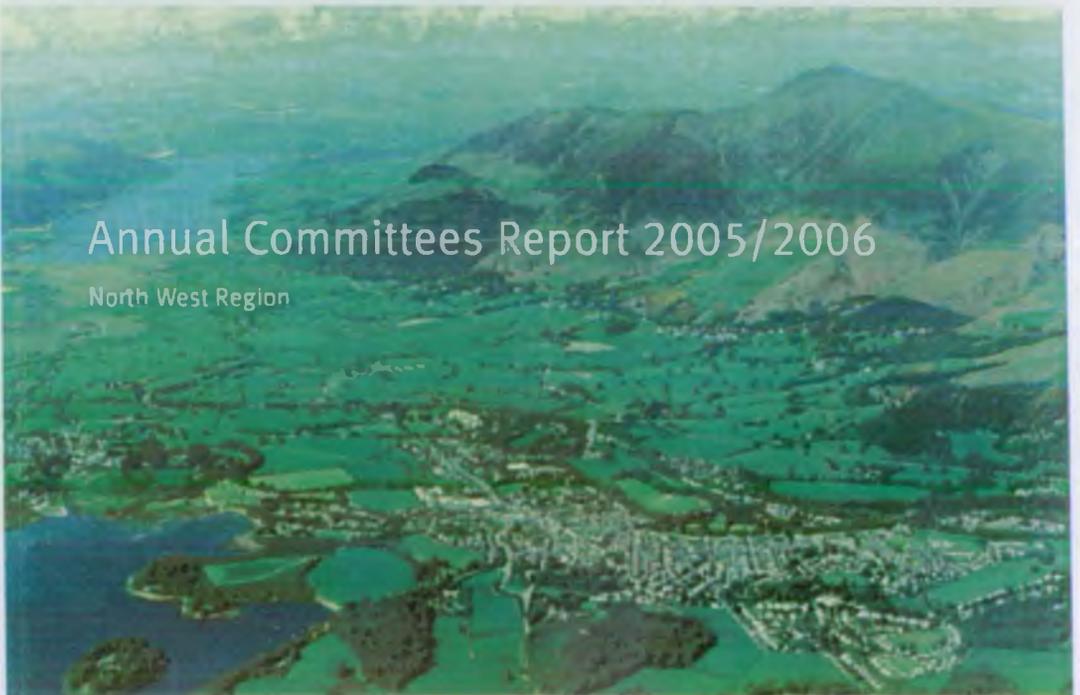




creating a better place

Annual Committees Report 2005/2006

North West Region



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Published by:

Environment Agency
Richard Fairclough House
Knutsford Road
Warrington
WA4 1HG
Tel: +44 8708 506 506
Fax: +44 1925 234 762
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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Introduction by Professor Peter Matthews

Environment Agency Board Member with special responsibility for the North West



I am pleased to introduce the Annual Report for the North West Committees 2005/06.

This has been my final year as Board Member with special responsibility for the North West region. It has been a rewarding year, and it is with great sadness that I step down from the Environment Agency Board.

I am always impressed by the wealth of experience and knowledge we have in our regional Committees. I have learnt a huge amount over the last 6 years and am always heartened to see the commitment to improving and protecting our environment, which drives the work of the Committees.

Over the past year the Committees have considered a broad range of issues. For me, the Water Framework Directive, and its implementation in the region, stands out as both a challenge and an opportunity. The Environment Agency needs to take the lead, but there will be many other organisations which will have a crucial role in the delivery. All three Committees have considered our proposals for implementation of the Water Framework Directive and their continued support and advice will be invaluable as we go forward.

I would like to pay tribute to Robert Runcie, Regional Director, who has left the North West to take on the challenges of Thames region and to Rob McKissack, Principal Officer – External Relations who has now retired. We wish them well for the future. I would also like to welcome Tony Dean as the new Regional Director and I am sure the region will be equally successful under his leadership.

Peter Matthews

Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee (REPAC)

The past year has seen significant developments in our methods of working. This has affected not only REPAC but also our partnerships with the other committees – RFERAC and RFDC.



