River basin management: Working Together Consultation
June 2018
River basin planning

Overview

Water is a precious resource that we can’t live without; from supplying drinking water and supporting fisheries, to providing an essential resource to business and agriculture, and a source of recreation.

Water pollution and drought threaten these things. Therefore it is critical that our rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal areas, wetlands and groundwater are managed properly. This ensures the needs of society, the economy and wildlife can be met and maintained over the long-term.

River basin planning provides an overarching strategic framework for managing that water environment. River basin management plans include the objectives and actions required to protect and improve the water environment. Water and land resources are closely linked and so river basin management plans also inform decisions on land-use planning and work alongside other strategies, such as flood risk management plans.

The current river basin management plans (www.gov.uk/government/collections/river-basin-management-plans-2015) were published in February 2016 and must be reviewed and updated by the end of 2021. Starting in 2018, there will be three consultations that will help shape the updated plans. The consultations are your opportunity to help shape the review and update of the river basin management plans.
Working Together

Overview

Working Together is the first consultation in the process of reviewing and updating the river basin management plans for 2021. It sets out the steps and consultation measures to be taken, the proposed timetable and the ways that you can get involved in preparing the updated plans.

Everyone’s views are welcomed. Responding to the consultation is just one way of getting involved in the process. You can also engage with us and our partners both locally and nationally on river basin planning.

All responses will be considered. We will publish a summary of your responses on our website within three months of the consultation closing.

River basin districts

A river basin management plan is produced for each river basin district in England. As part of this Working Together consultation you will be asked to identify which river basin district(s) your response applies to, or if you want your response to apply to the whole of England.

To find your river basin district use the map on the next page or visit the Catchment Data Explorer (http://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/) to search by postcode.

The Environment Agency is responsible for the review and update of the river basin management plans for the six river basin districts that fall entirely within England; Anglian, Humber, North West, South East, South West, and Thames.

The Environment Agency also leads on the review and update of the river basin management plans for the Severn and Northumbria river basin districts which lie partly in Wales and Scotland respectively.

Natural Resources Wales (www.naturalresources.wales/) leads on the review and update of the plan for the Dee river basin district.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (www.sepa.org.uk/) leads on the review and update of the plan for the Solway Tweed river basin district.

For more information on the consultations for the Dee and Solway Tweed please follow the links under related information below.

Related information

Natural Resources Wales Working Together:


Scottish Environment Protection Agency consultations page:

https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/consultations/currentopen-consultations/
Introduction

The current river basin management plans were published in February 2016. This consultation sets out the work programme, timetable and process for how we will work with you to review and update the current plans by the end of 2021. We are seeking your views on:

- how other plans and strategies affect, or are affected by, river basin management plans
- the proposed timetable and content of the work programme to review and update the plans
- whether all relevant stakeholders have been identified
- how people can get involved in the review and update of the plans.

For more information on the river basin planning process see our river basin planning page (https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/river-basin-management).

Implications of EU Exit for river basin management plans

The UK will be leaving the European Union (EU) on 29 March 2019. The EU Withdrawal Bill will carry over existing EU law, including the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), into domestic law. This process will only make technical changes to the legislation relating to river basin planning so the law remains operable after EU Exit.

The obligation to review and update the river basin management plans is set out in our domestic law, principally the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 (www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/407/contents/made) and these obligations will continue to apply. We will therefore complete the review and update to the plans in 2021 under the current set of WFD Regulations, as amended in domestic law by the process of leaving the EU.

The European Commission is carrying out a fitness check on the Water Framework Directive (www.ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html). It anticipates its assessment report will be completed by the middle of 2019. The fitness check will be assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Directive amongst other things. The Commission has indicated this is a fitness check of the Directive and that it will not automatically lead to a revised Water Framework Directive.

Sharing information

The Environment Agency has developed the Catchment Data Explorer that helps you explore and download information about the water environment. It supports and builds upon the data available in the river basin management plans. You can find catchments and water bodies of interest using a map or searching by name. You can also view summary information about catchments, and follow links to other useful sites. You do not need to refer to Catchment Data Explorer in order to respond to this Working Together consultation.
How river basin management plans are linked to other plans and strategies

To achieve more integrated river basin management plans we would like to hear your views on the plans and strategies that you think we should take account of when updating the river basin management plans.

