

Consultation on future engagement arrangements for EPACs and RLFACs

Summary of comments received and Government response to consultation exercise

May 2012

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<http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/closed/#withresponse>

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Contents

1. Introduction	4
What we were seeking views on and why	4
2. Summary of responses and the Government response	6
Proposed abolition of the existing committees	8
High Level Principles.....	13
Future engagement arrangements.....	18
Cost Impacts and Impact Assessment	23
3. The way forward	24
Next steps	25

1. Introduction

Background to the proposals

1. Since the Government's decision to review and reform the Public Bodies landscape, Defra, like all other departments, has been examining its network of arm's-length bodies to increase accountability and improve efficiency. As part of this, the Department has been reviewing the role of Environment Agency's statutory Environment Protection Advisory Committees (EPACs), and Regional and Local Fisheries Advisory Committees in England (RaLFACs), [known as the Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees – FERACs] whose function is to provide advice to Government.
2. These regional Committees have carried out good work, but are currently limited by prescriptive statutory remits and have an advisory role rather than a role to encourage and facilitate delivery of environmental outcomes. The proposed future approach will encourage wider collective responsibility and more local scrutiny of how the Environment Agency delivers environmental priorities. It will help communities and environmental partners both work with, and challenge the Environment Agency, Defra, local authorities and other responsible stakeholders to help them deliver the Water Framework Directive and other important environmental improvements at a local level.
3. On 1 November 2011, Defra launched a consultation¹ on the UK Government's proposal for the future engagement arrangements following (the proposed) abolition of the Committees (England only). The consultation closed on 23 January 2012.

What we were seeking views on and why

4. The proposal is to abolish EPAC and RaLFAC Committees in England and to replace them with non statutory, local arrangements focused on facilitating delivery of environmental outcomes. This is because the Government believes that more flexible, non statutory arrangements will enable more proactive local engagement and greater local accountability. The current role of the Committees is to advise the Environment Agency rather than being able to act. A plethora of other engagement arrangements has also grown up around the Committees which suggests that the Committees are not fully

¹ Consultation on future engagement arrangements for EPACs and RaLFACs
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2011/11/01/consultation-epacs-rlfacs/>

representative of the wide range of stakeholders they were set up to represent nor do they fulfil current engagement needs.

5. The proposed new arrangements will build on existing good practice. They aim to empower local communities and civil society to support or take the lead, where appropriate, in delivering environmental outcomes. They encourage further transparency of environmental data and information. This would provide increased direct local scrutiny of the work of the Environment Agency but also bring greater responsibility for local communities, partners and NGOs to work with the Environment Agency to tackle environmental challenges together such as the delivery of the Water Framework Directive – improving local water quality for local communities to enjoy.
6. The Public Bodies Act 2011² requires Ministers to consult on their proposals before laying a draft order. On that basis, the Minister invited comments on proposals of what might be carried forward in the event of orders under the Public Bodies Act proposing abolition of the Committees.
7. To support this approach and to ensure a smooth succession to the new arrangements, should the Committees be abolished, Defra and the Environment Agency developed a number of high level principles as a framework for the future approach. These were developed with the existing Committee Chairs and members and with local and national stakeholder groups. These high level principles were included in the consultation. A comprehensive mapping exercise (included as Annex C of consultation document) was also carried out. This looked at the current remit of the committees and the stakeholder groups covered and then mapped other stakeholder engagement channels against them to identify any gaps that would arise if the Committees were removed and how they might be mitigated. All of this informed the proposed future approaches to engagement which was detailed in the consultation.
8. The consultation asked stakeholders for views on whether they agree with the abolition of these Committees and for their views on the proposed arrangements for future engagement that would be implemented in place of the Committees. Respondents were also invited to comment on the high level principles and on the regional models with an emphasis on identifying any gaps in the engagement matrices. All responses received to the consultation have been given due consideration.

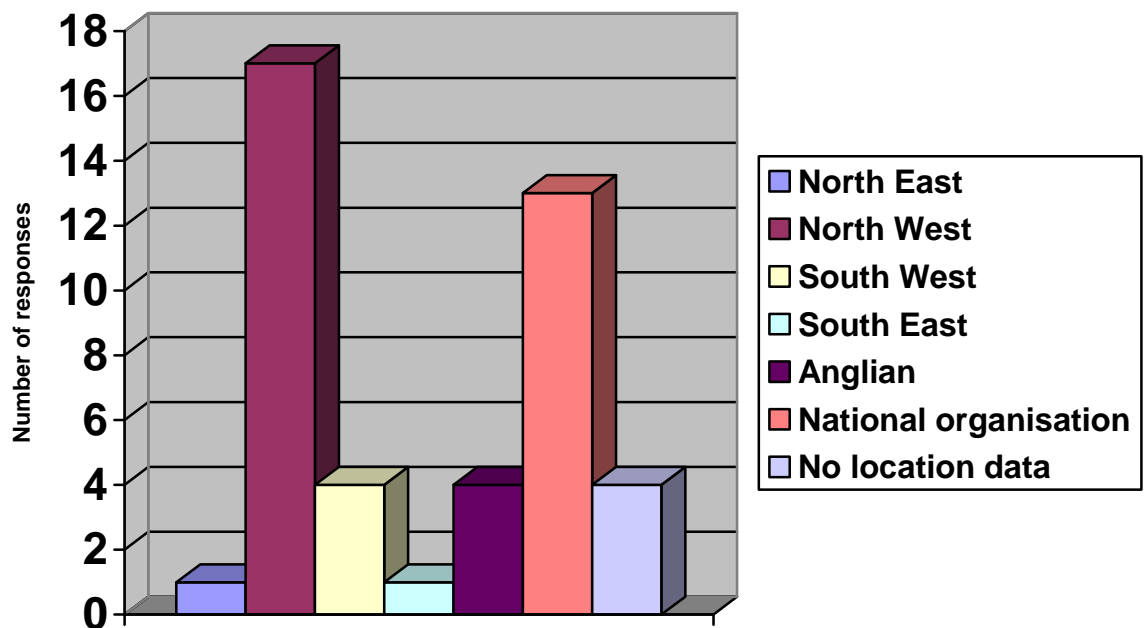
² Public Bodies Act 2011: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/24/contents/enacted/data.htm>

2. Summary of responses and the Government response

9. We received [44] responses to the consultation; 2 of these were received within one week after the deadline and have been included in this summary. 31 responses were from organisations and 13 were from individuals. Figure 1 below shows the geographic distribution of responses in relation to the Environment Agency's operational regions. This was a low response rate. Only 6 EPAC / RaLFAC Committees or individuals who are Chairs or Members of the existing Committees responded to the consultation.

