

## Rural land management

### What action for water means for you

### South East



#### Action for water

Everyone benefits from clean water, and a healthy water environment.

The end of 2009 marks the beginning of a new journey for the south east's water environment. The Environment Agency will publish the South East River Basin Management Plan, a long term programme of environmental improvements to make the south east a better place.

The environment of the south east is very special, and water quality has improved significantly in recent decades. However, it will take more time, effort and resources to deal with the pressures that still remain – as well as the future challenges of climate change and development.

Everyone can take action for water, to create an environment we are all proud of and can enjoy.



Kingfisher by Lukasz Lukasik

#### What are the challenges?

The south east's large population puts pressure on the environment through discharges from sewage works. Many urban and rural rivers have been modified for flood defence or navigation, often at the expense of ecological quality. Also, the way land is managed has given rise to a host of complex pollution issues in rural as well as urban areas.

There are also concerns over maintaining the water resources available for people and the environment. The south east is a water scarce region and we must reduce

household and non-household consumption. We need to balance our needs with the resources we have by using less, providing new resources and preparing for the impacts of climate change.

#### The river basin management plan

The South East River Basin Management Plan is a statutory plan, required under the European Water Framework Directive. One of 11 plans in England and Wales It covers the South East River Basin District, which extends from the Thames estuary in the east and almost as far west as Salisbury, and taking in the four county councils of Kent, East and West Sussex and Hampshire.



The South East River Basin District

The plan introduces new ways of measuring the health of our waters based on the Water Framework Directive's tougher environmental standards. It describes the pressures on the whole water environment, it's status and our targets for 2015, and the action required.

A range of actions are set out in the plan. They will require everyone to be involved – water companies, farmers, environmental organisations, local authorities, industry, individuals, communities and others. We need your help.

We are aiming for a 4 per cent improvement in the number of waters at 'good status' by 2015. By 2021, we expect this to increase to 60%. By 2027, we will work to improve this further – and as close to 100% as possible.

## Rural Land Management has a major role to play

This sector has a big role in looking after and improving the quality of the rural environment. Agriculture accounts for approximately two thirds of the land area in the South East River Basin District, and employs over 25,000 people.

A combination of incentive, advisory and regulatory measures have been in place for a number of years to help farmers and other land managers protect the environment. For instance the Code of Good Agricultural Practice and agri-environment schemes, such as Entry Level Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship. Wise management of resources such as soil, nutrients, water and energy helps to cut costs while maintaining or improving the productivity of land and livestock.

Nevertheless, the way in which land is managed is still having a negative impact on natural resources and further action is needed to address diffuse pollution and other key pressures in rural areas. Government will consider the introduction of further restrictions of activities and restrictions on chemicals where there is evidence that voluntary actions failed to deliver.

## Relevant actions

### Example actions

**Continue Cross-Compliance** – to help farmers comply with a range of Directives to reduce pollution from agriculture at farms receiving subsidies.

- **Where:** Across the river basin district

Establish and enforce **Nitrate Vulnerable Zones** in catchments at high risk from nitrate pollution to reduce the amount of nitrate and other pollutants entering water from farmland.

- **Where:** Across the river basin district

Encourage uptake of **Voluntary Initiative best practice on pesticide use** by land managers within the agricultural and amenity sectors.

- **Where:** Across the river basin district

Maintain a nationally funded advice-led partnership under the England **Catchment Sensitive Farming** Delivery Initiative to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture in priority areas.

- **Where:** Test and Itchen, Stour and Isle of Thanet, Eastern Rother, Pevensey Levels, Arun and Western Rother

Form **Strategic Partnerships** with the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative and other advice led partnership work to provide further funding to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture.

- **Where:** Isle of Wight, Arun and Western Streams, East Hampshire

Work with Natural England to target **Catchment Sensitive Farming type activities and agri-environment schemes** to ensure adoption of best farming practice and reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture.

- **Where:** Priority water bodies

## Case Study: Clean Water Partnership

A new initiative called the Downs & Harbours Clean Water Partnership will reduce the amount of pollution being washed into our water from farmland soils. The partners are Portsmouth Water, Natural England, and the Environment Agency, and the focus is the farmland that drains into streams and rivers that flow into the River Hamble and its estuary, Portsmouth Harbour, Langstone Harbour and Chichester Harbour.



When it rains heavily, pollution and soils run-off into nearby rivers and streams. Nutrients in the run-off help feed unnaturally large mats of green algae that carpet the harbour mudflats in summer and autumn and reduce oxygen levels in the estuary mud. This causes major problems for some of the wildlife that feeds there.

Although not all of the pollution comes from farms, experts calculate that these algal mats would be significantly reduced if the supply of farm nutrients brought to the harbours by inflowing streams and rivers could be cut back.

The Partnership offers local farmers free confidential services and support to help them to reduce run-off. Services include free management plans for nutrient, manure, and soil as well as workshops, face-to-face consultations and farm demonstrations of best management practices.

Farmers will have less of their expensive fertilisers and pesticides washed away and wasted, saving money on the farm. The initiative will also help reduce the cost of supplying the region with clean drinking water, by avoiding pollution of aquifers of groundwater – which supplies over 70 per cent of drinking water in the region. This pollution is expensive to clean up.

## Contact us

The River Basin Liaison Panel steers this work in the South East River Basin District. You can contact your sector representative via the Environment Agency, or get in touch with us directly as shown below.

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