

WESSEX REGION  
PLAN SUMMARY

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**NRA**  
*National Rivers Authority*

Guardians of  
the Water Environment

## Introduction

Established on 1st September 1989, the National Rivers Authority (NRA) came into being as a result of the 1989 Water Act and was created as a public body whose main task it is to protect and improve the water environment in England and Wales and provide protection against flooding from rivers and the sea. The first full year of independent operation was completed on 31st March 1991.

Head Office functions of the Authority are split between London and Bristol, but its operational activities devolve on ten Regions based on the former Water Authority areas.

This document, one of a set of ten, seeks to explain a little of Wessex Region NRA's background and shows how the Authority's national aims as set out in its 1991/92 *Corporate Plan* will be translated into Regional action.

## Mission Statement

The National Rivers Authority will protect and improve the water environment. This will be achieved through effective management of water resources and by substantial reductions in pollution. The Authority aims to provide effective defence for people and property against flooding from rivers and the sea. In discharging its duties it will operate openly and balance the interests of all who benefit from and use rivers, ground waters, estuaries and coastal waters. The Authority will be businesslike, efficient and caring towards its employees.

## Aims:

- to achieve a continuing improvement in the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters, through the control of water pollution;
- to assess, manage, plan and conserve water resources and to maintain and improve the quality of water for all those who use it;
- to provide effective defence for people and property against flooding from rivers and the sea;
- to provide adequate arrangements for flood forecasting and warning;
- to maintain, improve and develop fisheries;
- to develop the amenity and recreation potential of waters and lands under NRA control;
- to conserve and enhance wildlife, landscape and archaeological features associated with water under NRA control;
- to improve and maintain inland waterways and their facilities for use by the public where the NRA is the navigation authority;
- to ensure that dischargers pay the cost of the consequences of their discharges and, as far as possible, to recover the cost of water environment improvements from those who benefit;
- to improve public understanding of the water environment and the NRA's work;
- to improve efficiency in the exercise of the NRA's functions and to provide challenge and opportunity for employees and show concern for their welfare.

## Regional Organisation

Each Region of the NRA is managed by a Regional General Manager who reports to the Operations Director and whose management team has responsibility for managing the main functions and support services in the Region. Wessex Region employs a total of some 460 people.

There are three statutory Committees per Region through which the NRA achieves a wide base of consultation. These are a Regional Flood Defence Committee (through which the NRA discharges its flood defence and land drainage duties), a Regional Rivers Advisory Committee and a Regional Fisheries Advisory Committee (these two committees being composed of members from a wide range of relevant backgrounds who advise the NRA on river basin management and fisheries policy respectively).

In addition, each Region has a Regional Advisory Board, on which the RGM and the three statutory Committee Chairmen sit. This is chaired by the NRA Board Member with responsibility for that Region.

Regional General Manager  
**Nigel Reader**  
Regional Board Member  
Lady Dione Digby  
Regional Flood Defence Committee Chairman  
Ralph Baker

Regional Rivers Advisory Committee Chairman  
**Peter Lacey**  
Regional Fisheries Advisory Committee Chairman  
**Christopher Rothwell**

## Activities Requiring NRA Consent

Certain activities require NRA consent. The list is too long to include here, but the following are examples:

- abstract or impound water;
- make a discharge to any river, lake or tidal water or onto land for a soakaway, or to specific underground waters;
- clean or desludge a dam, weir or sluice;
- culvert any watercourse;
- interfere with land drainage by building or modifying any structures within or adjacent to a main river;
- build or plant within eight metres of a main river;
- introduce or transfer fish into any water or use a net or trap to catch fish;
- use a rod and line to catch fish;
- use a boat on a waterway controlled by the NRA;
- interfere with a sea defence.

## Public Register Access

The public registers of abstractions and discharges are available for inspection at the Regional Headquarters during normal working hours.

## Where to contact us: Regional Headquarters

Rivers House  
East Quay  
Bridgwater  
Somerset TA6 4YS  
Tel: (0278) 457 333  
Fax: (0278) 452 985

24-hour telephone number:  
Linkline (0345) 078 378

Copies of the full Corporate Plan are available @ £12 per copy from:  
Advertising Services  
Unit 13  
Lancaster Way Business Park  
Ely, Cambs CB6 3NP  
Cheques should be made payable to 'National Rivers Authority'.

## Foreword

This is a summary of the second Regional Plan of the Wessex Region. A vital difference from the first Plan is that this time we have been able to consult extensively with all of our statutory Committees and to take account of their advice in establishing the national and Regional priorities to which our resources should be targeted.

We must now look forward and build upon the solid foundation which we have established. Public expectation is very high for the NRA and we must do our best to deliver. It is difficult to single out for mention the most critical of our tasks but at the top of my personal agenda as Regional General Manager I would list the following:

- the determination of an NRA strategy for water level management on the Somerset Levels and Moors;
- the work to investigate and remedy river low flows where this is the result of excessive abstraction;
- the pursuit of genuine improvements in the quality of our inland and coastal waters.

The Region's grant-in-aid allocation for 1991/92, together with income from charges – including the new discharge consents charge – will enable us to make significant progress with the above challenges as well as with the other priority areas set out in our Plan submission.

We are also determined to maximise our own efficiency and productivity so as to release resources wherever possible to improve standards in existing areas as well as to undertake vital new initiatives of the NRA.

