

Notes of the meeting of the Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board held in on Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 2.00 pm

Attendees:

Voting Members present

Merry Albright (MA)	Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group
Liz Bickerton (LB)	Bannau Brycheiniog
Cllr Jackie Charlton (JC)	Powys Council
Helen Dale (HD)	Country Land and Business Association
Simon Evans (SE)	The Wye and Usk Foundation
Jenny Grubb (JG)	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
Christine Hugh-Jones (CHJ)	Council for Protection of Rural Wales
Georgie Hyde (GH)	National Farmers Union
Cllr Catrin Maby (CM)	Monmouthshire Council
Andrew McRobb (AM)	Council for Protection of Rural England
Cllr Sid Phelps (SP)	Forest of Dean District Council
Stuart Smith (SS)	Wye Salmon Association
Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst (ES)	Herefordshire Council
Tom Tibbits (TT)	Friends of the Upper Wye
Richard Tyler (RT)	Save the Wye

Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

57. NOTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST TIME

The minutes of the previous meeting, dated 11 October 2023, were approved.

58. CHANGES TO NMB MEMBERSHIP

The Chair noted that Farm Herefordshire is no longer a voting member of the board.

Cllr Charlton (Powys) asked if a representative of Radnorshire Wildlife Trust is to be added to the membership of the board following a request from the Chief Officer of Radnorshire Wildlife Trust.

The Chair asked if members had any concerns about Radnorshire Wildlife Trust being added to the membership. No concerns were expressed and it was agreed that a representative of the Trust would be added.

59. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair asked that if a space on a future NMB agenda relating to Project TARA could be reserved.

Martin Quine (Environment Agency) responded that there should be information in the coming months which will be shared with the board.

The Chair asked if there was a response from NRW that could be provided to one of the questions which was to be considered at this meeting.

Ann Weedy (NRW) responded that a written response would be provided after the meeting.

It was asked if the Environment Agency had any comments on whether their regulations were suitable on the spread of manure.

Martin Quine responded that EA is actively regulating permitted sites and farms within the catchment. The Wye Engagement HQ webpage has been recently updated which covers some of the work that EA is doing.

60. VOICE OF THE RIVER AND RIVER RIGHTS

Paul Powlesland gave a brief overview of rights of nature. The key points of the discussion included:

1. It was asked how adding a voice for the river into the mix would add value if they do not have any power other than their voice.
 - a. It was noted that approaching things from a rights of nature angle, rather than a failed environmental regulations angle, will more likely result in the changes desired. With correct research on what it would look like and how it would speak, it could be successful.
2. It was added that due to financial pressures, the voice which is often left out is nature and if the way in which the benefits and what is going to be achieved can be strengthened, it can help make it easier for local authorities to find extra resources to do the necessary work on the river.
 - a. Paul Powlesland agreed and noted that on the River Roding, as an example, even if a polluter is taken to court and fined, the fine will go to the Treasury. If fines were to go back to the river, it would help to directly improve the health of the river.
3. It was requested that an agreement for Lawyers for Nature, on the joint project with the Usk, start to research and come up with options that can be voted on.

It was agreed that Lawyers for Nature work alongside the board.

61. DIRECTIONS TO NMBS FROM WELSH GOVERNMENT

The key points included:

1. At this stage, this should be viewed as an information item. The directions have been passed to SOG for them to start to consider how to start developing their plan.
2. There is a recognition that all NMBS are at different stages.
3. There is funding for this and this funding has not been drawn down yet. There have been discussions with Welsh Government about whether it can be carried forward next year to commission the next phase. However, in terms of the ambition within the Welsh paper about the process to go through to get to the plan, the funding is not sufficient but it does set the parameters about what they would like to happen.

The Chair asked for further clarity about the funding situation.

It was responded that the funding had not been able to progress due to the governance review for most of last year. In discussion with partner agencies, the request was to progress governance first before moving on to the plan. It is hoped that a way can be found to keep this funding and discussions will continue over the coming weeks.