Figure 1

Geographic distribution of consultation responses



10. A list of organisations that responded is at **Annex A**. Names of individual respondents are not listed in Annex A for data protection reasons although any stated organisational affiliations are shown.

11. The consultation was also discussed with the Defra Civil Society Advisory Board³ who were broadly supportive of the proposal and the proposed future arrangements and gave helpful feedback on how the arrangements could be further improved.
12. The main points raised by the consultation and the Government's response to each are given below.

³ Defra's Civil Society Advisory Board membership

<http://blogs.defra.gov.uk/3rd-sector/2009/03/advisory-board-members-announced/>

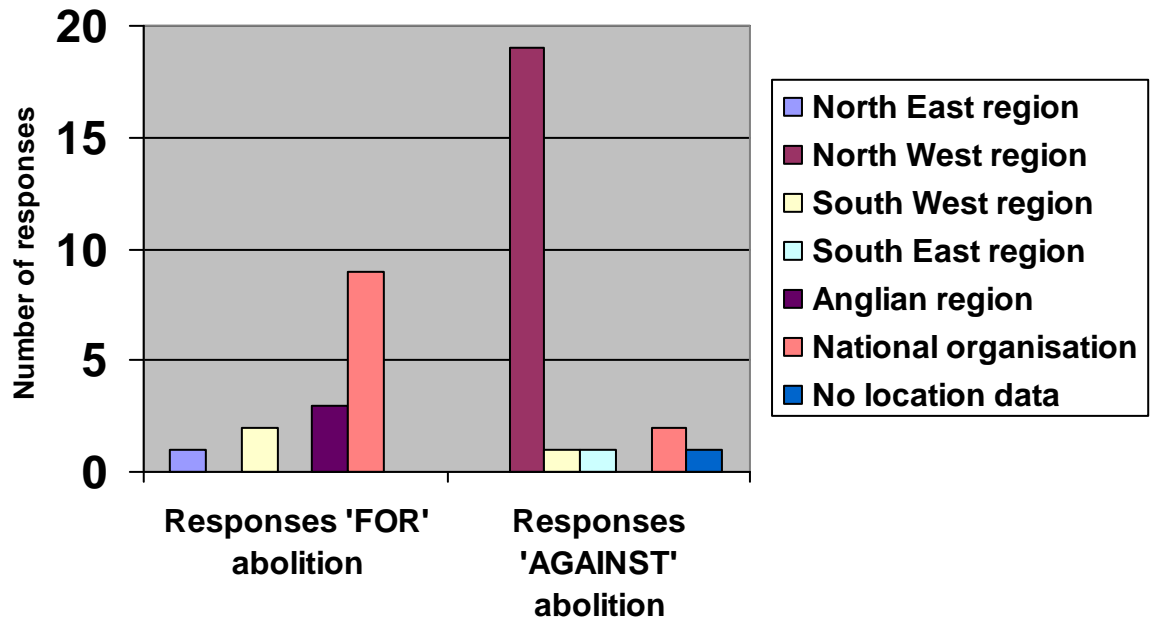
Proposed abolition of the existing committees

We asked: *Do consultees agree with the principle of abolition of the Environment Agency's statutory Environment Protection Advisory Committees (EPACs) and Regional and Local Fisheries Advisory Committees (RaLFACs) [also known as the Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees – FERACs] and the establishment of flexible non-statutory arrangements?*

13. **Statistics:** Of those who responded: 13 responses stated they were 'for' abolition of BOTH sets of Committees; a further 2 responses stated they were 'for' abolition of RaLFACs.
14. 7 responses stated they were 'against' abolition of BOTH sets of Committees; a further 17 responses stated they were 'against' abolition of RaLFACs.
15. 2 responses made statements that they were 'neutral' on the question of abolition. 1 response did not agree with abolishing as proposed but did not agree with the current statutory status quo either and suggested 'modernising' current arrangements.
16. Figure 2 below shows the geographic distribution of responses 'For' and 'Against' abolition of the Committees in relation to the Environment Agency's operational regions.

Figure 2

Geographic distribution of responses 'FOR' and 'AGAINST' abolition



17. There were more responses to the consultation from the North West than any other geographic region and the responses from the North West tended to be more opposed to abolition – especially with regards to RaLFACs. The Environment Agency in the North West has, and continues, to work closely with partners and stakeholders to develop the future approaches to engagement and to ensure that they can continue to benefit from the experience and expertise of the community if EPACs and RaLFACs are abolished. This includes setting up workshops with local stakeholders to understand what additional measures would help to establish the future approaches to engagement in the North West. A further case study to demonstrate engagement with fisheries stakeholders in the North West is shown at **Annex B** of this document.

18. Those who were in favour of abolition supported the course of action for a variety of reasons. Some Committees were not perceived as being efficient and effective against their remit nor fully engaging relevant stakeholder groups e.g. coarse anglers. There was concern that the Committees did not provide value for money in terms of the resources invested to support them. There was general agreement that a flexible, non-statutory approach was the right way forward and would address stated issues with the current approach which was seen by some respondents as stereotyped, undemocratic a 'closed shop', dysfunctional, and lacking a holistic viewpoint. There was a positive

response to involving and empowering civil society and local communities to be part of delivering solutions.

