

NATIONAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON FLOODING ISSUES

SUSTAINABLE FLOOD MANAGEMENT SUBGROUP – REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2004 NTAG MEETING

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the National Technical Advisory Group on Flooding Issues (NTAG) with a progress report from the Sustainable Flood Management Sub-Group.

Background

2. The Sustainable Flood Management Sub-Group met on 20 February 2004 and a second meeting has been arranged for 22 April 2004. Meetings are chaired by Alan Burdekin (Scottish Executive) and a list of Members is attached at Annex 1.

3. This Sub-Group is tasked with supporting the Executive to define “sustainable flood management” within the meaning of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (“the 2003 Act”) and produce a set of accompanying principles.

Main discussion points

4. Members discussed the importance of social and economic aspects of flood risk management and taking a whole-life approach to sustainability guidance. Members agreed that social tolerance to flooding is a variable that should not be ignored but any solution must be practical. Members recognised that if there is a need to prioritise schemes in the future then social aspects will become an issue for cost/benefit analysis.

5. Members were made aware of research into the potential for catchments to deal naturally with floods, which is about to be put out to contract by the Executive.

6. Prof. Charles Ainger gave Members a presentation on the concept of “Systems Dynamics” and how it might be applied to devising a definition and a set of principles for sustainable flood management. Charles also led a discussion on the principles of sustainability concentrating on social, environmental, economic and future generations outcomes.

7. Members discussed the need for improved reporting of flooding incidents and it was suggested that a database of all flooding incidents in urban areas be set up. Members decided that the local authority biennial reports on flooding had a role to play here. The possibility of holding a biennial conference to present the collated reports was also highlighted.

8. Members discussed how sustainability might be measured and recognised that any indicators should tie in with existing Executive indicators for evaluating sustainable development.

20 February 2004 meeting recommendations to NTAG

9. It was proposed that after a flood event the relevant bodies should get together to share experiences and learn from the event.

10. The Sub-Group recommends that NTAG endorse the preparation of a compilation of national biennial reports covering both river and coastal, and also sewer flooding. It also suggested that the Executive considers hosting a biennial conference to present the findings of the collated reports.

Defining sustainable flood management

11. The Sub-Group recommends to NTAG that there is a need for a two stage definition. Firstly a general definition within the meaning of the 2003 Act and secondly a more guided definition for taking forward flood prevention schemes under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961.

12. The Sub-Group recognises the importance of considering definitions already in the public domain; such as:

- Bruntland report definition of ‘sustainable development’
- WWF proposed definition of ‘sustainable flood management’
- DEFRA (from guidance on flood prevention schemes) definition of a ‘sustainable scheme’
- The RSPB definition of ‘sustainable flood management’ launched at its seminar on 24 March.

13. Members noted that there is little emphasis on the social and economic aspects of flood risk management in DEFRA’s sustainability guidance. Social impacts would need to be considered further by the Sub-Group.

14. Sub-Group Members propose that a definition of sustainable flood management:

- is practical;
- is measurable;
- takes account of social aspects and human risk;
- does not increase bureaucracy;
- takes a whole catchment approach;
- takes a long term approach and considers the needs of future generations;
- considers the role of natural environmental solutions;
- considers the ‘do-nothing’ option.

15. The Sub-Group recognised that natural solutions have an important place in flood risk management, but for extreme flood events it could well be that hard engineering methods, as well as natural solutions, may be required.

16. The Sub-Group agreed to recommend to NTAG that it adopt a “systems dynamics” approach to defining sustainable flood management. Whilst the approach is an experimental one, it could help validate the practical feasibility of a sustainable flood management

definition. The Executive has approved the project, which would run for 4 months and has agreed to meet nominal travel and accommodation expenses.

Next steps

17. The Executive will distribute a draft definition of sustainable flood management and a set of principles based on the Sub-Group discussions for the next meeting on 22 April 2004. The Sub-Group will report again at the NTAG meeting on 3 June 2004.

Conclusions

18. **Members are invited to:**

- **discuss the above;**
- **agree the recommendations at paragraphs 9 and 10 above;**
- **agree the characteristics of a definition as outlined at paragraphs 14-16 above, and**
- **support a “systems dynamics” approach to defining sustainable flood management.**

**NTAG Secretariat
March 2004**

THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON FLOODING ISSUES
MEMBERSHIP OF THE SUSTAINABLE FLOOD MANAGEMENT SUB-GROUP

Chair

Alan Burdekin, Scottish Executive (Air, Climate and Engineering Division)

Members

Charles Ainger, CIWEM

Gillian Hood, Scottish Executive (Water Environment Division)

Mike Donaghy, Scottish Environment LINK

John Greaves, COSLA

David Harley, SEPA

David Howell, Scottish Natural Heritage

Jonathan Chapman, Environment Agency

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NTAG Secretariat
January 2004