

Water Targets Expert Advisory Group

Meeting Notes, Monday 8 February 2021: 10:00-12:00

Defra and Environment Agency (EA) Attendees

Expert Attendees: Kevin Hiscock, Paul Withers, Paul Whitehead, Penny Johnes, Joseph Holden, Rob Lawson, Nicci Russell.

1) Opening remarks

Introductions

2) Chair role

Discussion and agreement for Penny Johnes to chair the Water Targets Expert Advisory Group.

3) Targets overview

Defra explained the Environment Bill, rationale and legal requirements for targets.

Discussion on:

- Consideration of new mines such as lithium mining
- Consideration of new pressures that have not been attributed
- Consideration of related consultations and ongoing enquiries

4) Targets timeline

Defra explained the process for developing fully evidenced targets until 2023.

Discussion on:

- Consideration of the scale of costs of environmental damage within cost benefit analysis (CBA) assessments.
- Consideration of CBA across areas
- Consideration of local and national objectives

5) Discussion on rationale and metrics for Abandoned Metal Mines

Defra explained the rationale and delivery routes for an abandoned metal mines target.

Discussion on:

- The longevity of the target and potential impact of winter seasonal effects on metal mine water treatment systems
- The focus of the target will be on ongoing emissions from abandoned metal mines.

- It was clarified that the target will not cover metal mine contaminated sediments, as there are already well-evidenced measures in place.
- Focus on historically abandoned metal mines where government is the actor of last resort and accepts liability
- Focus on historic mines and cases where government is the last remaining actor for the liability

6) Discussion on rationale and metrics for Agriculture Target

Defra explained the rationale and delivery routes for an agriculture target.

Discussion on:

- Presentation on rationale for nutrient based targets
- Discussion of mechanisms to achieve the target
- Consideration of including carbon alongside nitrogen and phosphorus
- Consideration of implications for upland land management systems
- Suggestion that this target be considered alongside the water demand target

7) Discussion on rationale and metrics for Wastewater Target

Defra explained the rationale and delivery routes for a wastewater target.

Discussion on:

- Consideration of emerging pollutants, such as, pharmaceuticals and microplastics
- Consideration of pathogens in rivers and human health concerns
- Links with the natural capital ecosystems pilot
- Suggestion of a potential nitrogen target, alongside a focus on phosphorus

8) Discussion on rationale and metrics for Water Demand Target

Defra explained the rationale and delivery routes for the water demand target.

Discussion on:

- Working with small and large retailers to explore feasibility of the target
- Consideration of chalk streams, agriculture and abstractions
- Consideration of metering within the target scope
- Consideration of behavioural changes
- Consideration of conjunctive use of water to balance water resource
- Consideration of biodiversity within farm ponds and blended water, dilution and concentration of contaminants.

9) Forward Look

Following meeting will explore cost benefit analysis.