This section of the consultation provides an overview of the main plans and strategies that will influence and shape the river basin management plans in 2021.

River basin management plans address how we can best protect and improve the water environment and the benefits that water in all its forms provides people and society. To achieve this, the plans draw together the aims, objectives and actions from a number of other water related plans and strategies. This helps those responsible for completing the actions to see the opportunities for linking up and achieving better outcomes for all.

River basin management plans promote an integrated approach to managing the water environment including the supply of drinking water and the protection of sensitive areas and habitats, including bathing and shellfish waters. Climate change adaptation is an integral part of the river basin management plans and the revised plans will be based on the latest 2018 UK climate change projections (ukclimateprojections.metoffice.gov.uk/24125).

All of these areas are addressed in the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan (www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan). This sets out the UK-wide long term vision for our natural environment. River basin management plans are the mechanism for ensuring that we achieve the 25 Year Environment Plan goal of clean and plentiful water. They set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound targets and detail how we will invest in the quality and quantity of water dependent natural capital over the long term.

The following plans and strategies are listed as particularly important areas of join-up. Aligning these with river basin management plans will enable those involved to better coordinate activities which in turn will deliver more benefits for people and wildlife.

At a local level the government wants environmental effort to be guided by the goals outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan, to reflect local needs and priorities, and be more integrated and efficient. To help achieve this, the larger environmental delivery bodies in the Defra Group, have aligned around a common geography of 14 areas. Each has its own Area Integrated Plan (effectively, a joint statement of intent between the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission) that will be developed, with partner organisations, into natural capital plans. These will be aligned with the 25 Year Environment Plan (ensuring a clear line of sight to national government) but be particularly relevant to the local area or geographies within them. The specific organisations involved in developing the natural capital plans may vary by area according to need, but it is important that the plans for each are co-designed and delivered.

Flood risk management plans (www.gov.uk/government/collections/flood-risk-management-plans-frmps-2015-to-2021) explain the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, surface run-off, groundwater and reservoirs. They explain how flood and coastal erosion risk management
authorities\textsuperscript{1} will work with communities to manage flood risk over the next 6 years. Updated flood risk management plans will be published in 2021. Aligning flood risk and river basin management plans provides an integrated approach to catchment planning and an opportunity to examine how working with natural processes can better protect ourselves from flooding. We will be aligning our engagement of flood risk and river basin management plans wherever possible during their development.

The national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy\textsuperscript{2} underpins flood and coastal risk management in England. The Environment Agency is currently working with partners and participants to review the strategy. This is a collaborative process, designed to achieve a shared strategy for managing flood risk that contributes to achieving the government’s wider 25 Year Environment Plan objectives. The revised strategy will be published in 2019.

Water companies in England and Wales must produce water resource management plans\textsuperscript{3} every five years to show how they will provide a secure supply of water to their customers while protecting the environment over a 25-year period. The next set of plans will be published in 2019. They will include a range of options to manage demand by improving water efficiency and reducing leakage, as well as options to increase supply through the development of new resources. The plans will also include action to reduce the impact of damaging abstractions on the water environment. These actions will play an important part in helping us achieve the environmental objectives in river basin management plans. River basin management plans will also link to the water abstraction plan 2017 (www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-abstraction-plan-2017) which sets out how the government will reform water abstraction management and how this will protect the environment and improve access to water.

Water company business plans\textsuperscript{4} describe how water companies will deliver water and wastewater services to their customers and improve and protect the environment. Plans are published every five years, with the next set of plans due in 2019. The Environment Agency and Natural England set out their expectations of water companies in the 2017 Water Industry Strategic Environmental Requirements document. The associated Water Industry National Environment Programme details the environmental measures that companies need to include in their business plans and represents the largest investment in the water environment made by any sector.

The new farming rules for water (www.gov.uk/government/news/new-farming-rules-for-water) and the new environmental land management system\textsuperscript{5} for agriculture will shape the contribution that farmers make to protect the water environment for decades to come. The new farming rules and any decision on future agri-environment schemes will be included in the river basin management plans and form a key part of the programme of measures.