Joint working groups have helped the Environment Agency develop its thinking on its corporate strategy and the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Implementing the latteWFD is a major challenge for the Environment Agency, but these groups have the benefit of the personal commitment and extensive experience and expertise of the members. Also, our involvement with the Ribble Pilot has given us a good insight into the scope of the WFD, to help drive the Environment Agency forward into the future with confidence.

As the Environment Agency Corporate Strategy developed, I am delighted that REPAC has established its own contributions to delivery. These are designed to ensure that members work towards clear objectives. This 'business approach' demands that we make best use of our four meetings each year, and requires forward planning. I am still pressing for better planning from both the Environment Agency and Defra.

We continue to use "virtual panels" to develop responses to national consultations, so that our time in the meetings is devoted to discussing the broad principles and not the detail. However, we always cover the North West issues when talking about these national topics.

The environment is ever changing and under continual threat from commercial development and climate change. All the members of REPAC are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the direction of an organisation dedicated to defending our environment.

Derek Norman
Chairman, Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee

Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) objectives associated with REPAC

The Environment Agency was involved with activities to bring the environment into NWDA policies and processes, influencing the region on environmental issues and developing economic programmes with environmental outputs.

The committee invited Mark Atherton, Head of Sustainable Development and Climate Change at the NWDA, to attend a meeting to discuss proposals for working in partnership with the Environment Agency on a number of initiatives during 2005/06. These included the Business Resource Efficiency and Waste (BREW) programme, future proofing to predict environmental legislation and the opportunities for North West businesses, and Responsibility NW, a proposal to develop an overarching framework for corporate responsibility in the region. The committee was pleased to note the environmental work of the NWDA, not only with the Environment Agency but also with a number of other regional partners, which involved working together on joined up solutions to deliver the objectives set out in the Regional Economic Strategy. The committee strongly supported the Environment Agency's relationship with the NWDA and their work and collaboration to make a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities across the North West.

State of the Environment reporting

State of the Environment reporting had progressed from a hard copy to web based information. The committee was advised on how this illustrates environmental trends and reports on particular topics such as water quality, air quality, and waste and resources.

Members welcomed the opportunity to comment on how the Environment Agency could raise its profile as a provider of information, whether reports should be Environment Agency or partnership driven, and how useful it was to compare regions. They felt it important for the target audience to be identified before starting the report and that the report be user friendly and impartial. Prior to publication, organisations with an interest in the report should be given a chance to comment. Information should be presented so it encourages a change in attitude and behaviour

Working with Health professionals across the North West

The committee considered regional issues surrounding health in the North West, and how involvement with key partners can help address health issues at a regional and strategic level. It recognised that the Environment Agency had an important role to play and was working closely with public health authorities to avoid duplication, and to make sure roles and responsibilities are clear. It was felt that there was a need to distinguish between pollution and lifestyle when commenting on mortality, and emphasised the fact that the declining industrial pollution was being replaced by traffic emissions. Unfortunately, the Environment Agency has very little influence on transport.

Modern Regulation

As part of the modern regulation programme, the Environment Agency has considered adopting a new approach to make penalty regimes more proportionate, efficient and quicker by increasing the penalties available.

Members were not in favour of nominated magistrates and judges to handle environmental cases in courts. They thought it more important to be consistent with penalties and ensure there is no gain from environmental crime. They supported the proposals for money raised by penalties to go to environmental causes or local environmental projects.

Waste – new duties

Significant changes in waste regulation, such as the Hazardous Waste Regulations and Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) will have implications for thousands of businesses. Many will have to register with the Environment Agency for the first time. Waste acceptance criteria will restrict the types of waste that can go to hazardous and inert landfills.

Members recognised the difficulties in raising awareness of new waste duties. Small businesses would be less likely to have knowledge of their waste production and are a hard to reach group. The Environment Agency's partnership with business advice organisations, such as ENWORKS, and involvement in the BREW programme was essential.

The Nuclear Industry – what is the future?

