



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

POLICY COMMITTEE Minutes

Draft

Monday 18 May 2026

Venue: Kings College, The Strand, London

10.40 – 15.00

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 (online)
Ed Johnson (EJ)	Committee Secretary, Committee Deputy Chair Chief Engineer, Witham Fourth District IDB	Y (online)	Oliver Pantrey (OP)	Clerk, Upper Medway IDB	Y (online)
Mhari Baldwin (MB)	Lowland Resilience Manager Environment Agency	Y	Richard Powell (RP)	Chairperson, Anglian (Eastern) RFCC	Y
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist, Somerset Drainage Boards' Consortium	Y (online)	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)	Principal Adviser Flood & Coast, Natural England	Y (online)
Sallyanne Jeffrey (SJ)	Chief Financial Officer & RFO, Water Management Alliance	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, HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS)	Y (for item 76)
Andrew McLachlan (AMN)	Chief Executive, Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Zora Akhtar	HMCTS	Y (for Item 76)
Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y (online)	Rachel Taylor	HMCTS	Y (for Item 76)

Ref	Minutes
85	Welcome and apologies All apologies were noted as indicated above.
86	Declarations of interest None.
87	Minutes of previous meeting Minutes of previous meeting on 22 January 2026 were accepted.
88	Matters arising None.
89	ADA Forum updates a. Environment Forum PB provided an update on the Environment Forum, which met on 13 April 2026: • The Forum is proving to be a positive way of sharing best practice and updates between IDB environment officers. • Forum members have recently met with colleagues from Defra, the Environment Agency, and Natural England to discuss updated guidance and direction for future Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs). PB had prepared a paper shared with the working group summarising the key issues regarding WLMPs in Somerset, including the loss of main river capacity and the damming of main river. ADA was set to chair a further meeting of the WLMP working group over the summer. • PB is representing ADA on work by Defra and Natural England on the development of a long-term management plan for beavers in England. He said that the presence of beavers in Somerset needs a proactive management approach and adequate funding to manage those issues. • AMN summarised a meeting with the Dolby Forest Beaver Group and how they asked to consult with Vale of Pickering IDB on a beaver release plan. He is investigating whether IDB byelaws may be applicable in relation to the impact on drainage districts and watercourses as a result of beaver releases. • 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 and feeding water into wetlands during periods of drought. In regard to monitoring peat depths, PB explained that there is more widespread monitoring within nature reserves, but missing information on lowland peat depths outside of WLMPs. Action: <i>Environment Forum requested to collate a statement on current environmental priorities for ADA.</i> b. Technical & Engineering Forum

	EJ provided an update on the Technical & Engineering Forum, which had not met since the previous Policy Committee meeting and was next due to meet on 09 July 2026.
90	ADA Policy Representatives CM thanked those who had volunteered to act as representatives of ADA on a range of policy topics. Representatives are summarised on Committees page of the ADA website. It was discussed how in relation to climate change, Andrew Newton (Ely Group of IDBs) is representing ADA regarding water resources. IT has contacted Helen Wakeham, Director of Water, Environment Agency with a view to discuss abstraction licencing issues at the highest level. MH reflecting on climate change following local elections that for Reform led councils there is not a supportive approach around net zero. There was a query on how natural flood management is covered so how will this be addressed? WMLA could be approached. MJ volunteered to represent ADA on natural flood management and water resources regulatory issues. OP has brought together a working group to develop and Health, Safety & Welfare Guide for IDBs. NO confirmed that she will continue to support this work with Martyn Isaacson from MLC. It was agreed that the guide should have abroad focus to reflect the different needs and approaches across all IDBs. Action: AMN to share their health and safety system with OP for processes within the document. Action: The app based system being developed with the Ely Group of IDBs to monitor mowing and other works to be presented at a future meeting of the ADA Technical & Engineering Forum.
91	Online process for Court Service applications Emma Sumner, North East Change Manager at the HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) presented 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 following the correct procedure for recovering unpaid land drainage rates via an application for a liability order to the court, which allows for enforcement action to be undertaken. AMN reported that Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards have volunteered to test the new process and possibly link it with the new Rates Management System that they have helped to develop. AMN gave an account of how they have found the system.
92	Electricity Standing & Capacity Charges IM reported that electricity fixed charges remained high for IDB pumping stations and further increases were anticipated in the coming year. ADA had written to DESNZ and received a response from Minister for Energy, Michael Shanks MP on 13 April 2026. IM reported that Ofgem had stated that they would not look into standing charges for the >600 IDB pumping stations that IM had provided MPAN numbers for. Instead Ofgem had recommended that ADA contact energy companies directly, but this would not be possible as ADA was not the customer. Instead this would require a coordinated approach by every IDB asking consistent questions about their fixed electricity charges. SL and IM had recently met to unpacking the data that would be required and the time period over which the data would be needed (to cover the wet weather of winter 2023/24). It was discussed whether ADA could seek a consultant or a university student to lead this piece of work. However, as this would be a prolonged piece of work, it was agreed by the Committee not to collect further data until ADA had know the political position on this.

