



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes

Monday 18 May

Venue: Kings College, The Strand

10.40 – 15.00

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 (online)
Ed Johnson (EJ)	Committee Secretary, Committee Deputy Chair Chief Engineer, Witham Fourth District IDB	Y (online)	Nicola Oldfield (NO)	Chief Engineer, Middle Commissioners	Y (online)
Mhari Baldwin (MB)	Lowland Resilience Manager Environment Agency	Y	Oliver Pantrey (OP)	Clerk, Upper Medway IDB	Y (online)
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist, Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium	Y (online)	Richard Powell (RP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Eastern) RFCC	Y
Robert Caudwell (RC)	Chairperson, ADA	Y	Iain Sturdy (IS)	Chief Executive, Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium	Y (online)
Matthew Harrison (MH)	Flood & Water Manager, Lincolnshire County Council	Y (online)	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	Y (online)
Steve Larter (SL)	Finance Director, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Apologies	In attendance		
David Letellier (DL)	Head of Operations South Wales Central, Natural Resources Wales	Y	Laura Lamb (LL)	Membership Officer, ADA	Y
Andrew McGill (AMG)	Chief Executive, Water Management Consortium	Y (online)	Emma Sumner	Business Change Manager, HMCTS	Y (for item 76)
Andrew McLachlan (AMN)	Chief Executive, Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Zora Akhtar	HMCTS	Y (for Item 76)
			Rachel Taylor	HMCTS	Y (for Item 76)

Ref	Minutes
70	<p>Welcome and apologies</p> <p>All apologies were noted as indicated above.</p>
71	<p>Declarations of interest</p> <p>None.</p>
72	<p>Minutes of previous meeting</p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting were accepted with exception of a misspelling of Catovsky, IT apologised it will be corrected.</p>
73	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>None.</p>
74	<p>ADA Forum updates</p> <p>a. Environment Forum</p> <p>PB provided an update on the Environment Forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Environment Forum is proving to be a positive way of sharing best practice and updates for the group involved. • Members of the Environment Forum group have recently had conversations on water level management plan with representations of DEFRA, the Environment Agency, and Natural England. There is a need for an update on the guidance or an alternative solution to follow for practitioners. Phil has been recently looking at this locally. His paper has been taken forward for comments from the working group. He summarised the development work going on and how they are not meeting targets on WLMPs as they are losing capacity with the damming of main river. There is a summer water level management plan meeting chaired by ADA. • PB is part of work consultation on long-term management plans of beavers and assisting with documentation. He said they are an area of concern for him locally, which needs a proactive approach in taking action and lobbying for the intensity of funding to manage the issues. • AM summarised his meeting with the Rolby Forest beaver group and how they asked to consult with the IDB on beaver release plan. He is investigating byelaws because a person is releasing an extinct species and carries on the conversations. • IS commented on how he responded to the EA regarding main river fund withdrawal consultation which included the receptors that would be affected by flood risk and has shared it with ADA. • There was discussion about the importance maintaining water levels for peatlands. The group discussed the importance of feeding water into wetlands for times of drought. In regard to monitoring levels of peat PB explained how there is more widespread monitoring, but with most of it done by nature reserves for example we are missing information on areas without WLMPs. <p><i>Action:</i> The Environment forum group to collate a statement on environmental priorities of ADA.</p>