19. Those who were against abolition of the Committees supported their continued existence mainly because the Committees were seen as a vehicle for independent and objective advice to the Environment Agency; there was concern that this would be lost upon abolition. In particular fisheries respondents were not assured that the 'voice' of current RaLFAC stakeholders which the Committees represent will be effectively 'heard' through groups currently proposed in the regional engagement models. Also there were concerns that the knowledge, expertise and experience of the members of the Committees and the good quality advice that they afforded to the Environment Agency would be lost upon abolition.
20. A number of issues were highlighted by both those who agreed with abolition as well as those who disagreed. These issues are detailed below and the Government's response to these concerns is provided (paragraphs 21-34).
21. **You said:** you were concerned that a holistic approach of a cross-sectoral and multi-functional body could be lost if the Committees are abolished.
22. **The Government's response:** One of the reasons given in the consultation for abolishing the committees and moving forwards with these new approaches is to ensure environmental matters are considered in a holistic, cross-sectoral and multi-functional way. It is a high level principal to operate in this way – paragraph 14(iii) of the consultation document states that the Environment Agency will: 'Work holistically – ensuring that Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) and Water Quality and Management issues are considered together at catchment and local levels. The Environment Agency will work with Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs) and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) to ensure that environmental protection and biodiversity matters are considered; and that Flood and Coastal Risk Management matters are considered at River Basin Liaison Panels'. A case study showing effective engagement on a pilot Water Framework Directive (WFD) catchment on the Adur and Ouse is shown at **Annex C** of this document. This example helps to show how holistic engagement is possible and potentially more flexible and delivery orientated, in the absence of the Advisory Committees.
23. **You said:** you were concerned about losing the benefit of expert advice from individuals or bodies e.g. local authorities, if the Committees are abolished.
24. **The Government response:** Defra and the Environment Agency are committed to working with experts in civil society to provide us with advice and evidence, enabling us to make better informed decisions and deliver outcomes for people and the environment. This doesn't just include technical experts but experts in their locality and communities. We believe that the new approaches will enable us to work with the right experts and encourage

partners, communities and individuals to come and discuss with us if they believe they can help input and deliver environmental outcomes.

25. **You said:** that if the Committees are abolished, a statutory duty should be placed on the Environment Agency to seek advice of local stakeholders and take it into account or for formal oversight by the EA Board and Defra to ensure this happens.
26. **The Government response:** We do not believe that a statutory duty is necessary or appropriate for the reasons stated in the consultation. We believe that more flexible, non statutory, local arrangements will enable more proactive local engagement and greater local accountability. A non-statutory approach is more able to evolve to tackle modern environmental approaches and challenges, such as the Water Framework Directive, in a holistic way. Engagement with partners, civil society and local authorities are key priorities for the Environment Agency; there are already a number of engagement initiatives that are being developed and trialled because of the proposed abolition of the Committees that enable to Environment Agency to gain advice from customers and stakeholders – see the Government’s response in paragraphs 28-31 below and the case studies in **Annexes B-E**.
27. **You said:** that clear communications channels are needed with the Environment Agency and there needs to be clarity about how local groups will be involved if the Committees are abolished.
28. **The Government’s response:** We agree that clear communications channels are needed and believe that a large number have been demonstrated through the proposed regional approaches given in the consultation (appendix C and D of the consultation document). The new framework will allow flexibility in response to local priorities and needs. The Environment Agency is committed to providing local data and information that will help local communities and organisations understand local environmental pressures and opportunities. Much of this is already available and the EA invites local communities or civil society groups to engage with their local office⁴ if they have further ideas or want to be involved.
29. The Environment Agency has a wide range of partnership working and engagement approaches and is increasingly using social media to enhance more traditional methods. For example by setting up new online customer panels, the EA will be able to seek customer and stakeholder views about technical issues, proposals and aspects of their service. The EA will also utilise the comprehensive e-consultation tool which allows all EA consultations to be published online allowing customers and stakeholders to share their

⁴ Environment Agency Local Offices
<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/contactus/36324.aspx>

views and comments and shape EA decisions. Previously EPAC and RaLFAC Committees were used to obtain views on consultations – now everyone is able to comment using this system. The EA will use the national and local groups and approaches detailed in the consultation to ensure people are aware of this service / specific consultations.

30. Other social media examples include opportunities to develop EA partnership work with other organisations. For example the Fish Active website which has the full support of the Angling Trust and other key fisheries associations and interest groups. It is designed to provide a central resource for all matters of interest to the fishing community and a platform for constructive debate on matters of local as well as national interest.
31. Some social media opportunities have developed because of the proposed abolition of the Committees – showing the innovation encouraged through the high level principles for the new approach framework. EA North West, have developed a virtual forum on 'LinkedIn' to comment on major environment issues in the region, particularly those involving pollution, climate change, waste and sustainable development. The group originated from the North West EPAC Chair who has been instrumental in setting it up. It already has approximately 100 members. Although initial help is being given by the Environment Agency, it is hoped the forum will embrace other regional partners, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Chambers of Commerce, CBI, Universities and others. A further case study to demonstrate further examples of EA use of social media is shown at **Annex D** of this document.
32. **You said:** that if RaLFACs were abolished you were concerned that there could be a gap in how fisheries stakeholders, for example riparian owners, will be able to engage.
33. **The Government response:** We are satisfied that there are already a number of alternative ways for fisheries stakeholders to engage with the Environment Agency and that any significant gaps identified in the mapping will be addressed in the new arrangements as they evolve. Defra has, following this consultation, reminded the EA that the fish farming / aquaculture sectors must be included in the regional models where locally appropriate as this sector was flagged as having been omitted. EA North West - where the largest numbers of concerns were raised - are holding further workshops with stakeholders over the next few months to identify any remaining gaps / concerns and identify what more can be done collaboratively with partners.
34. Two case studies are included to show more detail on how fisheries stakeholders can, and do engage with the EA – in the North West and South West. This includes the extensive use of consultative and stakeholder groups and the Angling Trust. These are shown respectively at **Annex B** and **Annex E** of this document.