There are other plans and strategies that influence and are influenced by river basin management plans. Some are national scale documents, such as the invasive non-native

\textsuperscript{1} www.gov.uk/government/collections/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-authorities
\textsuperscript{3} www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-resources-planning-managing-supply-and-demand/water-resources-planning-how-water-companies-ensure-a-secure-supply-of-water-for-homes-and-businesses
\textsuperscript{4} www.ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/price-review/2019-price-review-final-methodology/
species strategy\textsuperscript{6} and chemical reduction strategies\textsuperscript{7} while others are place-based and site specific.

Catchment plans (www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/resources/catchment-planning) developed by catchment partnerships under the Catchment Based Approach, help to deliver integrated catchment management. This approach can provide multiple benefits for all the partner organisations and the local community, including reducing flood risk whilst also cleaning up pollution, protecting drinking water resources, improving biodiversity and improving the health and recreation for local communities.

Site Improvement Plans (publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5458594975711232) outline priority measures needed to achieve and maintain the internationally important species and habitats within a Natura 2000 site in favourable condition. They provide a high level overview of the issues and priority actions to address issues affecting the condition of the site. Current information for all Natura 2000, Ramsar and Sites of Special Scientific Interest is available from Designated Site View (designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have we identified the right plans and strategies that affect, or are affected by, river basin management plans? If not, please tell us what other plans and strategies we need to be aware of.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{6} www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-great-britain-invasive-non-native-species-strategy

\textsuperscript{7} www.gov.uk/government/collections/chemicals-risk-reduction-strategies
Our proposed programme of work and timetable

Key steps in work programme and timetable

The review and update of river basin management plans involves three public consultation steps. The statutory deadlines for publishing the consultations and the updated plans are:

- by 22 December 2018 for the Working Together consultation
- by 22 December 2019 for the Challenge and Choices consultation
- by 22 December 2020 for the draft updated river basin management plans consultation
- by 22 December 2021 for the updated river basin management plans

Our proposed timetable for reviewing and updating the current plans is set out in the table below. This shows the proposed start date and duration for each of the three statutory consultation steps, as well as periods of engagement.

We are proposing to publish each consultation earlier than the statutory deadlines listed above. This gives more time after the consultation on the draft updated river basin management plans for us to consider responses to that consultation and where necessary further engage with delivery partners to ensure the updated plans are as good as possible and fully supported.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic environment assessment (SEA) is a process that ensures appropriate consideration is given to the environment during the development of certain “plans and programmes”. SEA may be required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (England) 2004\(^8\) (the Regulations).

Subject to the need for SEA, the proposed programme of work for the update to the plans will include consultation on the scope of the SEA for informing the preparation of the plans as well as consultation on the Environmental Reports of the draft update to the plans.

The criteria for determining whether SEA is required are set out in the SEA Regulations. These include whether a plan is likely to lead to significant environmental effects taking in to account the characteristics of the plan, its potential effects and the environmental characteristics of the area likely to be affected. SEA was undertaken for the current river basin management plans.

We will seek the views of the statutory consultation bodies (Natural England and Historic England) before determining whether SEA is required for the update to the current plans. This consultation is likely to take place towards the end of 2018.

Should a SEA be required, the Environment Agency will:

- identify, describe and evaluate the significant environmental effects of implementing the plan and any alternatives
- identify actions to prevent, reduce or as fully possible offset any adverse effects

• provide for early and effective opportunity to engage in preparation of the plan through consultation
• monitor the implementation of the plan to identify any unforeseen environmental effects and take remedial action where necessary
• report all of the above in an Environmental Report

Habitats Regulations Assessment

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017\(^9\), commonly referred to as the Habitats Regulations, provides the framework for the protection of habitats and species of European importance. European sites protected under the Habitats Regulations comprise:

• Special Protection Areas
• Special Areas of Conservation and candidate Special Areas of Conservation
• Sites of Community Importance

and, as a matter of government policy:
• potential Special Protection Areas
• areas formally provided as compensation for European site loss
• Ramsar sites (sites designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention for their internationally important wetlands)

