



A consultation on the River Basin Management Plan for the Solway Tweed River Basin District: 2021 Update

December 2020

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How the consultation works

We are asking for your feedback on the updated aims and actions to protect and where necessary, improve the water environment in the Solway Tweed River Basin District. Your responses to this consultation will help ensure that the actions and approach we adopt in the updated plan will support our green economy, our wildlife and habitats and contribute to our own health and well-being.

This document provides you with an overview of the plan for the Solway Tweed River Basin District. It highlights the challenges to the river catchments and estuaries that are in both Scotland and England, and the joint actions needed to resolve them. It is supported by detailed information for each of the individual stretches of river, lake, loch, coasts, estuaries and groundwater. There is also more information in the national reports, which set out the wider proposals for the water environment in Scotland and in England.

You can access all of this information and background data through the [SEPA consultation hub](#). This is also where you can leave your consultation responses. Alternatively, if you are unable to access the online tool, you can respond by email to rbmp@sepa.org.uk.

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A plan for the water environment in the Solway Tweed River Basin District

Introduction

The Solway Tweed River Basin District is renowned for the environmental quality of its rivers, lakes, lochs, wetlands, estuaries and seas. They are great natural assets, attracting visitors, contributing to our health and well-being, supporting a rich diversity of wildlife and providing for the sustainable growth of its economy.

Maintaining this resource is vital to this area's continued success and it is critical that we manage the water environment to ensure that the needs of society, economy and wildlife can be met and maintained for future generations.

On a global scale, the environment and the benefits it provides are under threat from the overuse of natural resources, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Our oceans are polluted with waste materials, including plastics. Many species of plants and animals are in decline. The climate emergency means we are facing more frequent and damaging floods, higher temperatures and droughts.

Communities living in our region are experiencing the increasing risk of floods and periods of drought. At the same time our population is growing. This growth leads to more homes, workplaces, transport, energy, drinking water and drainage infrastructure and creates huge environmental challenges.

Many people are even more aware that plastic has an impact on our seas and wildlife, but it's not just the plastic pollution we can see on beaches. Because of the way plastics are produced, used and disposed of, these plastics can also pollute our lakes, rivers and streams, soil and air.

The need for urgent and transformative action to tackle these threats is clear. As we emerge from the shadow of COVID-19, we will have the opportunity to support the transition to green and sustainable economic success. Healthy, natural systems can remove carbon from the atmosphere and help protect people and wildlife from the worst

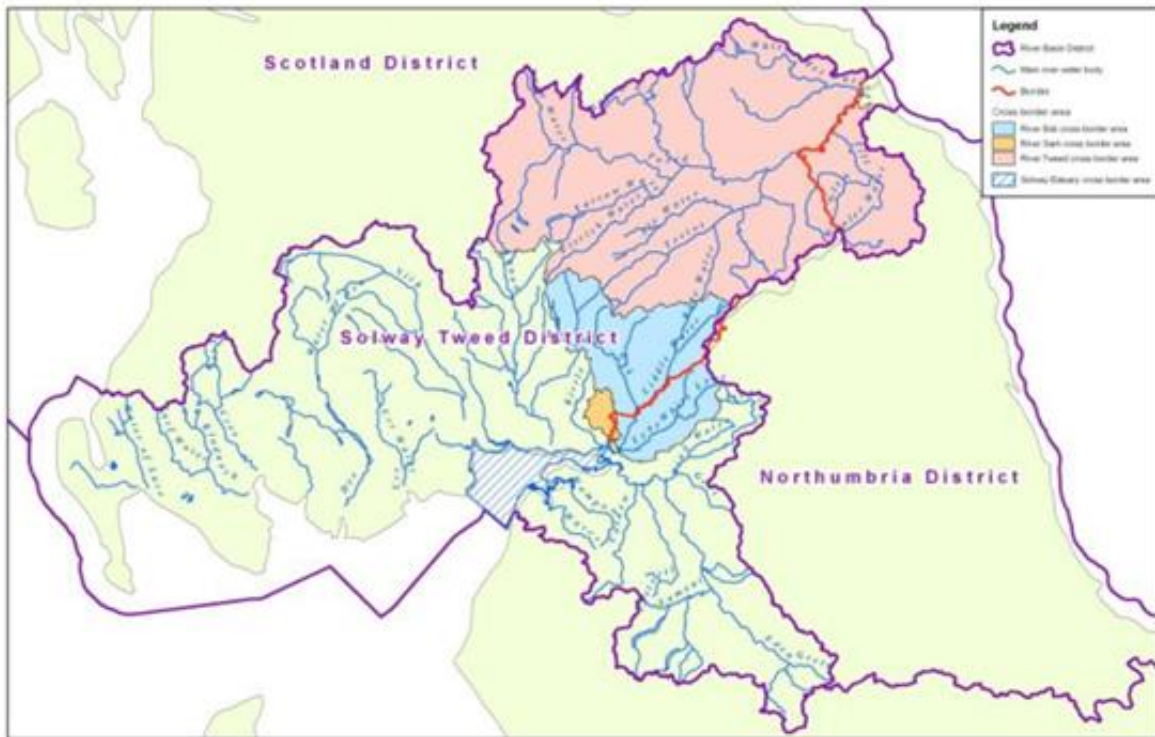
effects of climate change. The principles of a circular economy (design out waste, keep resources in use and restore the natural environment) that have been developed to ensure we manage finite resources sustainably, apply equally to water. Incorporating these principles into a more systematic approach to water management will provide new solutions to protecting and improving the water environment while providing wider public benefits.