High Level Principles

We asked: *Do consultees agree with the proposed high level principles against which to design future stakeholder engagement? Are there any gaps?*

35. **Statistics:** [31] respondents answered this question. Of those who responded, 30 responses agreed with the high level principles as stated in the consultation document; 1 response was 'against' the high level principles (and against abolition of BOTH Committees as well); 13 responses made no mention of the high level principles.
36. Interestingly, of those who were against abolition of the Committees there was still support for the high level principles – 50% of those who were against abolition of both Committees or just RaLFACs went on to state that they supported the high level principles. All other respondents, but one, who disagreed with abolition made no comment at all on the high level principles.
37. Although there was general support for the high level principles, a number of responses highlighted a variety of issues / gaps. These are detailed below along with the Government's response to these concerns (paragraphs 38-64).
38. There were a number of issues around the development of the approach to engagement, how communications would be delivered and how the Environment Agency will be kept accountable on the effectiveness of these regional approaches.
39. **You said:** 2-way Communication and line of sight between local and national levels is important as is the accessibility for different fora to engage in that communication process if there is not a formal Committee. You also raised the concern that it may be onerous to keep the regions consistent and up to date.
40. **The Government's response:** We know that it is important to have good communications and engagement between national and local levels. The Environment Agency will ensure that there is good communication internally between national and local colleagues – for example between national fisheries staff who liaise with national stakeholders and attend the England and Wales National Fisheries Group and regional and local staff who engage with local stakeholders and attend a range of local engagement meetings and events.
41. We believe that the range of engagement fora described in the consultation document, at national and regional / local level, provide the sufficient framework for national and local communication to occur and are flexible enough to evolve over time if gaps emerge. The Environment Agency Board,

who have regional as well as national portfolios, will provide an additional national / local level of scrutiny and are keen to ensure that national / local communication is effective.

42. Social media (see case study at **Annex D**) will also help to enable local and national engagement. Additionally there are non- Environment Agency forums which enable national / local discussion and engagement with the Environment Agency. For example, the Angling Trust is establishing regional open forums where any Angling Trust members, or others with fisheries interests, can discuss matters of local or national concern. They will provide a clear line of sight for fisheries and angling issues and interests to be raised from local to national level and vice versa. The Environment Agency will be involved in these fora.
43. The Environment Agency does not believe that these new arrangements will be unduly onerous for the organisation due to reprioritisation given to the Environment Agency through the substantial reform agenda and the future approaches being in line with how they seek to work collaboratively as an organisation to deliver local environmental priorities. Additionally the resource saved from servicing the Committees and paying for the Committee Chairs will be reinvested in supporting these new arrangements. It should also be noted that the new arrangements largely build on existing good practice which is already happening alongside the Committee structures as a response to act and deliver on environmental priorities which the Committees are unable to fulfil because of their restrictive advisory and/or regional remit. Additional arrangements will only be put in place if there is an identified gap in engagement to fill following the proposed abolition of the Committees.
44. Local communities and civil society will be encouraged and empowered to be involved and / or lead on delivery of environmental outcomes where there is appetite to do this. Existing engagement and good practice shows that this is the case in many areas – for example with existing Rivers Trusts. The Environment Agency will look for the most effective way to achieve the outcome i.e. funding or otherwise supporting civil society groups for example, in the South West where the Wetland and Rivers Trust have taken on projects related to Water Framework Directive delivery, including fish passes and habitat improvements. EA South West have also committed funding to provide a local Angling Development Board Angling Development Officer to help build civil society capacity so as to move towards more of a 'Big Society'- led approach to developing and promoting angling locally.
45. **You said:** It is important to develop local messages, relevant to the right audience i.e. the message on the Water Framework Directive for farmers vs water companies.
46. **The Government's response:** We agree that this is important. Local teams develop local messages using feedback from local customers and stakeholders. EPAC and RaLFAC Committees have historically had useful but

fairly limited input to this and we believe that the new arrangements will be sufficient to support this approach.

47. **You said:** that in relation to how the Environment Agency will work with customer groups, you thought web and social media have an important role to play in communication and engagement but had concerns over how this would be resourced and managed.
48. **The Government response:** Web and social media are very important to the Environment Agency in engaging with partners, customers and communities particularly for disseminating and exchanging data and information. More detail is given at paragraphs 31 and 42 above and in **Annex D**. All of this will help us to engage with customers and communities, to exchange real time information with them and enable them to have easier access to data.
49. We will also continue to engage with stakeholders through a range of face to face and traditional communication and engagement activities at local and national level as detailed in the consultation document, and at **Annexes B, C, E**. This includes local and national face to face meetings (for example with industry sector groups), written correspondence, telephone engagement and via the Environment Agency's 'e-consultations tool' which publishes all of the Agency's consultations allowing customers and stakeholders to share their views and comments, and shape decisions.
50. **You said:** in addition to the 'how' the Environment Agency will work with customer groups, that there should be more partnership agreements and specified principles for decision making in partnership.
51. **The Government response:** Partnership is the key to success in establishing these more flexible non-statutory arrangements to deliver environmental objectives. Defra and the Environment Agency are committed to developing innovative and effective ways to engage and work closely in partnership with local communities, customers and stakeholders. The Environment Agency has a number of partnership agreements with stakeholders, for example with wetland and rivers trusts, and engages in a range of formal and informal methods of partnership working. The EA have drawn up collaborative working principles based on good practice and experience of working with our partners. This builds on the EA's extensive 'Working with Others' programme that has supported improved engagement on a range of issues for example, working with communities and site operators to set up liaison groups for contentious waste management sites.
52. In Staffordshire, the EA have developed a joint approach with three other organisations, Staffordshire County Council, Lichfield District Council and the Health and Safety Executive, all of whom have regulatory responsibilities for a specific waste site. Working together, the EA were able to engage more effectively with the community and help the site become more compliant and

reduce its impact on the local environment. This approach will continue to be used with other sites.

53. Social media has been an important part of developing EA's partnership work with other organisations. For example, the Fish Active website which has the full support of the Angling Trust and other key associations and interest groups, is designed to provide a central resource for all matters of interest to the fishing community. It is also a platform for constructive debate on matters of local as well as national interest.
54. In Devon, local fishing associations have set up River Association Partnership Meetings in order to liaise with local Environment Agency staff to help deliver a more integrated and civil society approach to river improvements, especially directed at Water Framework Directive work. These have been very well received and have already led to projects on the ground led by external people with expert advice from EA staff.
55. **You said:** EA need to drive through their culture change to ensure this partnership approach will be undertaken.
56. **The Government response:** The Environment Agency has already made good progress against the priorities set by Ministers under the substantial reform agenda. This includes a focus on the 5 'How we do things' principles which include the 'Yes, If' principle and a focus on working in partnership. Defra is satisfied that the Environment Agency has made good progress and will continue to review this through the mechanisms outlined in the consultation document. Customer and stakeholder feedback of the Environment Agency will also be considered at part of their Triennial Review.
57. **You said:** there should be arrangements for review and evaluation of the new arrangements.
58. **The Government response:** A key reason for proposing the abolition of the Committees, as stated in the consultation, is to encourage more direct local scrutiny from customers and communities into the Environment Agency. It is proposed that the Committees are replaced with more fluid, flexible arrangements which will not be subject to formal monitoring or evaluation and which will be different in each locality – but underpinned by the consistent high level principles detailed in the consultation.
59. Defra will review progress with the Environment Agency against the high level principles within two years of the new engagement principles taking effect, if the Committees are abolished as proposed. Ahead of that review the EA will undertake web based stakeholder engagement to allow local and national customers and stakeholders to comment on how the new approaches have been embedded. Any learning from this review will be embedded into the High level Principles and used by the Environment Agency to focus its engagement work.