	Action: IT/IM to write to OFGEM on the topic of electricity fixed charges and pumping stations. Action: IT/IM to write to Shadow Energy Ministers: Andrew Bowie MP, Claire Coutinho MP, and Greg Smith MP. Action: IT to contact EFRA Committee Chair, Alastair Carmichael MP to suggest a possible enquiry. Action: AMN to write to Ed Miliband MP to express concerns about the electricity fixed charges impacting pumping stations within his constituency. Action: MB to make enquiries about sharing with Committee members the detailed MEICA report regarding pumping stations in Somerset. Action: IT to check with Defra about Emma Hardy MP's letter to DESNZ stated 05.04.26. Action: IT to check progress with Andrew Pakes MP following letter to him from ADA on electricity fixed charges.
93	AGAR and IDB1 reforms IM presented on how consultants, ICF, are working with Defra and looking at IDB costs and funding including through IDB1 and AGAR returns. The Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP), are looking at the AGAR. They are interested in what's useful to gather on a form for IDBs. Although colleagues want a simplified IDB form, the AGAR does need consistency. Annie Childs, Chief Executive at Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA) was keen to see this moving forward. SAAA published in May their report on the results of auditors' work at smaller authorities for 2024/2025. IDBs featured positively for getting their submissions back within the required deadlines and the limited number of qualified opinions. Supported by LW, RP was keen to ensure that the importance of biodiversity was emphasised and that internal Drainage Boards, as well as managing water levels, also have a statutory duty under section 29a of the wildlife and countryside act to maintain, enhance and protect biodiversity. The Committee agreed managing water levels should be a primary goal for IDBs and that there were gaps in questioning around governance, development planning control, and water level management functions. Furthermore, that the questions around biodiversity were outdated and overly focused on WLMPs and designated sites rather than across IDBs' biodiversity enhancement duties.
94	Water company discharges and ordinary watercourse consenting IM reported that Defra have been looking at the topic of developers and sewage undertakers discharging into ordinary watercourses. Defra had asked ADA to conduct a survey of local RMAs on ordinary watercourse consents and associated fees. The Committee discussed suggested changes to the draft survey questions, which included separating rainwater from sewerage, and exemptions as an aspect of FRAPs. MJ commented on the resource implications and cost for IDBs and local lead flood authorities in relation to ordinary watercourse consenting. West Sussex County Council as the LLFA utilise a fee structure for providing applicants with a pre-application service, which has a tiered approach and uptake has been successful. The Committee agreed that regulatory control of water discharges by water companies needed to be retained by RMAs. In relation to whether local RMAs want to set their own fees, a level of consistency is needed. Removing savings clauses for water companies from land drainage byelaws needed to be part of

	this conversation. There was discussion about Section 24 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 and how developers have a right to connect. NO highlighted not only the cost to process applications, but also a case where a water company did not seek 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 noted that a large number of storm overflows discharge into protected sites, and the government expect water companies to tackle overflows discharging to high priority sites by 2035 as part of the Storm Overflows Reduction Plan.
95	Procurement Act 2023 procedures for IDBs AMN gave a presentation outlining: the key requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, the content of the model procedure, and how it may be used by IDBs. The Committee was invited to consider whether ADA should seek professional legal or procurement advice to support the finalisation and adoption of the model document. On 24 February 2025, the rules that shape how public bodies buy goods and services changed. The Procurement Act 2023 seeks to improve and streamline the way procurement is done, including for IDBs. In response to these changes, a working group has previously met to develop a model Financial Scheme of Delegation (FSoD) 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. Action: AMN to shared the draft FSoD procedure with the Policy Committee for peer review. Action: After taking on board comments from the ADA Policy Committee, ADA to seek professional legal or procurement advice to support the finalisation and adoption of the model document.
96	Defra updates CT gave an update: a. King's Speech: In his speech on 13 May, King Charles III referenced the proposed Clean Water Bill, which is a key priority for Defra, amongst the government's legislative priorities for its second parliamentary session. The legislation will support major reforms to the water sector outlined in the government's Water White Paper published in January 2026. 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. b. New Directorate: With expansion of the water team within Defra a new Directorate has been created, within the overarching Water Group. The previous Floods & Water Directorate has now changed to the Water Regulator & Resilience Directorate, Sebastian Catovsky remains the relevant Director. The other two water directorates are the Water System Reform Directorate, and the Water Delivery Directorate. c. IDB ratings statutory instrument (SI): Defra had shared a draft copy of the latest SI with IT/IM. Another issue has come up regarding interpretations WHICH Defra's legal team were reviewing and add data for new boards. The work was being assisted by Craig Benson and IM. Defra hoped that checks on the SI can start in early June with the intention to lay the SI before Parliament later in 2026. d. IDB legislative orders: Two orders came into force on 01 April 2026: one to merge the three Bedford Group IDBs into the Upper Ouse Water Management Board, and the other to merge two IDBs into the North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board. Consequently, there are now 109 IDBs in