75	<p>ADA Policy Representatives</p> <p>Charles Mills summarised then representation of Policy Representatives to date. He and the wider ADA team are appreciative of the work that has been done so far with special thanks for Phil Brewin. Nicola Oldfield and Oliver Pantrey.</p> <p>The representatives were presented and are on the ADA website.</p> <p>It was discussed how in relation to climate change, Andrew Newton is representing ADA in water resources, Innes has put call out to Helen Wakeham at the Environment Agency with view to a discussion at the highest level about the issue of abstraction licences.</p> <p>MH reflecting on Climate Change, Reform led councils after local elections, there is not a supportive approach around net zero, members should be aware of the political. There was a query on how natural flood management is covered so how will this be addressed? WMLA could be approached.</p> <p>Matt Jackson volunteered to represent Natural flood management and water resources regulatory issues. MJ was thanked.</p> <p>OP has brought together a working group to IDB Health and Safety and welfare practical guide for IDBs, if anyone has a focus on this please make yourselves known to Oliver. NO confirmed that she will continue to support with Martin Issac. AM to share their health and safety system with OP for processes within the document, would like to look at existing systems. The need is different across all IDB's so broad stroke guidance is needed and the document will allow all IDBs to have relevant aides to them.</p> <p>It was discussed how in relation to climate change, Andrew Newton is representing ADA in water resources, IT has put call out to Helen Wakeham at the Environment Agency with view to a discussion at the highest level about the issue of abstraction licences.</p> <p><i>Action:</i> The app based system used at Ely to monitor mowing and other works on a ticket system to be suggested to be presented at ADA Technical and Engineering forum. AM to share health and safety workstream with OP.</p>
76	<p>Online process for Court Service applications</p> <p>Emma Sumners team gave a presentation for HM Court Service Managers on the new electronic onboarding processes. Emma Sumner, North East Change Manager at the HM Courts & Tribunals Service will present a new electronic system for lodging court proceedings with a magistrates court. The Court Service is rolling out the system for criminal cases this year followed by civil cases next year. This is important for IDBs because the correct procedure for recovering unpaid land drainage rates is via an application for a liability order to the court. This allows for enforcement action to be taken.</p> <p>Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards have volunteered to test the new process and possibly link it with the new Rates Management System. AM gave an account of how they have found the system.</p>
77	<p>Electricity Standing/ Capacity Charges</p> <p>IM updated the group on the subject of how fixed charges remained high for IDB pumping stations and concerns about further increases continue. He gave an overview of the letter sent to DESNZ by ADA and the response back to ADA BY Minister Micheal Shanks on 13th April 2026.</p>

	<p>It was discussed about how ADA could unpack data and whether it would be a consultant-led piece of work. It was suggested that an MSc student from Brunel University or another university could be utilised. Steve Larter and Ian Moodie have recently had a long meeting unpacking the data and they have confirmed that they need a prolonged period of time on the data set to make it relevant.</p> <p>The group highlighted the industry change which will change IDB price brackets. Ofgem were minded not to accept this proposal, so not a beneficial mechanism. Ofgem asked ADA to get the data, and have said that they won't look into it further. It is difficult to contact all the electricity suppliers as a third party. Ian Moody explained the issue about the labour intensity of analysing the data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA to write to OFGEM. • ADA to write to shadow Minister who appears to be Andrew Bowie MP, Claire Courtino MP and Greg Smith MP. • ADA to write to Alastair Carmichael MP at EFRA to suggest a possible enquiry. • A McLachlan to write to Ed Milliband MP to express concerns about the situation in his constituency. • Mhari Baldwin to make enquiries about being able to share the detailed Somerset MEICA report. • Check with Defra about Emma Hardy's letter to DESNZ stated 05.04.26. • Check progress with Andrew Pakes MP following letter to him from ADA. • There was no real push from the committee to collect further data until we know the political position on this.
78	<p>AGAR/ IDB1 reforms</p> <p>IM presented on how consultants, ICF, are working with Defra and looking at IDB costs and funding and AGAR returns. The auditing practitioners' group, SAPPP, are looking at the AGAR. They are interested in what's useful to gather on an IDB form. Although colleagues want a simplified IDB form, the AGaR does need consistency.</p> <p>Annie Childs and the team at SAAA is keen to see this moving forward. SAAA produced a report for small authorities. It was published on Friday, and IDB's featured quite well. They are top of the leaderboard in getting submissions back. RP noted that the biodiversity is important, and he said that he did not like the clumsy language that had been used. IM commented this relates to IDB1 forms terminology. The group agreed managing water should be goal number one. Questions are not being asked about governance and drainage, and it would be helpful if measurables were measured in a useful way. CT made a point on the analysis of data. Defra input into the data and they will undertake the analysis and have conversations with ADA. The research will complete in July.</p>
79	<p>Water Company discharges and Ordinary Watercourse Consenting</p> <p>The group discussed water company discharges. Government have been looking at the topic of developers and sewage undertakers in relation to ordinary watercourses consent. It allowed ADA to ask</p>

wider questions on watercourse consents. Environmental permitting permission consideration and fees were suggested by MB. DEFRA were interested in all of this and asked for a survey. ADA have drafted the survey and it has been sent around policy committee for comments. The group discussed the comments that had come back, including separating rainwater from sewerage, which is a saving to water companies, and exemption as an aspect of FRAPs.