60. **You said:** he high level principles could be developed to be more explicit about partnership and the engagement of experts in policy making.
61. **The Government response:** we have reviewed the high level principles and developed some of these further to reflect your feedback:
62. We have developed the principle described in 13 (ii) on partnership recognition to now state – ‘In partnership – the Environment Agency will not always lead new groups or local environmental work. Instead the Environment Agency will work with and inform others i.e. civil society, private and public organisations to achieve the necessary local outcomes in the most appropriate way.
63. We have developed the principle described in 14(v) on the use of experts to now state – ‘Provide advice to inform Government policy making - using intelligence gathered from customers and from civil society and local experts to inform delivery and the policy-making process’.
64. The EA will keep these principles under review. It is expected that the principles will evolve as appropriate – in consultation with customers and Defra - to ensure that they work in the most appropriate way to deliver local and national priority environmental outcomes as well as Government priorities. This will ensure that the future approaches to engagement remain flexible and focused, evolving over time.

Future engagement arrangements

We asked: *Do consultees support the more flexible and region specific approaches being developed to allow more engagement at the local level (Appendix D)? Are there any gaps?*

65. **Statistics:** [32] respondents answered this question. Of those who responded 31 responses supported the regional approaches; 1 respondent was 'against' the regional approaches; and 12 responses made no mention of the regional approaches.
66. Of those who had stated they were against abolition of the Committees, 54% went on to state that they supported the regional approaches. All other respondents who disagreed with abolition, except one, made no comment at all on the regional models.
67. Although there was general support for the regional approaches and models, a number of responses highlighted a variety of issues / gaps. These are detailed below along with the Government's response to these concerns (paragraphs 68-93).
68. **You said:** you thought the regional models, as described in the consultation document, demonstrated a piecemeal approach. This raised concerns about the diversity of approaches across regions and that it was possible inconsistencies would arise. However, you understood the need to be flexible with respect to the differences in issues across the regions and that we should not pigeon-hole delivery of solutions.
69. **The Government response:** The consultation explains the consistent overall framework of high level principles and the regional models approaches, demonstrating the reasons for flexibility within that. A range of views were received on this during the consultation and we are comfortable that the future approaches as laid out in the consultation are a valid way of moving forwards. We believe that the benefits of a flexible, local, delivery focused approach outweigh any possible inconsistencies. We see local variation as a strength of the new arrangements and agree that we should not pigeon-hole delivery of solutions.
70. **You said:** you think it will be onerous to keep all regions consistent and up to date as described by the regional models.
71. **The Government response:** By freeing resources through abolition of the Committees, the Environment Agency will be well placed to develop and build on the existing networks and ensure delivery is fully informed from both the local and national perspectives. This is addressed in more detail at paragraphs 43 and 44 above.

72. **You said:** you thought there needs to be commonality across regions, for example, with Angling – a common reporting process, the same mechanism for transparency of spend.
73. **The Government response:** We believe that flexibility in approach is a strength of the proposed new engagement approach as detailed at paragraphs 26, 40-44 and **Annex C**. However where issues would most efficiently be consistent nationally – for example transparency of rod licence spend - then we expect the Environment Agency to use its judgement in determining this advised by stakeholders through the various engagement mechanisms detailed in the consultation. For example, we would expect the England and Wales National Fisheries Group to have oversight of this matter.
74. **You said:** there is a desire for greater engagement on fisheries issues including angling at all levels.
75. **The Government response:** We believe that the framework outlined in the consultation and in the case studies at **Annexes B and E** provides a good basis for this – and provides opportunity for civil society groups to take the lead on setting up further engagement if they would like. The onus should not be all on the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency is working to ensure the consistency of guidance across regions whilst reflecting the need for good practice to be led and developed locally. The England and Wales National Fisheries Group will monitor the fisheries arrangements and make further changes where necessary and where they will deliver value for money.
76. **You said:** The England and Wales National Fisheries Group is not representative of fisheries, angling and riparian interests and doesn't allow local input into national policy / direction.
77. **The Government response:** The England and Wales National Fisheries Group has 8 members, including representatives from the Angling Trust, the Institute of Fisheries Management and the Salmon and Trout Association and the Angling Developed Board (to be subsumed by the Angling Trust). The Group meets quarterly and discusses all matters affecting fisheries and angling, including environmental issues such as biodiversity, water quality and water resource issues, where they affect fisheries. They are one part of an extensive framework of engagement with fisheries stakeholders as detailed in the consultation document and at **Annexes B-E**. The majority of the group's members have regional or local representation / connections – for example the Angling Trust is setting up regional forums as detailed in Annex B.
78. Policy is developed by Defra, informed by the Environment Agency which collects information at the local and national level through local fisheries consultatives and local fisheries forums, River Basin Liaison Panels and the England and Wales National Fisheries Group to enable local input into national policy development and strategic decision-making.

