



Diffuse water pollution

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites Theme Workshop Note

Introduction

As a high percentage of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) sites are affected by diffuse pollution it has been identified as a priority for the IPENS project to address. Often sites are affected by multiple sources of pollution, many of which have proved difficult to tackle in the past. However the inclusion in River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) of Natura 2000 sites as 'Protected Areas' under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides an added driver for understanding the sources of diffuse pollution and progressively addressing these using a range of measures. Whilst some mechanisms are available and actions are underway or planned, implementation often involves complex and costly measures with habitat responses uncertain, and the timescales for recovery often lengthy or unknown.

A technical workshop was held on 5 September 2013, attended by eight experts from Natural England and other organisations.

The workshop attendees discussed the delivery mechanisms for diffuse pollution for Natura 2000 sites (such as Diffuse Water Pollution Plans, New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS), Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF), and WFD etc), the barriers to implementation of solutions on the ground and how these might be resolved.

The Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) has hosted a series of workshops with key stakeholders in order to gather views and ideas on how to resolve some of the issues affecting Natura 2000 sites. The views in this note are those of the workshop participants and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England or the Environment Agency.



Key messages from the workshop

- 43 Natura 2000 sites were identified as requiring a Diffuse Water Pollution Plan in August 2013. Approximately two thirds of these have a Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative in place.
- As a core principle, we should recognise the need to set the direction of travel towards achieving often challenging water quality targets for individual Natura 2000 sites, whilst recognising the uncertainties involved and acknowledging the need to adopt an **adaptive management approach in practice**.
- Tackling diffuse pollution in Natura 2000 catchments involves a **sequential approach** with a good quality Diffuse Water Pollution plan (DWPP) as a starting point. That is, apply the advice and incentive approach, driven as appropriate, by awareness raising, and enforcement of, existing underpinning regulation. If this is not effective seek to apply tougher regulation e.g. Water Protection Zones (WPZ) (supported by advice and incentives) and as a last resort consider land use change (supported by advice and incentives and compensation).
- **Diffuse Water Pollution Plans** need to set out and confirm what the priorities are in a particular catchment; they need to become **spatially explicit** (new data will help); and take account of local information e.g. from walk-over surveys and knowledge from partners. The importance of a collaborative approach and integration within the Catchment based Approach (CaBA) was emphasised.
- There is a desire from some NGOs to see targets adopted so that progress at reducing diffuse pollution can clearly be tracked. Appropriate **levers and legislation** need to be in place to support the process of managing invasive species. The will and resource to take regulatory or enforcement action are also required.

Envisaged next steps

- Secure wider engagement with the results of the workshop through the development of a Theme Plan
 - Agree an approach and develop guidance on how to deal with Diffuse Water Pollution Plans (DWPP) and the need to link this with the next round of RBMP as part of the development of Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) by IPENS.
 - Scope out the evidence gap related to our understanding of the impacts of urban diffuse pollution and available solutions.
 - Consider current regulatory mechanisms and their effectiveness in practice; identify Natura 2000 test cases where diffuse pollution problems exist and standard approaches have been tried without satisfactorily addressing the problem.
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Workshop participants

The following organisations and Natural England staff participated in the workshop:

Senior Adviser, IPENS
Principal Specialist, Environmental Impacts
Project Manager, CSF
Senior Specialist, Diffuse Water Pollution
Senior Adviser, Diffuse Water Pollution
Farming and Water Quality Adviser

Water Policy Officer

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Natural England
Natural England
Natural England
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Environment Agency
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RSPB

Image: Hare's-tail cotton grass on Hatfield Moor Special Area of Conservation (SAC) /
Thorne and Hatfield Moors Special Protection Area (SPA)
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