



General introduction to the Water Framework Directive

There is a major change ahead for the management of the environment in England and Wales. This change is being driven by the introduction of the most significant and innovative piece of European water legislation of the past 30 years, the Water Framework Directive (the Directive).

The Directive marks the outcome of a complete rethink of European Union (EU) water policy. On the one hand, it harmonises existing EU legislation on water management, removing many inconsistencies and gaps, and provides for the first time a coherent framework for EU water policy. On the other hand, it sets EU water policy on a new footing, in terms of environmental objectives, regulatory style and spatial organisation of water management. The Directive's provisions do not relate simply to standards of water protection but also to organisational and procedural aspects of water management – it represents the formalisation of the concept of integrated river basin management.

The overall aim of the Directive is to establish a legal framework within which to protect surface waters and groundwaters using a common management approach and following common objectives, principles, and basic measures. The core environmental objectives are to prevent deterioration of aquatic ecosystems and to restore polluted surface waters and groundwater to "good status" in terms of ecological and chemical parameters within a specified timescale.

The Directive will take into account economic considerations to ensure that planned improvements are not disproportionately expensive or technically infeasible. This provides an unprecedented opportunity to underpin the principles of sustainable development in terms of water management with implications for land management too.

River Basin Management Plans

Improvement in the quality or status of water bodies will be achieved through the development and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for each River Basin District (RBD). The river basin planning process takes place on a 6-year cycle. Key to this cycle is a risk assessment of pressures and their impacts on water bodies. Where this risk assessment shows that water bodies are not meeting their environmental objectives, a cost effective programme of measures must be identified and put in place to achieve these objectives.

The River Basin Management Plans will be subject to consultation and will provide the focus for the public and stakeholder participation required by the Directive.

The Directive will be transposed into legislation in England and Wales by the end of 2003. The Environment Agency will be the sole competent authority charged with the Directive's implementation in England and Wales.

WFD timetable

Year	Requirement
2003	Transpose Directive into domestic law (Art. 24). Identify river basin districts and the competent authorities (Art. 3) that will be empowered to implement the Directive.
2004	Complete first characterisation (Art. 5), and assessment of impacts on, river basin districts. Complete first economic analysis of water use. Establish a register of protected areas in each river basin district (Art. 6&7)
2005	Identify significant upward trends in Groundwater and establish trend reversal (Art. 17)
2006	Establish environmental monitoring programmes (Art. 8). Publish a work programme for producing the first RBMPs (Art. 14). Establish environmental quality standards for priority substances and controls on principle sources (Art. 16)
2007	Publish an interim overview of the significant water management issues in each river basin district for general consultation (Art. 14).
2008	Publish draft RBMPs for consultation (Art. 14).
2009	Finalise and publish first RBMPs (Art. 13). Finalise programme of measures to meet objectives (Art. 11).
2010	Ensure water pricing policies are in place (Art. 9).
2012	Ensure all measures are fully operational (Art. 11). Publish timetable and work programme for second RBMPs. Report progress in implementing measures (Art. 15)
2013	Review characterisation and impact assessment for river basin districts. Review economic analysis of water use. Publish an interim overview of the significant water management issues.
2014	Publish second draft RBMPs for consultation.
2015	Achieve environmental objectives specified in first RBMPs (Art.4). Finalise and publish second RBMP with revised Programme of Measures.
2021	Achieve environmental objectives specified in second RBMPs. Publish third RBMPs
2027	Achieve environmental objectives specified in third RBMPs. Publish fourth RBMPs.

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ENVIRONMENT AGENCY



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