79. **You said:** you thought River Basin Liaison Panels (RBLPs) are not a representative, challenging, and effective group.
80. **The Government response:** RBLPs draw membership from a wide range of groups including statutory and civil society conservation organisations, landowners and farmers, water companies and local authorities. The RBLP Committee Chairs have recently highlighted the need for these panels to address delivery of improvements in the water environment. We expect that these groups will evolve, and the membership reviewed and adapted, as the focus shifts from planning to delivery.
81. **You said:** there is now no formal representation covering the EPAC/RaLFAC remit at Regional Fisheries Coastal Committees (RFCCs) and there is nothing to replace this.
82. **The Government response:** RFCC members are generally expected to have broad areas of expertise and experience to ensure there is the right balance of skills across the committees. This may include individuals with experience or knowledge of agriculture, farming and land management. In addition to the main members, each committee should have one conservation/environment expert who will be responsible for advising the committee on wider environmental issues.
83. Conservation Members are expected to contribute to general Committee discussions but are also responsible for:
- Providing an environmental perspective at Committee meetings;
 - Helping the Committee understand the views of the conservation community about specific plans or projects, if they arise;
 - Monitoring and reviewing programmes of work on flood and coastal erosion risk management and conservation issues needing to be addressed; advising on relevant legal compliance; and
 - Providing a link between the Committee and Natural England and other conservation organisation in the Committee area.
84. To be effective the conservation member needs to demonstrate significant knowledge of nature conservation and wider environmental issues relevant to flood and coastal erosion risk management. We are also suggesting a closer link between RFCCs and River Basin Liaison Panels where it is locally thought to be appropriate.
85. **You said:** there was a lack of reference to fish farming or aquaculture in the regional models.
86. **The Government response:** The Environment Agency is working to ensure that where locally relevant these sectors will be included in local engagement under the new approaches – and will be included in national engagement as appropriate.

87. **You said:** there appears to be no mechanisms within the regional models for influencing decisions that affect property rights and values (owners and licensees of riparian fishing rights).
88. **The Government response:** The Environment Agency is committed to transparent decision making and we comply with the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation. The consultation lays out a number of ways in which engagement and consultation will be carried out under the new arrangements on top of the basic recourse already in place including the customer charter, contact to MPs, Ministers, and Ombudsman etc. Many riparian owners are members of local fishery groups and can engage with the Environment Agency in a number of ways – for example as detailed in the local case studies at **Annexes B and E**.
89. **You said:** that no input on the historic environment and cultural heritage is demonstrated in the regional models.
90. **The Government response:** The Environment Agency has a limited remit of historic environment and cultural heritage and works with English Heritage as locally as required and nationally using an 'account manager' approach to ensure that relevant matters in the remit of the body are discussed and addressed as needed. We believe that this existing mechanism is sufficient for addressing any issues and note that neither EPAC nor RaLFAC had direct responsibilities for the historic or cultural heritage matters.
91. **You said:** There is a gap in ensuring water companies planning and delivery involvement at a regional level.
92. **The Government response:** The Price Review was previously discussed at EPAC meetings but this level and type of engagement has recently been replaced with the OFWAT Customer Challenge Groups. They provide the means by which the Water Companies engage with the range of stakeholders around the Price Review and ultimately the customer needs and expectations. This new forum should be more effective than previous mechanisms due to its ability to directly influence the water company and the planning and pricing process. As an example the North West Customer Challenge Group includes Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and Natural England amongst a breadth of relevant stakeholders groups directly feeding in.
93. **You said:** there appears to be a gap at the regional strategic level on climate change.
94. **The Government response:** The leadership and engagement around climate change continues. EPACs and RaLFACs were not the only vehicles for this issue to be discussed. Changes to regional governance and top down government targets has resulted in some realignment of local governance and we are already starting to see the emerging and collaborative thinking and planning of Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnership to this

agenda. The recent Flood and Water Management Act 2010⁵ reinforces the responsibilities to flood risk management on Local Authorities and the Environment Agency. The work Defra and the Environment Agency are doing to develop the National Adaptation Plan and the recent publishing of the Climate Change Risk Assessment⁶ is also providing a useful vehicle to engage Local Climate Change Partnerships in planning local action and engagement.

Other issues raised in the consultation:

95. **You said:** More transparency on how rod licence charge income is raised and spent.
96. **The Government response:** The England and Wales National Fisheries Group receives annual reports on fisheries transparency and expenditure. These reports are made available on the Environment Agency website, together with minutes of the Group's meetings and agendas
97. **You said:** there is potential that Quangos could be amalgamated and work on a more regional basis.
98. **The Government response:** Defra reviewed all its arms length bodies as part of the Arms Length Body Review in 2010 and made a reduction in the number of bodies across its Arms Length Bodies network from 92 to 36. It will continue to seek the most effective way to deliver its priorities for the environment – for example through capability review programmes and Triennial Reviews.

⁵ Flood and Water Management Act 2012 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/29/contents>

⁶ Climate Change Risk Assessment

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13698-climate-risk-assessment.pdf>

Cost Impacts and Impact Assessment

99. **You said:** you challenged the assumption that there will be no cost impact. You thought that the abolition of the regional committees will have a cost impact on the public, business or civil society.
100. **The Government's response:** The new arrangements largely build on existing good practice which is already happening alongside the Committee structures as a response to act and deliver on environmental priorities which the Committees are unable to fulfil because of their restrictive advisory and/or regional remit. There are already a number of engagement initiatives that are being developed and trialled because of the proposed abolition of the Committees. Additional arrangements will only be put in place if there is an identified gap in engagement to fill following the proposed abolition of the Committees and where appropriate will provide the opportunity for civil society groups to take the lead if they would like and there is appetite to do so (see paragraphs 43 and 75, and the case examples in **Annexes B-E**).
101. **You said:** you were concerned that these changes will increase workload on EA staff.
102. **The Government response:** If EPACs and RaLFACs are abolished, resource will be redeployed into ensuring the success of the flexible engagement arrangements. Environment Agency staff costs will certainly be required for the future engagement approaches which will better reflect the way Government wants its arms length bodies to work in general. We are satisfied that with the reinvestment of the savings from abolishing the Advisory Committees and the reprioritisation given to the Environment Agency through the substantial reform agenda, we believe the Environment Agency will be able to work deliver the future approaches without a significant additional burden to their staff (see paragraph 43).