River basin management plans (RBMP) set out a framework for protecting and improving the benefits provided by the water environment. We are updating previous RBMPs published in 2009 and 2015, setting revised objectives for the period from 2021 and giving a strengthened programme of actions for achieving the objectives. This document highlights the issues that are still to be resolved in the river basin district.

More detail and additional issues can be found in the [Draft River Basin Planning Overview \(Solway Tweed River Basin District in England\)](#) and the update to the [River Basin Management Plan in Scotland](#).

We will work closely with businesses, land managers, voluntary groups and other organisations to build strong and effective partnerships that will deliver the ambitious actions set out in this plan. By working together to secure sustainable use of the water environment we will maximise the benefits that a healthy water environment can bring to people and businesses.

There is a specific responsibility on SEPA and the Environment Agency to work jointly in the Solway Tweed and this is discussed in the next section.



Map 1: cross border water bodies in the Solway Tweed district

Coordination in the river basin district

Our shared vision

SEPA and the Environment Agency have a responsibility to work jointly to protect and where necessary improve the water environment in the Solway Tweed River Basin District. Some waters in the district form part of the boundary between Scotland and England, or cross from Scotland into England. Three catchments are in both Scotland and England. Joint working on the cross-border waters is important to ensure the water environment is protected and improved. Our vision is to achieve this through collaborative working with the land managers, local groups and interested people.

SEPA and the Environment Agency work jointly to ensure consistency in our approach to these rivers by sharing monitoring and classification results. This can be for a small part of the river, or for the whole catchment. The fish populations in the Border Esk, for example, are monitored by the Environment Agency and this data used by SEPA to classify the river. We also exchange data when it is appropriate to help with management decisions, within the context of our own legislative framework.

The actions proposed in this update are based on this joint approach.

Coordination with our partners

Working jointly with our partners and people of this region increases our understanding of the priorities for action and ensuring that proposed improvements are carried out.

There are several Catchment Partnerships that contribute to the successful delivery of the actions in the shared water bodies. For example, the Tweed Forum¹ was formed in 1991 and aims to protect, enhance and restore the rich natural, built and cultural heritage of the River Tweed and its tributaries in both England and Scotland. The forum works at both the strategic level and the project level in order to achieve tangible benefits on the ground.

In 2013, Defra launched the catchment based approach, CaBA, as a [Defra policy framework](#) to improve the quality of the water environment in England. It embeds

¹Website: www.tweedforum.org

collaborative working at a river catchment scale, bringing a range of partners together to support integrated catchment management. This results in multiple benefits including improvements to water quality, enhanced biodiversity and reduced flood risk.