The updated river basin management plans will need to consider requirements under the Habitats Regulations and the need for an assessment of effects on European sites (Habitats Regulations Assessment). These requirements will be discussed with Natural England and with Natural Resources Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage for any cross-border river basin districts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Together consultation</td>
<td>June 2018 to December 2018</td>
<td>How should we all work together to update the river basin management plans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>• explains the key steps in the river basin planning process</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• asks how you want to get involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>June 2018 to April 2019</td>
<td>Where there are areas which need to be resolved or clarified following the Working Together consultation, the Environment Agency will facilitate further engagement with relevant stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Improving the evidence base used to inform the review and update of the river basin management plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and Choices consultation</td>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>Have the significant issues and the challenges in tackling them been fairly summarised? What can be done about them?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>• Summarises the significant water management issues and share the latest evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• seeks views on prioritising action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• agreeing what additional approaches are needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>September 2019 to May 2020</td>
<td>The Environment Agency will consider the responses to the Challenges and Choices consultation. Where there are areas which need to be resolved or clarified we will facilitate further engagement with relevant stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft update to the river basin consultation</td>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>Does the draft plan set the right level of ambition for the water environment and a strong commitment to deliver?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>• proposes changes to water body objectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• estimates the likely state of the environment by 2027</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• outlines who will be involved to achieve these outcomes, how much it will cost and the benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>October 2020 to August 2021</td>
<td>The Environment Agency will consider the responses to the consultation and where necessary further develop the content of the plans with delivery partners to ensure the updated plans are the best possible and fully supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated river basin management plans published</td>
<td>September 2021 to December 2021</td>
<td>This is the plan to address the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Publish proposed plans in September and submitting to government for approval. The approved plans will be published in December. These plans will be used as a framework to direct planning and action and to track progress in each river basin district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consultation questions

2. Does the programme set out include all of the significant steps necessary to review and update the river basin management plans? If not, please tell us about anything extra you think we need to include.

3. Is the timetable set out for achieving the work programme realistic and achievable by 2021? If not, please suggest how we might timetable things differently, taking into account that some dates cannot be changed because of the law.
Who we plan to work with

The best way to protect and improve the water environment is by everyone becoming actively involved. River basin planning is a cyclical, continuous process. It involves planning and implementing actions to protect and improve the water environment, checking delivery of those actions and reviewing their effectiveness. Engagement is an integral part of this on-going process.

River basin districts

Experience and feedback tell us that river basin districts are not an appropriate scale for encouraging the active involvement of all interested parties. We need to speak to the right people at the right time.

Defra, the Environment Agency and the Catchment Based Approach National Support Group have asserted a commitment to undertake more planning and action at the river catchment scale, under the ‘catchment-based approach’. They agreed that there should be a new focus on facilitating delivery through improved partnership working and better integration of the various catchment based programmes of work. The Environment Agency is delivering this work at an area and catchment scale through existing engagement mechanisms.

Our approach for this review and update of the plans is for greater emphasis on engagement at the local and national scale, with an important role for catchment partnerships.

Catchment partnerships

The Catchment Based Approach promotes collaborative working in river catchments to achieve environmental, social and economic benefits. Catchment partnerships are now actively working in over 100 catchments across England.

More than 2000 organisations are engaged nationwide, including non-governmental organisations, water companies, local government, government agencies, land owners, angling clubs, farmer representative bodies, academia and local businesses.

You can find more information about the catchment partnerships in your river basin district and how to get involved here [www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/](http://www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/).

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National Water Leaders Group

This group comprises of national organisations from a range of sectors with responsibility for or an interest in leading the strategic management of England’s waters. It is chaired by the Environment Agency and meets three times a year. The objectives of the group are to:

- influence national policies and processes, though an integrated approach, to conserve, manage and improve the water environment
- steer environmental water planning to meet the objectives in river basin management plans
- lead and drive action to conserve, manage and improve the water environment, promoting partnerships and empowering others to play their part
- share knowledge, good practice and lessons learnt in water management

The following organisations are members of the Water Leaders group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angling Trust</th>
<th>Country Land and Business Association (CLA)</th>
<th>Mineral Products Association</th>
<th>RSPB (representative for Blueprint for Water)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport</td>
<td>Defra</td>
<td>National Farmers' Union</td>
<td>Salmon and Trout Conservation UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA)</td>
<td>Energy UK</td>
<td>National Trust</td>
<td>Shellfish Association of Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities</td>
<td>Environment Agency</td>
<td>Natural England</td>
<td>The Rivers Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canal and River Trust</td>
<td>Forestry Commission</td>
<td>Ofwat</td>
<td>United Kingdom Major Ports Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal Authority</td>
<td>Highways England</td>
<td>Regional Flood and Coastal Committees</td>
<td>Water UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Partnerships Network</td>
<td>International Navigation Association</td>
<td>Renewable UK</td>
<td>Wildlife Trusts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working with others

The Environment Agency also works with the individual organisations from the Water Leaders group and those involved in catchment partnerships, on a daily basis, both
nationally and locally, either directly or through joint involvement in other groups and projects.