The way forward

103. The Government confirms its proposal to pursue abolishing both the Environment Protection Advisory Committees, and the Regional and Local Fisheries Advisory Committees in England (known as the Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees – FERACs). The Public Bodies Act 2011 provides the necessary powers to abolish the Committees. The Government will use powers in the Public Bodies Act to implement the proposals outlined in the consultation in relation to the proposed abolition of the Committees.
104. The Environment Act (95) provides the statutory obligations for Environment Protection Advisory Committees (EPACs) and Regional & Local Fisheries Advisory Committees (RaLFACs) in England and Wales. These statutory Committees currently provide advice to the Environment Agency but within prescriptive regional remits which creates a degree of inefficiency and inflexibility. Localism and Big Society agendas require the Environment Agency to more directly engage with civil society, the public and business. A non-statutory approach would provide greater flexibility and remove statutory constraints which would enable civil society and local communities to be empowered to take the lead where appropriate.
105. A plethora of other engagement opportunities has grown up around the Committees which suggests that the Committees are not fully representative of the wide range of stakeholders they were set up to represent nor are they able to provide a more holistic and multi-functional engagement approach to tackling and acting on environmental issues we now face. These initiatives enable the Environment Agency to gain advice from customers and stakeholders at a more local level to input into solutions and they are delivering successes (see **Annexes B-E**).
106. Effective local stakeholder engagement and partnership are key to successful delivery on the ground. A non-statutory structure would have the flexibility to evolve and better address local priorities and would facilitate the engagement of civil society and local communities and partners in delivery - the new approaches will be flexible to focus when, where and with whom action is needed. Abolition of the Committees would free-up resources for reinvestment to achieve this.
107. If the Committees were not abolished it would be necessary to continue to appoint paid chairs and meet the requirements of Environment Act 1995. There would be the added complexity and cost of getting the level of local/civil society interaction needed to deliver environmental outcomes while still having to service regional committees not best suited to local engagement. In practice the roles of Committee members would need to be changed to make this happen whilst still meeting the statutory requirements. The risk would be that ineffective committees would still have to be funded whilst also having to

Next steps

108. Draft Statutory Instruments proposing the abolition of the Committees will be laid before Parliament under an 'affirmative' process on 21 May 2012.
109. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Annex A – List of respondents

Below is the list of organisations that responded as well as organisations where individual respondents stated they had an affiliation.

Angling Development Board
Angling Trust
Association of Electricity Producers
Bowland game Fishing Association
British Trout Association
East Lindsey District Council
EDF Energy
English Heritage
Essex & Suffolk Water (Northumbrian Water Ltd)
Gressingham Anglers Ltd
Hyndburn and Blackburn Angling Association
Institute of Fisheries Management
Kent (Westmoreland) Angling Association
Lune & Wyre Fisheries Association
National Farmers' Union
Norfolk County Council
North West Fisheries Consultative Council
NW RaLFAC (FERAC)
Peterborough City Council
Prince Albert Angling society (PAAS)
Ribblesdale Angling Association
Ribble Fisheries Consultative Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Salmon & Trout Association
Scottish and Southern Energy
South West EPAC
South West RaLFAC (FERAC)
South West Rivers Association
Thames RaLFAC (FERAC) / Thames Basin RBLP
The Hodder Consultative
Tyne Anglers Alliance
Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF)

Annex B – Case Study: Future engagement arrangements with fisheries stakeholders in the North West Region

Background

The Environment Agency has been working closely with the RaLFAC Chairs and members and with other fisheries and angling groups through local managers since the Government announced proposals to abolish RaLFACs in autumn 2010.

There were more responses to the consultation from the North West than any other geographic region and the responses from the North West tended to be more opposed to abolition. The Environment Agency in the North West has, and continues, to work closely with partners and stakeholders to develop the future approaches to engagement and to ensure that they can continue to benefit from the experience and expertise of the community if EPACs and RaLFACs are abolished.

Engagement with fisheries stakeholders in the North West

EA North West engage with angling and fisheries stakeholders in a number of ways – and at a number of local levels – for example frontline environment management teams engage with local fisheries consultative and clubs, providing information to those with fisheries interests and seeking views on fisheries matters and our performance so that this can inform how we provide our service – locally and nationally.

EA North West works with a range of local fishing clubs through local consultative associations. For example, they engage with the Bowland Game Fishing Association via its membership of the Ribble Fisheries Consultative Association. EA North West meets with the Chairman of the Ribble Fisheries Consultative Association every two months to discuss issues relating to the Ribble.

EA North West also maintains strong links with the North West Regional Consultative Council (representing all the Consultatives in the North West), the North West Angling Trust and the Angling Development Board capturing concerns regarding national technical, strategy or enforcement issues. They attend individual Consultative Council meetings, Regional Consultative Council meetings and meetings of the Angling Trust.

EA North West works closely with the IFCA (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority) on fisheries technical and enforcement issues related to the marine environment. This has worked particularly well on developing a sustainable fisheries approach for the North West shellfish fisheries.

EA North West works on the development of Marine Conservation Zones with a wide range of stakeholders from fishers to local authorities and the Marine Management Organisation and promotes work across the north of the country on fisheries projects - this has resulted in greater investment in fish passes and barrier removal in partnership with local communities.

Customer feedback is also very important whether received at local or national level key points from engagement, meetings, correspondence or complaints and commendations related to angling and fisheries and is shared between local and national teams and acted upon as necessary.

River Basin Liaison Panels are being evolved in the North West to ensure they can better enable delivery of environmental outcomes. To support this local catchment groups, involving angling representatives, are being established. The North West River Basin Liaison Panel provides a clear line of sight between national and local decision making including our catchment pilots. EA North West is seeking feedback from the RBLP on their delivery of improvements.

EA North West work with external bodies, such as the Bowland Game Fishing Association, to make sure that they are communicating with members in the most effective and helpful way. In partnership with customers and stakeholders, a number of workshops are being set up over the next few months. These will ensure that EA North West can learn from local needs and further evolve their proposed future approaches to engagement.

EA North West is developing their use of digital engagement via social media and their website. They offer feedback via the website and participate in local web-based fisheries forums. They will continue to explore new innovative ways of communicating and engaging with local partners in this way.

EA consultations are available nationally online via the EA e-consultation tool. EA North West will use all their local engagement networks to draw attention to EA consultations that are relevant to local North West fisheries groups.

The Angling Trust is establishing Angling Trust regional forums, which will broadly reflect the Environment Agency operational regions. These provide open forums where any Angling Trust members, or others with fisheries interests, can discuss matters of local or national concern. Local Chairs are being appointed to these Forums. The Forums will provide a clear line of sight for fisheries and angling issues and interests to be raised from local to national level and vice versa. EA North West are supporting the establishment of a North West forum and will attend once it has been established.