Catchment Partnerships are now active in all the management catchments in England, including the Eden Catchment Partnership², led by Eden Rivers Trust, and the West Cumbria Catchment partnership³, that includes the Waver Wampool, led by West Cumbria Rivers Trust.

In Scotland, SEPA has adopted a new regulatory strategy, One Planet Prosperity, which aims to deliver environmental protection and improvement in ways that help communities and businesses thrive within the resources of our planet. SEPA uses a sector planning approach to work towards achieving these goals and realise the economic benefits of increased resource efficiency, innovation and resilience. The approach covers many sectors relevant to the Solway Tweed, including forestry and wood processing, crop production, dairy production, livestock, water supply, and wastewater management.

Borderlands⁴ Growth Deal is an ambitious approach to cross border working across the south of Scotland and the north of England. It is led by the local authorities and, with partners, will deliver projects that promote sustainable economic growth including natural capital investment.

² Website: <https://edenriverstrust.org.uk/eden-catchment-partnership/>

³ Website: <https://westcumbriacatchmentpartnership.co.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.borderlandsgrowth.com/>

Current Condition

Monitoring our water environment allows us to understand the impact of pollution and other pressures. Sharing this information openly through our data tools allows everyone to review it and to see how their individual actions can contribute towards safeguarding this valuable resource.

There are 624 river, lake, loch, estuary, coastal and groundwater water bodies in the river basin district. In 2019, 43% of the district's surface water bodies were assessed as being in good or better ecological condition and 83% of the groundwater bodies were assessed as being in a good condition. This is a slight decrease (of one percentage point) in ecological condition since the publication of the 2015 update of the plans. A map showing the ecological condition of surface water bodies in the Solway Tweed can be found on the [Spotfire tool](#).

In England, all water bodies fail to achieve good chemical status because of the way the Environment Agency now monitor for certain chemicals. Further information can be found in the [Draft River Basin Planning Overview \(Solway Tweed River Basin District in England\)](#).

In Scotland, we have collected new data and changed our approach to how we assess morphology pressures, including the designation of heavily modified water bodies. The water bodies where these changes have been applied are shown in the [Spotfire tool](#).

There are 58 protected areas in the river basin district, including bathing waters, nature conservation sites important at a European scale, catchments where water is abstracted to supply drinking water, and areas important for growing and harvesting shellfish. The majority of the protected areas continue to meet their required standards. Where improvements are required, such as bathing water quality, we will work to ensure compliance with the appropriate environmental legislation.

Overall, the condition of the Solway Tweed water environment has remained stable, with improvements in condition being offset by newly identified downgrades. For example: five separate fish barriers were eased or removed to allow fish passage, but a further seven new barriers were identified resulting in a small decrease in classification. We have not met our ambition for 57% of water bodies at good or better ecological status by 2021, but the

lack of measured improvement does not reflect the sustained hard work by all stakeholders to enhance and protect the water environment.

Projects, such as introduction of eel and lamprey passage at a barrier on the lower reaches of the River Annan, have been delayed by COVID 19 and are now due to complete by spring 2021. A new partnership project has recently been set up between United Utilities and farmers in the River Petteiril catchment to reduce nutrient pollution will see improvements in water quality delivered in the next few years.

Actions for improving cross border catchments

Many of the watercourses that are on or close to the border have common reasons for failure. These includes water quality, diffuse pollution measured by invertebrates, fish and plants and morphology (condition of the banks and bed of the watercourse). However, as these watercourses tend to be in the lower parts of the catchment they are also at risk of impacts from upstream sections and benefit from a holistic, catchment wide approach to management of these issues.

Working together and with our partners provides better opportunities to access funding to support innovative projects to protect and improve the water environment. For example, the EU Life WADER bid, led and co-ordinated by Natural England, has now been given the go ahead to move to the development phase. This important initiative ties into the need for more discussions on appropriate measures to address the Tweed estuary downgrade and importantly will provide funds for cross border measures.

Sustainable and resilient land use and management

The way we use and manage our land provides a significant positive contribution to the Solway Tweed; putting food on our tables, producing timber and offering opportunities for recreation. The way land is managed to provide all these benefits affects water, air, soils and climate because of the interdependent nature of these systems.