Regional flood and coastal committees\textsuperscript{11} have a key role in the co-ordination of flood and coastal erosion risk management. They guide flood and coastal management activities within catchments and along the coast, advising on and approving programmes of work for their areas and supporting the development of funding for local priority projects and works. The committees also provide for local democratic input through the majority membership of representatives from Lead Local Flood Authorities. We will engage with the committees during the review and update of the river basin management plans.

A significant part of the Severn River Basin District is in Wales. Although the principles of good water management are the same either side of the border, some of the legal and administrative arrangements, and some of the organisations involved are different. Natural Resources Wales has provided information on the arrangements in Wales in their Working Together consultation.

\textbf{Related information}

For more information on the Working Together consultation in Wales please go to https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/consultations/our-own-consultations/?lang=en

\textbf{Consultation questions}

4. Are we working with the right organisations that need to be involved in reviewing and updating the river basin management plan(s)? If you think a relevant organisation is not involved, please tell us.

5. Now that you have read this consultation, do you know how to get involved in the review and update of the river basin management plans?

Submit your response

The Environment Agency would prefer you to respond online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/river-basin-planning-working-together. This will allow you to make your comments more effectively, while helping to gather and summarise responses quickly and accurately. However, the Environment Agency will also accept hardcopy responses.

You should return written responses by 22 December 2018 to:

Clive Phillips, RBMP Programme Manager
Environment Agency
Kings Meadow House
Kings Meadow Road
Reading
RG1 8DQ

RBMPconsultation@environment-agency.gov.uk

Providing the following information will ensure your response gets to the right people and let us contact you when our response document is published:

- Your name. We will not publish your name, but may contact you about your response using the email address provided below.

- Your email address (If you provide an email address you will be sent a receipt and a link to a PDF copy of your response)

- If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please name it and specify what type of organisation it is. If you don’t wish to leave your organisation name, let us know what type of organisation it is.

- Please indicate which river basin district(s) your response relates to:
  - Anglian
  - Humber
  - North West
  - Northumbria
  - Severn
  - South East
  - South West
  - Thames
  - All river basin districts (England)

- Please tell us if you are happy for us to publish your response on this consultation? If not please let us know why
Almost done

How we will use your information

Throughout the consultation we will look to make all comments (excluding personal information) publicly available on the Environment Agency’s online consultation portal. This includes comments received online, by email, post and by fax, unless you have specifically requested that we keep your response confidential. We will not publish names of individuals who respond, but we will publish the name of the organisation for those responses made on behalf of organisations.

After the consultation has closed, a summary of the responses will be published on our website. We will contact you to let you know when this is available. We will also notify you of any forthcoming consultations unless you tell us otherwise.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we may be required to publish your response to this consultation, but will not include any personal information. If you have requested your response to be kept confidential, we may still be required to provide a summary of it.

What we will do with the feedback from the consultation and what happens next

We will publish all of the consultation feedback in a summary document on the GOV.UK website and on the consultation website within 12 weeks of the end date of the consultation.

We will take into account all of the consultation responses received, along with all of the other important considerations, before finalising our plans for the review and update of England’s river basin management plans.

Consultation Principles

Government is improving the way it consults by adopting a more proportionate and targeted approach. We are running this consultation in accordance with their Consultation Principles (www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance).

If you have any queries or complaints about the way this consultation has been carried out, please contact: Emma Hammonds, Consultation Coordinator, Environment Agency, Horizon House, Deanery Road, Bristol BS1 5AH; Email: emma.hammonds@environment-agency.gov.uk
Would you like to find out more about us or about your environment?

Then call us on
03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

email
enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

or visit our website
www.gov.uk/environment-agency

incident hotline 0800 807060 (24 hours)
floodline 0345 988 1188 (24 hours)

Find out about call charges (www.gov.uk/call-charges)