on the evening of 10 June.</p>
66	<p>Local authority updates</p> <p>MJ gave an update:</p> <p>West Sussex County Council had adopted a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy that focused on collaboration and asset management. Targeted local actions, such as water sharing, are prioritised over new bids due to timeline constraints. Within highways, two riparian officers manage permitting guidance and a catchment-based approach. The team promotes better permitting practices and trusted partnership status.</p> <p>The Committee discussed how ASA/ADA were moving towards a merger, and ADA is working to proposals being put to both Associations' AGMs later in 2026.</p>
67	<p>ADA Climate Resilience Handbook for Lowland Water Management</p> <p>IM shared a draft scoping document for developing a Climate Resilience Handbook for Lowland Water Management. The Committee expressed interest, and supported ADA committing to producing such a publication, alongside research into multifunctional benefits and the evolving role of drainage boards. The Lowland Peat Task Force is also advancing these approaches, with a focus on retaining water safely. It was noted Peter Glas, Vice President ADA had been consulted, and had assisted with Dutch input.</p> <p>RC suggested that Defra may wish to contribute to both the content and funding for the guide. CT offered to share the scoping document with the wider Defra floods team.</p> <p>Possible titles for the guide were discussed. IDBs would find guidance on good practice of moving water useful, as well as being a useful tool to talk about water management options with partners, board members and councils. IDBs were encouraged to make contributions to case studies.</p> <p>Action: MB/IM to attend a future meeting of the EA's Lowland Resilience Group to discuss this work further.</p>
68	<p>Update: Consultations</p> <p>IM provided an update on current and recent consultations.</p> <p>IM had responded to a consultation from MHCLG on statutory consultees, with IDBs specifically referenced. The government wanted to retain the moratorium on adding more statutory consultees, ADA supported a position that would periodically keep this under review, including for IDBs. Not all IDBs had sufficient capacity to perform this role currently, but this may change through sufficient amalgamation of IDBs in the future, given the importance of their input to consideration of flood risk within the planning system.</p>

	Other consultations open for responses included changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and another on reducing the prevalence of private estate management arrangements. Both of these consultations from MHCLG would be relevant to surface water flooding in particular. Both consultations conclude in March 2026.
69	AOB None.
	Close