- MJ commented on the resource implications which come to IDBs and local lead flood authorities. He mentioned riparian ownership and how IDBs should support it, or we will be in dangerous territory. They had a fee structure in line with the Land Drainage Act requirements and that is open to interpretation of the Water Management Act. They have offered a tiered approach and the uptake has been successful. Recent storm effects have highlighted riparian ownership, opening ourselves up to legacy.
- The group agreed the bigger question about water discharge. And we need to think about nipping that in the bud with water companies while we have this opportunity. In relation to whether boards want to set their own fees, a level of consistency is needed. Removing savings for water companies needs to be part of this conversation. There was discussion about section 24 and how developers have a right to connect.
- NO highlighted not just cost to process applications she gave an Anglican water situation example where there was no consent to connect. With surface run off, the systems are designed to cope with certain amount of water and elongated of run off. Water company discharge needs to be acted on now.
- LW notes that a third of water pollution plans for protected sites cite storm overflows to differing degrees but note these are not all in IDB areas.

80 Procurement Act 2023 procedures for IDBs

The Procurement Act 2023 introduces new statutory requirements for sub-central authorities, including Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs). In response to these changes, the Policy and Finance (P&F) Working Group has previously met to develop a model procurement procedure that IDBs can adopt to support compliance with the Act. The proposed model is intended to provide a consistent and practical framework for procurement activity and to inform updates to IDBs’ financial regulations where appropriate. The document is currently undergoing peer review. A presentation will be given at the meeting to outline the key requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, the content of the model procedure, and how it may be used by IDBs. The committee is invited to consider whether ADA should seek professional legal or procurement advice to support the finalisation and adoption of the model document.

AM presented on a procurement process piece of work that he has done and a matrix system. He explained that we should be following 2024 rules now that things have changed since Brexit, and previously we have followed 2015 regulations. He has adapted this model so that we can all be legally compliant and transparent. Small to medium businesses have been recognised, which is really good news. He explained the concepts of the work, which includes works and non-works and threshold contracts.

The group were shown expenditure information, shown its transparency, skeleton forms.

It was recognised that AM had done a great piece of work. It would be looked at by IT, NO and SL, and discussions will be picked back up again in regard to a professional review.

81 a. Defra

Kings Speech: On 13 May, King Charles III delivered the King’s Speech at the State Opening of Parliament, setting out the government’s legislative priorities for the second parliamentary session.

The Speech referenced the proposed Clean Water Bill, which is a key priority for Defra. The legislation will support major reforms to the water sector outlined in the Water White Paper published in January.

These reforms include establishing a new independent and integrated water regulator by consolidating relevant functions currently carried out by Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Environment Agency, and Natural England.

New Directorate: Mentioned previously water team has expanded so much that a new Directorate has been created – our overall Director General group will be Water Group from the Summer and our Directorate previously Floods and Water has now changed to Water Regulator and Resilience and our Director is still Sebastian. Other two Directorates are Water System Reform and Water Delivery.

IDB SI:

We have shared a copy of the latest SI with ADA. Another issue has come up regarding interpretations and so we are working with legal again to review and add data for new boards. We received some helpful information from Craig Benson. Hoping the checks on the SI can start early June and still hoping to lay the SI in Parliament later this year.

Progress on IDB orders:

Two orders came into force on 1 April: Upper Ouse Water Management Board and North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board. 109 IDBs.

We are also waiting on the draft orders for Euixmoor and March West, Warboys, Somersham and Pidley, Connington and Holme and Ramsey, hoping to advertise them soon.

IDB1 reports

Now received all IDB1 reports for 2024/25, and we will undertake our analysis – once that is done, we will be sharing this with ADA, and we plan to write and engage with those IDBs, where we wish to seek more information from you and understand the responses provided.

Working on getting the 2025/26 IDB1 report out very soon – there will be no significant changes.

