



Protecting our water

from catchment to coast

Background

The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), the most significant piece of European water legislation for over 20 years, is set to overhaul the management of the water environment in the UK. The aims, practicalities, timescales, implications for business and industry, and implementation of the Directive are summarised in this leaflet.

The Directive applies to all surface freshwater bodies (including lakes, streams and rivers), groundwaters, estuaries and coastal waters out to one mile from low-water.

The Directive embodies the concept of integrated river basin management. It sets out environmental objectives for water status based on:

- ecological and chemical parameters
- common monitoring and assessment strategies
- arrangements for river basin administration and planning
- a programme of measures in order to meet the objectives.

It will rationalise and update current water legislation, replacing five existing European water directives.



Golitha Falls, Cornwall. Peter Wakely.

General questions

Why do we need this Directive?

Currently there is a wide range of European legislation covering many different aspects of water management. This is widely acknowledged as a patchy and inconsistent approach. The Water Framework Directive intends to resolve this by introducing a holistic approach to water management. It should make it simpler for everyone and result in greater protection for a vital part of our environment.

Successful implementation of the Directive will go a long way to protecting all elements of the water cycle and enhancing the quality of our groundwaters, rivers, lakes, estuaries and seas for now and for future generations.

What does the Directive replace?

By the end of 2007 the Directive will replace:

Surface Water Abstraction Directive – 75/440/EEC

Exchange of Information on Surface Water
Decision – 77/795/EEC

Surface Water Abstraction Measurement /
Analysis Directive – 79/869/EEC

By the end of 2013 the Directive will also replace:

Freshwater Fish Directive – 78/659/EEC

Shellfish Waters Directive – 79/923/EEC

Groundwater Directive – 80/68/EEC

Dangerous Substances Directive – 76/464/EEC

What will the competent authority's responsibilities be?

The first consultation paper on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (published by the Government in March 2001) proposed that the Environment Agency should be the sole competent authority for England and Wales. This would involve the Agency:

- undertaking the analysis of the River Basin District's characteristics and assessing the impact of human activity on the water bodies within the district
- monitoring the status of waterbodies against the objectives set for them
- preparing and consulting on the River Basin Management Plans, and
- taking the lead in drawing up the Programme of Measures and co-ordinating the actions within it.

How many river basins districts will there be?

There will be about 10 River Basin Districts (RBDs) covering England and Wales. There will also be one or more covering cross-border river basins between England and Scotland. A single RBD will consist of one or more river basins. Each river basin must have a single point of discharge to the sea, via an estuary or delta.

Groundwaters and coastal waters will also have to be assigned to the most appropriate river basin district.





River Eamont, East Cumbria. Peter Wakely.

What does the Directive aim to achieve?

By taking an inclusive approach to managing water as it flows through catchments from lakes, rivers and groundwater to estuaries and the sea, the Directive aims to:

- prevent further deterioration and protect and enhance the status of aquatic ecosystems and associated wetlands
- promote sustainable water consumption
- progressively reduce or phase out discharges, emissions and losses of priority substances and priority hazardous substances
- progressively reduce the pollution of groundwater
- contribute to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts.

How will the Directive achieve this?

The Directive will:

- introduce the concept of River Basin Districts – river catchments or groups of catchments
- analyse the state of River Basin Districts, and the human and natural needs and impacts within them
- establish monitoring programmes that use biological as well as chemical parameters
- develop management plans for River Basin Districts
- establish a Programme of Measures that will set out the actions to achieve the environmental objectives of the Directive.



Burrator Reservoir, Dartmoor. Mike Henchman.



Chetney Marshes, Medway Estuary, Kent. Peter Wakely.

Over what timescale?

Changing the way the water environment is managed cannot be achieved overnight. This is recognised by the forward-looking nature of the Directive timetable as outlined below.

2003	define River Basin Districts and appoint Competent Authorities (such as the Environment Agency) to carry out the work
2004	assess the River Basins
2006	start monitoring programmes
2007	state issues and objectives for River Basins
2008	consult on draft River Basin Management Plans
2009 to 2012	enact the plans
2013 to 2015	review the plans
2015	meet Directive objectives

Although the timescales look lengthy, achieving the objectives will involve a substantial amount of work from 2003 onwards.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY



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CONTACT DETAILS

The Directive and industry

The Directive will have implications for all sectors whose business activities directly or indirectly affect the water environment. These include:

- the water industry
- agriculture
- the development and construction industry
- all businesses that have discharge consents, trade effluent licences or abstraction licences.

The Directive will also be relevant to those local authorities, other agencies (particularly the Environment Agency, British Waterways, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales) and environment groups with a role in the management of the water environment.



Pond at Upwood Meadows, Cambridgeshire. Paul Glendell.



Bassenthwaite Lake, Cumbria. Peter Wakely

Implementation process

The Water Framework Directive came into force on 22 December 2000. Each European Member State has three years from this date to 'transpose' the Directive into domestic legislation.

This process was initiated in England and Wales by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (now part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - DEFRA) and the National Assembly for Wales when the first of a series of consultation papers on the implementation of the Directive was issued in March 2001.

The legislation to transpose the Water Framework Directive into English and Welsh law is expected to be laid before Parliament in 2002.

A ROLE FOR ALL