

Notes of the meeting of the Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Wednesday 31 July 2024 at 2.00 pm

Attendees:

Voting Members present, in person:

Merry Albright (MA)	Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group
Simon Evans (SE)	The Wye and Usk Foundation
Daniel Humphreys (DH)	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
Cllr Andrew McDermid (AM)	Forest of Dean District Council
Andrew McRobb (AM)	Council for Protection of Rural England
Claire Minett (CM)	Natural England
Martin Quine (MQ)	Environment Agency
Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst (ES)	Herefordshire Council
Richard Tyler (RT)	Save the Wye

Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

83. NOTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST TIME

The minutes of the previous meeting, dated 26 April 2024, were approved.

84. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

85. UPDATE ON ACTIVITY

The key updates from Nutrient Management Board members included:

1. It was noted that at the Royal Welsh Summit, on farming, Farm Cymru were invited to speak alongside NFU, FUW, the Future Generations Commissioner, and the Nature Friendly Farming Network.
2. It was added that Welsh Government had been asked to do a review of anaerobic digestion through Wales which has been since signed off for completion in the next six months.

86. STATUTORY OFFICER GROUP REPORT

The key points made included:

1. There will not be a further progress update of the Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) at the next NMB meeting, but this was to give board members a picture of the actions and where they are at currently.
 - a. There will be actions in addition to the recent plan that were not captured in the 2021 Nutrient Management Plan.

2. Moving forward the focus of the Nutrient Management Plan will be set out measures and actions to restore the river to favourable conservation status. All plans and projects likely to impact upon the River Wye SAC are the subject of Habitats Regulations Assessment. Within the Lugg catchment where the river is failing to meet its conservation targets Nutrient Neutrality is applied on development proposals.
3. It was noted that Herefordshire Council link up with all the local authorities who received funding from DLUHC.
 - a. For example, Norfolk commissioned a report on septic tank upgrades and the report author is willing to make that available for learning.
4. The SOG have agreed that the primary spend will be on updating the Welsh evidence feeding into the NMP.
5. The Chair argued that the Phosphate Action Plan forms a useful baseline to have within the agenda papers of the NMB so that the board can refer to it and change things included in it.
 - a. Emma Johnson responded that she would take that request back to the SOG.
6. The Chair asked about actions that sit with DEFRA.
7. Martin Quine responded that evaluations will be made on where the DWPP is at before the next NMB meeting and an update can be provided on that.
8. It was asked if it was possible for a summary on what progress has taken place regarding the plans in place.
 - a. It was agreed that an executive summary would be helpful for newcomers onto the committee to outline the facts and an update on the direction of travel of the plans.
9. The Chair asked who would be willing to produce a summary.
 - a. Claire Minett responded that the SOG could take the request away and consider a summary to be produced.
10. It was noted that the Wye Catchment Partnership are trying to create a plan for the river that deals with the defined problems and slots in the elements of the DWPP and the Upper Wye SAC Restoration Plan in order to work in a more coordinated way.
11. It was asked what timescale is expected for the Welsh Government funded work in Wales of the NMP to be done by.
 - a. Liz Duberley responded that that the project brief is being worked through with the SOG and NRW have provided feedback. Discussions will then be had with Welsh local authorities to get their feedback before developing the specification to go out to tender.
12. It was asked if there are any outcomes from TAG groups.
 - a. Martin Quine responded that when the governance for the NMB was looked at, there were six TAG sub-groups. It was felt that it was more

appropriate to focus on the key things that needed to be focused on first subject to a review to ensure that funding and resourcing is placed in the right areas. The ambition with the review of the NMP and the Catchment Plan is that existing groups need to be used to avoid duplicating groups that already exist.

87. FARMSCOPER PHOSPHATE LOSS TOOL UPDATE

1. Claire Minett noted that the key outcome from the Farmscoper update is that 50% of phosphates come from soil loss. Natural England work closely with catchment sensitive farming programme and have initiated extra targeted activity on the Wye to encourage the voluntary measures in place to provide buffers, cover crops, and that work is ongoing.
2. Merry Albright asked in relation to the APHA numbers whether the 30 million poultry figure in the catchment is correct.
 - a. Claire Minett responded that it was the best evidence available at the time to be used. The figure cannot be regarded as definitely right; however, it was the APHA data at that moment in time.
3. Claire Minett added that this is one piece of evidence feeding into the DWPP that will add to the evidence-based understanding and options appraisal.

88. IMPORTATION AND USAGE OF BIOSOLIDS IN THE CATCHMENT

The Chair introduced Tom Powell to speak on the item.

Tom Powell noted that he would provide a brief overview on how biosolids work and answer questions from members. The key points included:

1. The Biosolids Assurance Scheme (BAS) exists to ensure that the biosolids works are tested every three months and is tested every day for nitrogen and phosphate. There are different criteria as to whether it can be exported to land. Welsh Water are not prohibited to recycle to land with elevated levels of nutrients.
2. The Chair asked in relation to nutrients what controls are in place not to apply or sell to land that is full of phosphate.
 - a. Tom Powell responded that for a farm, Welsh Water will visit and test the soil for a range of determinants including phosphates. They are tested every five years to see where those levels are.
 - b. If a field has a phosphate index of 4 and above, then biosolids are not applied.
 - c. Once the farm is tested for nutrients, it is ensured that the farm's Nutrient Management Plan is seen before biosolids are taken there.
3. It was asked that Welsh Water apply according to the ADHB Nutrient Management Guide 'RB209' guidance.
 - a. Tom Powell responded that biosolids do not only contain phosphate but nitrogen as well. The phosphate that goes on is not the only thing that the agronomist considers when using RB209 and working out what crops need.

4. Concern was noted that if the soil is tested only every five years, how is it known what has happened the following year, for example.
5. Tom Powell added that Welsh Water can provide copies of the paperwork which shows the different mapping risks including distances from water courses, for example.
6. Martin Quine mentioned that Project TARA is focusing on the transport of digestate from anaerobic digesters. Once the section on anaerobic digestion is complete, the project will examine sludge from water companies across the catchment area. Records of where the sludge is currently being spread can then be requested, helping to identify specific localities that need to be targeted.
7. It was asked whether the five-year test is a standard cycle of testing for water companies in general.
 - a. Tom Powell responded that it is standard as part of the Biosolids Assurance Scheme (BAS) every five years and then every 10-15 years, there is a more in-depth suite testing at different levels looking at heavy metals. Details of the tests that Welsh Water conduct could be provided at request.
8. The Chair asked in relation to phosphate through land drains whether the drains are tested by Welsh Water.
 - a. Tom Powell responded that the drains are not tested, however, they are required to find out where the land drains are located.
9. It was asked whether the testing is done unannounced or whether it is done on a regular basis every five years.
 - a. Tom Powell responded that it is not unannounced, and it must be arranged with the farmer. There must be a relatively long period of the fertiliser being applied or otherwise the tests are invalid.

89. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is 16th October 2024, 14:00.

The meeting ended at 3.43 pm

Chairperson