ICF research:

Expecting the final draft report by end of this week, it will be shared with the Project Board for comments and then shared with the Project Steering Group in June – the final report has to be completed by mid-July and there will be webinars to disseminate findings and best practice.

IDBs and local audit

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is now an Act – this establishes the Local Audit Office. We have been liaising with MHCLG colleagues on local audit and they are planning to write to all departments asking us what we wish to see on financial reporting. We had a meeting with Ian and Peter Bateson to discuss the AGAR and reporting which was very helpful and we will continue the dialogue on this.

b. Environment Agency

1. Environment Agency actions in partnership with rural stakeholders
 1. As well as contributing to RFRP actions, the EA is also leading work pertaining to maintenance, working in partnership with rural stakeholders.

2. **Maintenance Protocol:** In response to the Taskforce Maintenance Sub-group meeting the EA has committed that further work will be undertaken to review the maintenance protocol and its application.
3. The scope will focus on reviewing internal guidance and its application to support the EA's area teams. The EA will also review relevant public facing information as hosted on GOV.UK. An important part of the review will involve exploring how guidance regarding engagement, consultation and working with others can be improved. EA commenced partner working in February 2026 including ADA CLA NFU.
4. **Permitting – Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAP):** the EA is working across functions/regimes to improve our permitting guidance. This includes agriculture and nature-based activities. This includes whole FRAP permitting process to examine improvements and a proportionate approach to permitting across the piece.
5. **De-maining:** building on Rationalising the Main River Network: De-maining Pilot Project Consultations work undertaken in 2018 and published guidance (Designation of 'main rivers': guidance to the Environment Agency), the EA has committed that further work will be undertaken to review guidance and standards relating to main river variations and de-maining. Resources are in place and work to review standards commenced in January 2026.
6. In response to the Maintenance Sub-group meeting actions the opportunity for de-maining a stretch of the River Hun in Norfolk is being explored. A first meeting was held in February 2026 between local and national EA teams, Lead Local Flood Authority partner Norfolk County Council and Internal Drainage Board (IDB) representatives from the Water Level Management Alliance. Further meetings are being held and planned to look at detailed questions and consider how this can be effectively managed.

1. Better Flood Protection Target Exceeded

On 15 April 2026 we announced that almost 62,000 homes and businesses were better protected from flooding between 2024-26, during the government's previous 2 year £2.65 billion FCRM investment programme of repairing and replacing existing defences and constructing new ones. This exceeded the two-year property protection target of 52,000 by nearly 10,000, and with over 250 projects completed.

2. New FCRM Investment Programme

A new 3-year £4.2 billion FCRM investment programme started on 1 April 2026, allocating investment where flood and coastal risk and vulnerability are greatest, using government's new funding rules. On 3 March 2026 the Environment Agency published new FCERM funding policy guidance. This new guidance explains how the government's new funding policy will work in practice for new project opportunities. On 17 March 2026, we published the flood and coastal schemes that have been allocated FCERM (GiA) funding for 2026 to 2027, the first year of the new programme. This follows approval by the Environment Agency Board and Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs).

The new allocation for 2026 to 2027 includes £750 million for over 600 flood and coastal projects, and £144 million for preventative maintenance of Environment Agency assets in 2026/27.

We wrote to local authorities and internal drainage boards to formally confirm their allocations for FCERM projects in 2026 to 2027. The allocation for 2026 to 2027 has been created using a prioritisation method based on a partnership funding score, which complements agreed allocation principles and maximises the wider benefits that flood and coastal schemes can achieve.

3. Coastal Adaptation Pilots

On 28 January 2026 the Environment Agency and Defra announced a new initiative - the £30 million Coastal Adaptation Pilots – to help coastal communities plan ahead and adapt to the impacts of climate

change. £18 million will be shared between coastal projects across the East Riding of Yorkshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, and £12 million for RFCCs to select projects that can deliver smaller scale adaptation readiness actions. The new pilots build upon the lessons learnt from the Coastal Transition Accelerator projects which continues to support coastal authorities to trial new methods for managing erosion.