Dr Roger Coates, Director Environment, Health and Safety, British Nuclear Group, gave a presentation to the Committee on the operating facilities in the North West and the role of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

Members discussed the possible role of nuclear power in the future of electricity generation. This would involve significant investment in new build sites and they acknowledged that the public were rightly concerned about safety and terrorist attacks on nuclear facilities. In particular, the committee contributed to the Consultation on Radioactive Waste Management, requesting extra investment in communities hosting waste sites.

The Waste Strategy Review 2000

The committee received details of Government plans to publish a major consultation in February, giving its view of likely policy directions and seeking comments on the scope and content of the updates on the waste strategy.

Members acknowledged the regulatory role of the Environment Agency, but suggested it should make more use of its knowledge and expertise of waste problems. There was no support for a Strategic Waste Authority, but they were in favour of regulatory co-ordination and much better national co-ordination. There was general agreement that fines should be paid to the enforcing authority to ensure enforcement is kept in balance with the scale of emerging problems.

Reprocessing Waste Plastics in the North West

Stephen Jenkinson, Managing Director for Greater Manchester Waste Group, outlined the work in promoting the need for a North West Market Development Programme, to develop new markets and build reprocessing capacity to deal with the increasing additional material for recycling.

Members deplored the lack of recycled plastics processing facilities in the UK. They supported the approach that more investment and long term contracts would be an incentive for the industry to expand and establish more reprocessing facilities.

Site visit to Bassenthwaite Lake

In July 2005, the committee visited Bassenthwaite Lake in Cumbria. They discussed the role of the Still Waters Partnership and saw the work being undertaken in protecting and managing the threats to the lake and its wildlife. These threats included sediment from the erosion of the fell and hill slopes, pollution, growth of algae and invading alien plant species – all due to man-made changes in the last century.



Regional Flood Defence Committee (RFDC)

Introduction



The first committee meeting involved a visit to Carlisle, the site of devastating flooding in January 2005 and where tragically, two elderly ladies drowned in their homes during this severe event. This clearly illustrates the need for effective flood risk management, especially as it's perceived that such extreme events are becoming more frequent. The visit gave members an appreciation of the extent of the flooding and the misery it caused to so many people.

A key success for the region has been the re-examination and development of the scheme works at Carlisle. The Project Board has put in a tremendous amount of effort and is to be congratulated on its progress. The action plan arising from the event has also been successful, with lessons learned from its management being incorporated into our region wide incident response procedures.

At the annual budget meeting in January 2006, the committee approved a local levy of treble Formula Spending Share (FSS), which was £3.249 million. The support and continued commitment of our local authority members is very much appreciated and their agreement to local levy funding will allow locally important works to go ahead. We had an excellent year in 2005/06 with our local levy, combined with grant in aid, allowing us to invest over £40 million in managing flood risk in our region.

The committee was consulted on the proposed Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 25, covering development and flood risk, and received updates on a range of topics including Making Space for Water and the Water Framework Directive. These will have an impact on our future work. The work already being carried out on Catchment Flood Management Plans will be an essential building block. A strategic approach to flood risk is increasingly important especially with the predicted consequences of climate change.

As Chairman, I was grateful to see excellent support from our committee at the first national meeting of RFDC members in December 2005. We are very fortunate in having committed members who show a real interest and understanding of flood risk in our region.

On behalf of the Regional Flood Defence Committee, I would also like to express my thanks for the work of the Environment Agency's staff at a time of great change.

Sinclair McLeod
Chairman

Capital Programme 2005/06

The flooding in Cumbria in January 2005 generated significant new information, which has enabled a reassessment of our future works programme. Officers have also reassessed the scheme proposals for Carlisle and these now take into account the new data.

The committee supported a £14.6 million programme of flood defence capital works for 2005/06. This has been used to continue the ongoing improvement of the region's flood defences, which resulted in higher standards of protection to about 1,939 properties.

Flood Warning Investment Strategy

The committee received an update on the progress of the 10 year Flood Warning Investment Strategy. It started in 2001 and involves significant investment in projects and systems, which will be of considerable benefit to all regions. Members noted that the current Automated Voice Messaging System (AVM) was being replaced by the UK's first integrated multi media warning system, Flood Warnings Direct (FWD). The committee recognised the tremendous progress being made in educating people about the risks of flooding.