By these means I aim to match with resources the enthusiasm, commitment and aspirations, both of my staff and of my Committees, for the well-being of the water environment in the Wessex Region.

**Nigel Reader**  
Regional General Manager

## Key Achievements 1990/91

The past year has seen the completion and consolidation of our infrastructure in the Region. People, property and procedures were the main priority of the newly-formed organisation.

Pollution prevention, enforcement and gathering of essential and reliable data have figured as key activities in making optimum use of a modest budgetary increase with significant achievements made during the year.

### *Water Resources:*

- implementation of programme to licence newly-controlled categories of abstraction;
- substantial progress with the investigation of catchments with low river flows.

### *Pollution Control:*

- completion of chemical and biological monitoring required for the 1990 River Quality Survey;
- an increased level of enforcement of discharge consents;
- updating of the register of consents to provide a database for charging for discharges.

### *Flood Defence:*

- uprating of emergency response capability through the new 24-hour control room;
- further development of the weather radar flood forecasting system;
- the production of detailed emergency operational plans for many main rivers.

### *Fisheries:*

- bye-laws revised;
- licences for eel traps in tidal waters introduced.

### *Support Services:*

- relocation of the Avon and Dorset Area Office.

Targets for 1991/92 reflect two main themes. Firstly, the Region intends to make further general improvements in the areas of monitoring, survey work, regulation and enforcement activities. Secondly, a number of specific Regional problems will be addressed such as the continuation of the programme to investigate and, where necessary, remedy low river flows believed to be caused by over-abstraction of groundwater and the search for an agreed water level management policy for the Somerset Levels and Moors.

*Water Resources:*

- continue with low flows investigations and development where necessary, of remedial measures (particularly the River Piddle);
- implement national licensing scheme and national enforcement policy;
- support the development of the national Groundwater Protection Policy and commence implementation in the Region;
- enhance data collection network for rainfall, river flow and groundwater levels.

*Water Quality:*

- introduce charging for discharges scheme;
- commence implementation of new consents policy (Kinnersley Report);
- complete work on assessment of 1990 River Quality Survey and commence work on river quality objectives;
- review sampling and monitoring programmes to meet national guidelines (increase monitoring where required);
- extend the use of "Merlin" remote automatic monitoring and sampling units;
- transfer analyses to the new purpose-built laboratory at Exeter (shared with South West Region) and implement necessary data processing and archiving systems.

*Flood Defence:*

- complete data gathering for levels of service project;
- progress weather radar-based flood forecasting systems to operational status;
- determine suitable NRA strategy for water level management in the Somerset Levels and Moors;
- achieve capital works programme as planned;
- agree a development control policy which ensures that developers provide for and finance costs associated with extra run-off without detriment to others.

*Fisheries:*

- survey fishery ownership in relation to implementation of S28 Orders;
- investigate the decline of salmon stocks in Avon and Dorset rivers;
- seek measures to control drift netting in the Bristol Channel;
- design and construct three additional fish passes and complete weirs and hatches survey.

*Recreation and Conservation:*

- develop additional sites for water-based recreation and promote public access to NRA-managed conservation sites;
- further increase conservation survey work to cover all routine flood defence activities;
- develop NRA strategy for water level management of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

*Multifunctional Activities:*

- produce integrated Catchment Management Plans for selected catchments;
- further enhance input to town and country planning process.

*Support Services:*

- implement charging for discharges scheme, Abstraction Charges Scheme and S28 Orders (Fisheries);
- maintain a high level of awareness of the NRA and its activities through effective public relations and develop comprehensive NRA information pack;
- continue the newsletter production for staff (Riverwise) and Regional Rivers Advisory Committee;
- support the National Research and Development Programme through Topic and Project Leaders.



### Wessex Region

The Wessex Region covers the counties of Avon, Dorset, Somerset and most of Wiltshire, with small parts of Gloucestershire, Hampshire and Devon. It encompasses the southern Cotswolds, the Mendip Hills, the chalk downlands of Dorset and Salisbury Plain and the eastern slopes of Exmoor. The Somerset Levels and Moors are one of England's most important remaining wetland areas.

The Hampshire Avon, Dorset Frome and Piddle are typical high quality chalk-fed rivers, supporting populations of migratory salmonids. Other major catchments such as the Bristol Avon, Dorset Stour and Parrett drain catchments of mixed geology with significant areas of clay.

The oolite limestone (Cotswold area), carboniferous limestone (Mendip area) and chalk (Dorset Downs and Salisbury Plain) represent major aquifer areas which are important water resources and provide half of the public water supplies for the Region.

On the south coast, Poole and Christchurch harbours are important water habitats. On the north coast, the Bristol Channel/Severn Estuary with its large tidal range presents unique flood defence and water quality management requirements.

### Some Key Statistics

- Area: 9,918sqkm
- Population: 2.4m
- Length of main river: 2,312km
- Length of estuary: 64km
- Length of coastline: 265km
- Flood defence works maintained: 1,319km
- Area of flood plain: 939sqkm
- Area of land below sea level: 576sqkm
- Average annual rainfall: 869mm
- Number of abstraction licences: 3,390
- Volume of authorised water abstraction: 4,222Ml/d
- Number of consented discharges: 9,100
- Number of EC bathing waters: 39
- Number of pollution incidents: 2,063