



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

ENVIRONMENT FORUM Meeting Note

07 May 2024

Venue: Online via Microsoft Teams

13.00 – 14.30

APPROVED

Invited					
Name	Role and organisation	Present	Name	Role and organisation	Present
Phil Brewin (PB)	Ecologist for Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium	Y	Sofi Lloyd (SL)	Environment Officer, Middle Level Commissioners	Y
Nick Downing (ND)	Environment & GIS Officer, Witham & Humber Drainage Boards	Y	Ian Moodie (IM)	Technical Manager, ADA	Y
Priscilla Haselhurst (PH)	CEO, Lower Medway and North Kent Marshes IDBs	Y	Iain Turner (ITr)	Environmental Officer, Water Management Consortium	Y
Mat Jackson (MJ)	Senior Flood Risk Management Officer, West Sussex County Council	Y	Diana Ward (DW)	Ecologist for Ely and Bedford Groups of IDBs	Y
Caroline Laburn (CL)	Environmental Manager, Water Management Alliance	Y			

Ref	Notes
1	<p>ADA Committees and Forums</p> <p>Discussed the new ADA Committee structure, role and functioning of ADA forums.</p> <p>Members supported the draft Terms of Reference for the Environment Forum.</p> <p>Members supported the appointment of Diana Ward as their representative on the Policy Committee. The appointment would be for one year to 31 March 2025.</p>
2	<p>Badger licences</p> <p>Several IDBs have received warning letters from Natural England related to the registration of licenced operators. There are problems with the significant delay between applications being made to Natural England and registrations being made during a key operational period in the calendar year.</p> <p>This has also highlighted some potential inconstances between the legislation and how Natural England are operating the licence. It has also raised questions as to whether certain activities such as grass cutting on banks or vegetation removal from channels near badgers are in fact activities that would be unlawful without a licence.</p> <p>Key questions relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What IDB activities are licensable

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do non-licensable activities need to be notified and/or registered • Timeframes for notifications and registrations, including re-registrations • Who must be a registered person • What is appropriate supervision <p>Several IDBs are seeking legal opinion from a QC to help clarify these uncertainties and this could be used by IDBs to determine what actions they need to take to be legally compliant.</p> <p>ADA is happy to provide support at a high level in discussions with Natural England. ADA would like this to be a joint and agreed approach with all the IDB ecologists to identify the problems and come up with solutions that can be put to NE.</p> <p>It is understood Natural England are due to review the licence in October 2024 and have stated a willingness to engage with ADA and IDBs on this issue.</p> <p>DECISION: Engagement with Natural England to await findings from legal opinion.</p>
3	<p>Hedgerow regulations and vegetation cutting</p> <p>Discussed the new Management of Hedgerows (England) Regulations 2024 recently laid before parliament.</p> <p>Discussed the provision for hedge ‘cutting or trimming is carried out on land by virtue of, or in connection with, any statutory activity and is reasonably necessary for that purpose’ in Regulation 6 (3) (c).</p> <p>DECISION: ADA to seek guidance from Defra regarding the interpretation of ‘statutory activity’ and ‘reasonably necessary’ within the new regulations.</p> <p>Discussed vegetation cutting by IDBs, the timing for such works, best practice, and training for operatives.</p> <p>DECISION: Forum members wished to investigate drafting best practice for vegetation maintenance related to bird breeding season. Forum members to review ADA Gazette article of Spring 2021 (p22-23) that outlined basis for good practice.</p> <p>Discussed training course prepared by British Trust for Ornithology for Environment Agency operatives. Consisting of a recorded training course. BTO had discussed make a recording of the training available to IDBs for a fee.</p> <p>DECISION: Forum member to trial training course and report on suitability for training IDB operatives.</p>
4	<p>Buffer strips</p> <p>Discussed an upcoming meeting and field visit in mid-June between ADA, Defra, Environment Agency, Natural England, and Middle Level Commissioners regarding the grant options for buffer strips and maintenance operations of IDBs. This follows from discussion of buffer strips at the ADA Environment Day 2024.</p> <p>DECISION: Agreed that finding suitable provisions for buffer strips to be promoted next to watercourses managed and maintained by risk management authorities would be welcome.</p> <p>DECISION: Any members in attending the mid-June meeting and field visit with Defra regarding buffer strips to contact IM.</p>
5	<p>Water level management plans (WLMPs)</p>

	<p>Discussed support for updating guidance for WLMPs to cover catchments and for wider purpose than solely to environmentally designated sites.</p> <p>DECISION: ADA to seek views from Defra and Natural England as to the status of WLMPs and guidance for their content, and funding to support them.</p> <p>DECISION: Forum members to think through the principles for guiding the drafting and updating of WLMPs.</p>
	<p>Next meeting</p> <p>DECISION: 13.00 – 15.00 Monday 9 September 2024</p> <p>DECISION: Members to notify IM of new IDB environmental officers who may wish to join the Forum.</p>
	<p>Close</p>