Partnership working with farmers, land managers, advisory services and water companies (such as United Utilities) has improved compliance with the relevant legislation and adoption of good practices to reduce pollution and environmental impacts. SEPA will continue with a focused approach in diffuse pollution priority catchments, ensuring compliance with environmental legislation to help achieve water quality objectives and improve bathing water quality. This work also promotes a circular economy by minimising nutrient and soil loss and saving farmers money.

The Waver Wampool catchment has been selected to form a Cumbrian test and trial of Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). ELMS will replace future farm payments, using public money to deliver public goods - clean and plentiful water,

thriving plants and wildlife and a reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought.

The test and trail in the Waver Wampool will explore co-designing spatial prioritisation of public goods to determine which public goods might be best delivered in the Waver Wampool, how those public goods could be delivered through individual land management plans and how to best encourage collaboration of land managers to deliver public goods across multiple land holdings.

This Solway estuary does not meet good ecological status due to elevated nutrient levels. The work done by farmers, land managers and the water companies to ensure compliance and improve water quality will aim to improve this coastal water body.

Sustainable use of water

We expect to see a greater demand for water to irrigate crops as our climate changes and rainfall decreases at certain times of the year. Rivers affected by agricultural irrigation typically have multiple abstractions within a river catchment. Under these circumstances, it is important that irrigators work together to manage the available water resources in an equitable manner. On the River Till, the Environment Agency is currently in the process of incorporating previously exempt surface water abstractions into the regulatory regime, ensuring the demand for water is within sustainable limits.

Modifications to physical condition, including man-made barriers to fish migration

For thousands of years we have physically modified our rivers, estuaries, lakes and the coastline to support farming, industry, transport, including shipping, and by building places to live. Some of those physical changes are still essential. They help to protect us from flooding and support the supply of drinking water and the production of the food we eat. Other changes have helped create the iconic landscapes and architecture we value. But as we have diverted rivers, covered them and straightened them, we have also damaged the environment. The legacy of structures and other changes means many of our rivers and waterways do not provide healthy habitats for wildlife.

SEPA and the Environment Agency are jointly investigating barriers to fish migration in the Border Esk to identify priorities for action.

Invasive non-native species

An invasive non-native species is an animal or plant introduced, either deliberately or accidentally, into a place where it does not belong. They can 'hitch hike' a ride on goods or other animals or even travel in the ballast of ships. Not all non-native species are damaging; for instance, non-native food crops can have huge benefits. A species only becomes 'invasive' if it has negative effects on the environment. Global trade, tourism and transport increase the problem world-wide. The problem is increasing every year.

Partners such as the Solway Firth Partnership and Tweed Forum have set out objectives for the sites that they oversee. The best practice manual developed by the Tweed Forum has been published and shared across all fishery trusts⁵.

⁵ https://tweedforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TF_invasives_manual_web-FINAL.pdf

Summary of Objectives

The actions planned for the period from 2021 are expected to achieve a good ecological status in 262 of the 318 water bodies that are not at good ecological status in 2019. This gives an overall target of 81% of the water bodies in the district being in a good or better ecological status by 2027. Pressures on another 10%, in the Scottish part of the Solway Tweed would have been addressed and they would be in the process of recovering to a good condition after 2027. In the English part of the Solway Tweed all but one of the water bodies have an objective of good status, but with low confidence of meeting this objective by 2027. More information about these objectives can be found in the [Draft River Basin Planning Overview \(Solway Tweed River Basin District in England\)](#) and the SEPA [Spotfire tool](#).

Achievement of these objectives would also safeguard the quality of drinking water sources in drinking water protected area and achieve improvement objectives for bathing waters, shellfish waters and the water bodies on which protected areas for the conservation of internationally important wildlife depend.

Consultation questions

This overview presents our shared vision towards delivering improvements to the water environment in the third cycle.

Please provide us with your comments on this plan and specifically the questions:

- Do you agree with the aims of this plan?
- Can you suggest any improvements to this plan?