62. SOG TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO REVIEW AND ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS WITH CRITICAL EVIDENCE OF IMPACT OF THE PRESENT PLAN

The key points included:

1. The SOG has met in November and December.
2. Two technical groups were set up.
 - a. One is a task and finish group which focuses on existing nutrient lost tools.
 - b. The second focuses on evidence and data which needs to be brought together from groups such as NE, EA, Herefordshire Council etc. to find out what the gaps are and make that evidence as accessible as possible.
3. It was added that EA is working with a team from Lancaster University to help deliver what the agency cannot. A lot of data has been accumulated from citizen science and other research institutions.
4. Some of this work will be aligned to the development of the Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP).
5. An indicative timeline of what that process will look like will be shared with this group as soon as it is available to do so.

It was asked whether the EA's involvement with Lancaster University has been a permanent engagement.

1. Martin Quine confirmed that EA are continuing to work with Lancaster University since the initial report was released. The Phase 2 report has been committed to following the Phase 1 report. Funding will be made available for Phase 3.
2. Much of the RePhoKUs report is based upon modelling and work with the Lancaster team will help better understand it from the actual catchment in terms of sampling and understanding the role that Legacy P, for example, plays.
3. Therefore, work is ongoing as to how the next phase of research will look like and it is important that the findings of those reports help progress future work.

It was asked whether the Phase 3A report has to happen before any firm plan of action can be recommended by the EA as part of the SOG.

1. Martin Quine noted that data and evidence could be collected forever because it is iterative and does not necessarily stop.
2. The data which comes in is used and helps to prioritise where in the catchment and EA uses its own data from the sondes and the water quality monitoring regime as well as monitoring as part of citizen science.

On the Diffuse Water Pollution Plan, it was asked what the indicative timeline looks like.

1. It was confirmed that March 2025 is when EA aims to have the DWPP completed.
2. The indicative timeline is about the steps that happen in the next twelve months towards March 2025.

The Chair asked if landscape recovery bids would be looked at.

1. It was confirmed that they would be and that it has the potential to bring about another benefit to the catchment.

It was added that an integrated plan would be very helpful as well as a concept around multi-level governance and how the interactions between national, regional and local actors operate.

The Chair suggested that a timeline would be worth considering and would help the board to know how to agenda items going forward. Partners and members of the board can also be better aware of the work that is being done and can be referred back to the SOG so that they are cited on everything that is happening when working on the plan.

63. HAVING PROVIDED AN UPDATE IN ITEM 5, SOG TO SET OUT HOW THEY PLAN TO DEVELOP THE PRESENT NMP

The Chair noted that things in the existing plan have been delivered, however, the plan never got updated and everyone needs to be clear about the dynamic nature of the plan and the relationship with the board.

1. Therefore, going forward, the plan needs to get updated when an action gets progressed, even if not complete.
2. As activities emerge, that they need to go into the plan and comes through to the board before going to the SOG to fold into their thinking.

64. AOB

Councillor Jackie Charlton commented that sustainable farming is currently being looked at in Wales with a lot of discussion around a sustainable farming scheme.

Peter Morris noted that Welsh Government is bringing forward the sustainable farming scheme and new subsidy scheme for farming across Wales. It was asked whether the board wants to comment on that proposal and seek to influence the direction of the subsidy regime that is emerging in Wales in a way that reflects the importance of new treatment of nutrients in river SAC.

The Chair asked if anyone from the board is responding to the consultation as individual organisations.

1. Ann Weedy confirmed that NRW will be responding to that consultation.
2. Helen Dale added that the CLA will be responding to the consultation.
3. Helen Lucocq confirmed that Bannau Brycheiniog would be making a representation to the consultation.
4. Georgie Hyde confirmed that NFU Cymru will be responding to the consultation.

Councillor Catrin Maby commented that Monmouthshire Council will be putting together a response and would be keen to share these views in order to establish mutual agreement. It was added that it would be stronger to respond as a board at least on those areas where there is agreement.

Merry Albright noted that the board should have a representational role otherwise it cannot challenge, advise and influence.

The Chair added that the November conference in Hereford was held which looked at bringing together environmental groups and the agricultural sector to explore short,

medium, and long-term solutions. From the 9th to 23rd February, Herefordshire Council is hosting the Vessel with the River at Plough Lane before being taken to Monmouthshire. It will involve a series of conferences allowing people to come together and discuss what is happening.

The meeting ended at 3.58 pm

Chairperson