4. FCERM Strategy refresh

In our current National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for England, we made a commitment to review the Strategy in 2026. Confirmation of this has recently been set out in the government’s response to the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC), as well as in the Environment Agency’s Strategic Policy Statement 2026. The current FCERM Strategy was published in 2020 and sets out a long-term vision for “*a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.*”

- During spring and early summer 2026, we are engaging with external stakeholders to review and develop objectives and measures for the refreshed Strategy. We will then publicly consult on these objectives and measures during autumn 2026. The refreshed Strategy will be published in 2027.

5. Strategic Policy Statement for the Environment Agency

On 12 March 2026, Defra published the Strategic Policy Statement for the Environment Agency. The purpose of this is to:

- set out the Secretary of State’s expectations for the Environment Agency in terms of how it delivers on both environmental protection and economic growth
- be embedded into decision-making, to guide the Environment Agency’s use of discretion and ensure the effective delivery of these priorities

The expectations set out in this SPS build on actions the Environment Agency has already taken and illustrate how it can go further to support delivery of the government’s strategic priorities.

6. April 2026 marks 30 years of the Environment Agency

For three decades, FCRM has been central to protecting people and the environment — from responding to major flood events and coastal change to driving innovation in natural flood management, carbon reduction, habitat creation and community resilience.

7. Floods Resilience Taskforce

On 16 March 2026, the Floods Resilience Taskforce held its sixth meeting in Manchester. Minister Hardy Chaired the meeting, which was attended by Caroline Douglass, Julie Foley and Paul Clements from the Environment Agency. The meeting focussed on the national and local response to this autumn and winter’s flooding, wider societal flood resilience, the Environment Agency’s refresh of the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy, and an update on implementation progress of the FloodReady report. The next Taskforce is due to be held in Exeter on 8 June 2026

Following the fifth meeting of the Flood Resilience Taskforce in December 2025, the Rural Flood Resilience Partnership (RFRP) was asked to report back on agreed flood maintenance actions at the Taskforce meeting in March 2026. The 6 equal founding partners are: Action with Communities in Rural England; the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA); Country Land and Business Association; the Environment Agency; the National Farmers Union; and Natural England.

- Environment Agency actions in partnership with rural stakeholders included: Maintenance protocol review; Public Sector Co-operation agreements (PSCAs) guidance review; Flood Risk

Activity Permits (FRAP) guidance; enabling the delivery of nature recovery projects through better regulation; and de-maining guidance.

9. Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee

On 20 March 2026, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee [published a report on coastal erosion](#) following their inquiry into climate and weather resilience in the UK. We provided evidence to this inquiry on investment in coastal flooding and coastal erosion.

The report makes recommendations to the government on practical ways to help people with issues around insurance, demolition costs and relocation. It criticises the lack of requirement to inform home buyers of the risk of their home falling into the sea and calls for changes to make it mandatory for conveyancers and estate agents to do so.

- The government will now consider the report and respond to the committee's recommendations. The Environment Agency is currently supporting with this. You can find the full report [here](#) and the associated press release [here](#).

10. Flood and Coast Conference 2026

The annual Flood and Coast conference will take place from 9-11 June 2026 at the [Exhibition Centre Liverpool](#). The Environment Agency will be one of 4 strategic partners for the event, alongside the Association of SuDS Authorities (ASA), Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), 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 Day 2. We will also host an exhibition stand throughout the conference, led by the FCRM Events Team.

c. Local Authorities

MJ discussed core statutory duties, catchment planning, and the importance of consulting with the Environment Agency at a local level. He noted that a number of small funding opportunities are available. Significant progress has been made on the consenting regime, which remains heavily focused on surface water management.

He also discussed the statutory duty relating to the asset register, which focuses on designated features and remains an ongoing area of work. Looking ahead, devolution could potentially lead to teams being split, with internal resources currently being used to assess how this might be managed.

He referred to FRAPs and consents from the Environment Agency. Although the consent backlog has been reduced, it remains significant, and there are still some conflicts relating to modelling data.

MH added that it is important to monitor government decisions, as new Lead Local Flood Authorities may be established, although the future structure is not yet known.

d. Natural Resources Wales

DL summarised the reform movement and how NRW are working with ADA in relation to a review. They are waiting for the elections to happen and then it can get underway. A new post has been created for James West and Natural Resources Wales key objective is to realign with what's happening in England, with the CYMRU ADA chair to be heavily involved.

	None.
	Close