There have been excellent achievements so far, in particular, an increase in the coverage of the Flood Warning Service from 8% of properties at risk in 2000/01 to 66% for 2004/05, and introduction of a modern telemetry system.

National Flood Forecasting System (NFFS) Project

It is extremely important that we are able to undertake prompt assessment of weather conditions and the effects on our regions' rivers to provide us with the ability to warn people as soon as possible about the likelihood of flooding in their area.

This project has been developed to help achieve improvements to forecasting as part of the Flood Warning Investment Strategy. Operation in the North West is due to start in September 2006. The committee was pleased to note that this would enable better and faster communication of forecasts.

Flood Awareness Campaign 2005/06 – 2007/08

The committee noted the proposals for the new campaign including adverts, media interviews, face to face contact and school poster competitions. The campaign's objectives included raising awareness of flood risk and the ways in which people can take effective action to help themselves and the more vulnerable members of society.

When targeting businesses and older people, it had been found that the best way to spread the message was through existing national organisations such as Help the Aged and the Womens' Institute.

Government changes to Environment Levies

During 2005, Defra carried out a consultation exercise on future arrangements for Flood Risk Management levies payable to the Environment Agency. The committee received details of the proposed changes and a response was agreed at the October 2005 meeting. The outcome is that the cap on the amount that can be raised through local levy is removed. However, any levy now requires approval by a majority of local authority members.

At the annual budget meeting in January 2006, the Committee agreed a local levy of £3.249 million for 2006/07. This represented the full amount of the former treble FSS cap. The support and continued commitment of our local authority members is very much appreciated. Their agreement to local levy funding has allowed worthwhile schemes of local importance to be carried out which would not have qualified for national funding.

High Level Planning for future Flood Risk Management

The committee received a two part presentation outlining Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMPs) and Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) in the North West, their purpose and how they link into other studies. There are 13 CFMPs in the North West and regional programmes are due to finish in October 2007, with a review after six years. These plans will be incorporated into the river basin management plans for the Water Framework Directive. They will also be important to local authorities as they develop their Strategic Flood Risk Assessments.

Developing the New Corporate Strategy

An important part of the committee's work this year involved advising on the development of local contributions which would form a key part of translating the new Corporate Strategy, "Creating a better place", into local actions.

Members of the three statutory committees met in July to discuss and provide feedback on the consultation paper. Some of the recommendations included the need to resist pressure and to minimise the impact of new development, to improve our understanding and impacts of climate change, and to increase engagement with local communities to increase their understanding of flooding issues and what they can do to help themselves.

The new strategy was launched in July 2006.

Progress with the Flood Defence Business Plan for 2005/06

The committee was regularly updated on progress of work outlined in the Flood Defence Business Plan. The committee was pleased to note that work was being delivered as planned. Highlights included an increase in the number of properties protected by new schemes and an increase in flood warning coverage from 66% at the beginning of the year to 75% at the year end.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS)25 - Development and Flood Risk

Flooding of properties in floodplains continues to highlight the need to prevent inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding.

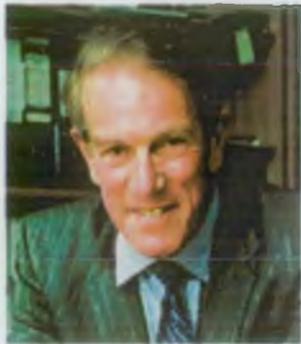
Members considered PPS25. This will replace the existing Planning Policy Guidance PPG25 and will provide greater confidence and clarity to planning bodies when considering flood risk issues. It requires local authorities to consult with the Environment Agency at an early stage and will ensure that flood risk is considered at all stages of the planning process.

The committee noted and commended the North West's excellent working relationship with local planning authorities in the region. Members also welcomed the fact that officers would be meeting with local authorities to discuss implementation of the new planning guidance.



Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee (RFERAC)

Over the past year members have provided advice to the Environment Agency on a wide range of national and local topics. In addition to fisheries management issues, the committee deals with numerous matters of wider ecological interest.