	England. Defra were expecting to soon advertise draft orders for Euximoor & March West, Warboys, Somersham & Pidley, Connington & Holme, and Ramsey IDBs. e. IDB1 reports: Defra had received all IDB1 reports for 2024/25, and were undertaking analysis. Defra plan to write and engage with those IDBs where further information may be helpful. Defra hoped to get the IDB1 form for 2025/26 out to IDBs shortly, no significant changes were being made to the previous year's. f. IDB Costs & Funding Review: Defra expected to receive the final draft report from ICF LATER IN May 2026. The draft would be shared with the Project Board for comments and then shared with the Project Steering Group in June. It was planned that the final report be completed by mid-July and that there be webinars to disseminate findings and best practice. g. IDBs and local audit: The English Devolution & Community Empowerment Act 2026 received royal assent on 29 April 2026, which establishes the Local Audit Office. Defra had been liaising with MHCLG on local audit and they are planning to write to all departments asking what they wish to see on financial reporting. CT and Defra colleagues had met with IM and PB to discuss the AGAR and reporting, which was very helpful and would continue dialogue on this.
97	Environment Agency updates MB gave an update: a. 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 EA, and IT from ADA. The meeting focussed on the national and local response to this autumn and winter's flooding, wider societal flood resilience, the EA's refresh of the National FCERM Strategy, and an update on implementation progress of the FloodReady report. The next Taskforce was due to be held in Exeter on 08 June 2026. As an action from 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. b. Asset and system maintenance: As well as contributing to RFRP actions, the EA is undertaking work pertaining to maintenance, working 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. i. 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. 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. ii. Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAP): The EA was working across functions/regimes to improve their permitting guidance, including for agriculture and nature-based activities. This comprises the whole FRAP permitting process to examine improvements and a proportionate approach to permitting across the piece. iii. 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. In response to the Minister’s Flood Resilience Task Force’s Maintenance Sub-Group meeting, 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, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Rivers 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. c. Better Flood Protection Target Exceeded: On 15 April 2026 the EA announced that almost 62,000 homes and businesses were better protected from flooding between 2024 and 2026 through the £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, with over 250 projects completed. d. New FCRM Investment Programme: A new three year, £4.2 billion FCRM investment programme started on 01 April 2026, allocating investment where flood and coastal risk and vulnerability are greatest, using the government’s new funding rules. On 03 March 2026 the EA published new FCERM funding policy guidance, which explains how the government’s new funding policy will work in practice for new project opportunities. On 17 March 2026, the EA published the flood and coastal risk management schemes that have been allocated FCERM (GiA) funding for 2026/27, the first year of the new programme. This follows approval by the Environment Agency Board and RFCCs. The new allocation for 2026/27 includes £750 million for over 600 flood and coastal projects, and £144 million for preventative maintenance of EA assets in 2026/27. The allocation for 2026/27 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. The EA had written to IDBs and LLFAs to formally confirm their allocations for FCERM projects in 2026/27. e. Coastal Adaptation Pilots: On 28 January 2026 the EA and Defra announced this £30 million initiative to help coastal communities plan ahead and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Projects across the East Riding of Yorkshire, Norfolk and Suffolk will share £18 million, with a further £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. f. FCERM Strategy refresh: A review of the National Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for England was confirmed 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 for England was published in 2020 and sets out a long-term vision for “<i>a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.</i>” During spring and early summer 2026, the EA was engaging with external stakeholders to review and develop objectives and measures for the refreshed Strategy. The EA were to publicly consult on these objectives and measures during autumn 2026, with the refreshed Strategy to be published in 2027. g. Strategic Policy Statement for the Environment Agency: On 12 March 2026, Defra published the Strategic Policy Statement for the EA, setting out the Secretary of State’s expectations for the EA in
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	terms of how it delivers on both environmental protection and economic growth, and be embedded into decision-making, to guide the Environment Agency's use of discretion and ensure the effective delivery of these priorities. h. 30 years of the Environment Agency: April 2026 marked the 30th anniversary of the EA. i. EFRA Committee coastal erosion report: 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. 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. j. Flood & Coast Conference 2026: The annual conference and exhibition was to take place from 9-11 June 2026 at the Exhibition Centre Liverpool. The EA was to be one of four strategic partners for the event, alongside the Association of SuDS Authorities (ASA), 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.
98	Local authorities update 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 flood defence asset register, which focuses on designated features and remains an ongoing area of work. Looking ahead, devolution could potentially lead to LLFA 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 in relation to devolution that it is important to monitor government decisions, as new LLFAs may be established, although the future structure is not yet known.
99	Natural Resources Wales update DL summarised the reform movement and how NRW are engaging with ADA in relation to a review of internal drainage districts in Wales. They are waiting for the Senedd elections to take place in May 2026 before deciding how and when to take this work forwards. A new post had been created for James West and Natural Resources Wales key objective is to realign with what's happening in England, with the ADA Cymru Branch chair to be directly involved.
100	AOB None.
	Close