For some time the committee has been concerned about the environmental impact of synthetic pyrethroid sheep dips, and has recommended that they be banned. It is pleasing to note that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate temporarily suspended the sale of cypermethrin dips from February 2006.

Following advice from committees, the publication of the Environment Agency's Fisheries Strategy for the next five years was welcomed. Real challenges lie ahead as all indications point to the need to deliver the desired outcomes against a background of decreasing Government funding. This issue is certain to be discussed in committee in the years ahead.

As salmon numbers decline in many rivers. It is pleasing to note that due to tighter controls, the salmon population in the Lune has improved considerably. The committee supports the continuation of these controls to safeguard this position.

Nick Marriner
RFERAC Chairman

Flood Defence and Ecology – Working together

Work ethics have now changed. Work is undertaken with consideration for the ecology and every opportunity is taken to enhance watercourse features and create new habitats.

'Making Space for Water', the Government's new Strategy for Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management, highlights the benefits of the changed approach in which environmental factors must be considered in all new schemes. The Committee has had a number of presentations from the Agency demonstrating environmental enhancements that have been created by adopting this new approach.

Members were supportive of the effort made by the Flood Risk Management teams to work with ecology staff and external organisations. Options for managing flood risk take into account ecological considerations. Where it is necessary to have defences in place, preference will be given to more natural methods such as flood storage, the use of willow along river banks and grassy earth embankments rather than heavily engineered concrete flood walls.

Agri-environment schemes and diffuse pollution

Members have been briefed on the new arrangements for agri-environment schemes in England and Wales. These arrangements offer an opportunity to influence rural soil and water management, and to tackle diffuse pollution. If the majority of farmers take up the schemes, then a major step towards the delivery of the Water Framework Directive will have been taken.

In tackling diffuse pollution, the committee welcomed the proposed delivery model based on a partnership between farmers and regulators. Providing local support to farmers through Catchment Advisors was welcomed, as farmers are likely to need targeted advisory input and guidance.

Working with partners

River Trusts and other organisations make significant contributions to improving fisheries and the wider environment. The Water Framework Directive will see the introduction of Integrated River Basin management, but if we are to achieve our objectives we require contributions from a wide range of organisations. The intention is to build on established relationships, as well as to develop new partnerships.

Members recognised that Trusts, including those established on a river or area basis, are an excellent way of restoring and safeguarding rivers, lakes and wetlands. However, the Environment Agency needs to be clear what it means by partnership, and clarify expectations when working with other organisations. It is important to develop a series of approaches which could be used with different partners, and not to establish a single set of rules to be applied in all circumstances. This should achieve greater environmental gains by establishing a wider range of effective partnerships.

Developments in Salmon Management

Latest assessments show that salmon stocks have remained low despite a good year in 2004. Diffuse pollution, siltation, degraded river habitat, river flow, and obstructions to migration have been the main factors affecting the recovery and improvement of stocks. However, further restrictions in exploitation rates will be necessary in most rivers to maintain stocks.

There was a need to continue to educate anglers and change fishing practices to encourage salmon anglers to help safeguard stocks. Members recognise the need for conservation where the species is at risk, and that restrictions on exploitation should be accepted. This includes the need for all anglers to behave responsibly by making accurate catch returns.

Creating a better place to play – an Environment Agency strategy for water related sport and recreation

Overall, the committee thought this was an excellent document. However, it failed to address the implications of the Water Framework Directive in plans for the sustainable use of waters for sport and recreation. Members thought that the Environment Agency should use its influence to discourage recreation activities that may be harmful, such as water skiing in inappropriate places.

Responding to a request to advise on the best ways to communicate and achieve the desired results from the strategy, the committee suggested forming a small group with responsibility for raising awareness among different organisations.

Ribble Net Limitation Order and byelaw

The committee received an update of the review of the Net Limitation Order (NLO) for salmon net fishery on the Ribble. It's believed the majority of anglers fishing on the Ribble do so responsibly and voluntarily practice catch and release. However, the Ribble Fisheries Association asked the Environment Agency to introduce a statutory bag limit of two salmon per year to ensure that all anglers play their part. Some members expressed concern and raised issues which they believed contributed to the expected spawning shortfall. Data quality, pros and cons of bag limits, estuary netting for migratory salmonids and sea fish and anti poaching work all needed to be considered. Members thought the Environment Agency was devoting too little effort to controlling illegal fishing.

Eel conservation and management

The committee was advised that the European eel population was at a dangerously low level. Some of the main causes were thought to be climate change, access to freshwater habitats, parasites, bioaccumulation and exploitation. Any action taken to help stop the decline will have to take account of legislative constraints and, without the availability of additional funding, some other work may have to be stopped. Members believed most of the eel fishing in the UK was well regulated and that the North West was already achieving a 40 per cent escapement target. However, they felt work should be increased to assess eel populations and monitor stocks to ensure the best solutions were found. The pressures on eels should be ranked so that the most important issues can be identified and appropriate action taken. There was strong committee support to divert resources to stop the decline of the European eel.

Angling 2015 – our plan for getting more people fishing

The committee was presented with an update on the Environment Agency's plan "Angling in 2015" which looks specifically at making more people aware of



angling and getting more people from different backgrounds to take up the sport. Members supported the plan for promoting angling as a sport and encouraging participation. However, they felt more should be done to involve the Angling Consultatives in promoting and developing the sport. Other issues were identified including a shortage of qualified coaches, a need for more fisheries with facilities for the disabled a lack of attention to women in angling and opportunities to engage with mothers taking their children to fishing events.

South Area Carp Mortality preparations for 2006

An investigation into a large number of carp deaths in Cheshire and Greater Manchester during the summer of 2005 failed to identify one specific cause of death. Carp hybrids found were not considered naturally occurring, and indicated that illegal stocking may have taken place. In order to deal with any repeat situation, the Environment Agency had prepared an action plan which was presented to the committee.

There was general support for the proposals outlined. It was considered important that the Environment Agency move quickly to communicate up to date information about what is happening and what actions should be taken, by using the local press and tackle shops.

Signal Crayfish

The committee was notified that signal crayfish had recently been found in St John's beck, a tributary of the River Greta, in the Derwent catchment in West Cumbria. It was not known how widespread the infestation had become. There was concern that it had, or could, spread beyond St John's Beck despite the water chemistry in the catchment being far from ideal for the species. As the Derwent is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) established under a European Directive, conservation concerns are heightened in the catchment. Members were adamant that eradication should take place if possible. It was recognised that this would be likely to cause some environmental damage, but this was preferable to allowing the species to become established. The committee felt this course of action was entirely justified due to the proximity of important native crayfish populations on the Kent and the Eden, even before the status of the Derwent as an SAC was considered.

North West Region

Statutory Committee Members 2005/2006

REPAC

Derek Norman (Chairman)
Dr Rafid Alkhaddar
Peter Allen MBE
Cllr Brian Bailey
Cllr Linda Dirir (until May 2005)
Nigel Dibben
Euan Hall
Cllr Mike Hodgkinson
Stephen Jenkinson
Dr Carys Jones
Colin Maloney
Nick Marriner
Sinclair McLeod
Dr Carl Milner (from April 2005)
Beverly Mitchell
Cllr Richard Oglethorpe
Prof Martyn Regan
Cllr David Robinson (until May 2005)
Dr Malcolm Shaw
Peter Shields (from April 2005)
Gill Weeks (until November 2005)
Juanita Yau

RFERAC

Nick Marriner (Chairman)
Patrick Arnold
Jill Bolton (until January 2006)
Dr John Brown
James Bennett (from October 2005)
Dr Judith Clark
Simon Dowson
Fred French MBE
Roy Garton (from January 2006)
Chris Goodlad (until July 2005)
Chris Heap
Mike Helliwell
Dr Keith Hendry
Helen Little (from January 2006)
Frank Lythgoe
Sinclair McLeod
Keith Noble (until January 2006)
Derek Norman
Laurie Norris (until December 2005)
Mark Oddy (from January 2006)
Brian Parry
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Dr Amanda Wright

RFDC

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