Annex C – Case Study: a pilot catchment in action

In England and Wales there are one hundred catchments. We want to engage with delivery partners at a catchment level to encourage greater local participation and achieve more for communities and the water environment. In England, we are hosting pilots to trial improved ways of engaging with local organisations. These pilots are one of the ways that the Environment Agency is taking forwards the new approaches to engagement. We have included this case study as a real example of how we are working with others to deliver real environmental outcomes.

The pilot catchment approach provides the opportunity to work with experts in civil society to enable us to deliver outcomes for people and the environment. This doesn't just include technical experts but experts in their locality and communities. It provides an opportunity for us to develop new ways of working with partners, engaging in range partnership working.

The Environment Agency has a number of partnership agreements with stakeholders. Defra encourages the Environment Agency to engage in a range of formal and informal methods of partnership working. We have drawn up collaborative working principles based on good practice and experience of working with our partners. This builds on our extensive 'Working with Others' programme that has supported improved engagement on a range of issues.

Working in this way helps to ensure that environmental matters are considered in a holistic and multi-functional way. Moving away from an advisory committee structure enables the Environment Agency to invest resource in working with partners and communities to deliver outcomes in a flexible way.

Specific Case Study

The Adur & Ouse Partnership was established in October 2011, with support from a number of organisations. The Partnership is hosted by the Environment Agency as one of ten initial Defra led pilot catchments, but has been developed collaboratively with all interested parties agreeing to commit time and resource. The Partnership exists to: Improve local waters in the Adur and Ouse and achieve more ambitious environmental goals by:

- Working together to understand the issues.
- Discussing and agreeing on outcomes and priorities.
- Sharing information and resources.
- Working together to tackle difficult issues that require multi-agency input.

- Working collaboratively to deliver work on the ground to achieve the agreed outcomes.

A core steering group provides direction and co-ordination for work in the Adur and Ouse catchment; this group has 12 members who meet monthly:

- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Brighton University
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust
- South Downs National Park
- South East Water
- Southern Water
- Sussex Wildlife Trust

The Adur & Ouse Steering Group collaboratively developed six work themes and have agreed to form sub-groups (task & finish groups) to pursue each theme.



Adur & Ouse task & finish groups will understand the complex issues within the Adur and Ouse catchment by drawing on a wide range of expertise. This understanding will stem from robust evidence gathered from the wider Adur & Ouse Partnership and local communities. The evidence will be used to underpin all action in the Adur and Ouse catchment and form the basis of the Adur & Ouse Catchment Plan.

The Steering Group made an active decision to have a dedicated fisheries theme to ensure that the Adur & Ouse Partnership were engaging with the widest range of the angling community. As the Adur and Ouse pilot catchment also includes coastal waters, sea anglers and commercial fisheries will also be included in projects and engagement.

Projects supported by the Adur & Ouse Partnership and led by the Environment Agency are following the ‘Working with Others’ approach to engagement. Some examples are the Middle Ouse Restoration of Physical Habitat (MORPH) project and the Sussex Coastal Habitats Inshore Pilot Project (SCHIP).

MORPH is a catchment wide project combining river and floodplain restoration. The Environment Agency has held several public drop-in sessions in village halls to discuss the project, and feedback has shown that 90% understood why we are doing MORPH ‘quite well’ or ‘very well’ and 91% feel that restoration of the river and floodplain is the right thing to do. One to one engagement is now taking place at site specific locations, ensuring that people are truly involved throughout the project.

The SCHIP aims to develop a better and shared understanding of the habitats, species and pressures on the Adur and Ouse coastal water body. The Environment Agency and the Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) held a series of participatory workshops to gather evidence from the local community for the project. We are also looking at how the wider marine community can help gather data to assist in the assessment of the health of our marine environment.

We are utilising a number of communications channels to increase awareness of the Adur & Ouse Partnership. One example is the use of an independent website, www.fishactive.com, to post online information targeted at anglers and people interested in the water environment. This website also hosts the Adur & Ouse blog and also provides a forum for people to feed their views into the Partnership.

Annex D – Case Study: engagement with stakeholders using social media

Background

Web and social media are very important to the Environment Agency in engaging with partners, customers and communities. We have made significant developments in this area over the last year and are committed to making further progress. We see this as an important way to work with others to deliver environmental outcomes – especially with the proposed abolition of the EPAC and RaLFAC Committees.

Social media helps the Environment Agency to engage with our customers, build communities and increase efficiency. We are committed to using it effectively to complement and improve the existing partnership working approaches and to increase local accountability and scrutiny of the organisation.

Nationally the Environment Agency has used social media to achieve environmental outcomes in several ways, including our iPhone applications for flood warnings and bathing waters. A few other examples – including social media opportunities that will help engagement if the EPAC and RaLFAC committees are abolished – are given below.

Social media engagement on environment protection in the North West

EA North West, have developed a virtual forum on LinkedIn to comment on major environment issues in the region, particularly those involving pollution, climate change, waste and sustainable development. The group originated from the North West EPAC Chair who has been instrumental in setting it up. It already has approximately 100 members. Although initial help is being given by the Environment Agency, it is hoped the forum will embrace other regional partners, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Chambers of Commerce, CBI, Universities and others.

The members of the forum are made from people in the North West who have had some relevant experience in the issues confronting the Environment Agency, including light-touch regulation, climate change, waste and sustainability. The forum also has several requirements for members, including having several years experience in an environmental field and a willingness to comment.

There is also a 'news' website, 'Environment NW', being developed and led by the Environment Agency. This will initially be filled with Environment Agency news, but selected by lay people. Once up and running smoothly (August/September 2012),

the EA will encourage other North West environmental organisations (including Natural England, the Coastal Forum, Wildlife Trusts and Local Economic Partnerships) to use this open website for their news and events.

Engaging with fisheries and angling communities via social media

EA Yorkshire and the North East have been using social media to improve communication with local angling groups. Previously the fisheries team had tried a number of traditional communication approaches for example, quarterly newsletters, EA website and face-to-face forums. The problem with these events was that they tended to be attended by the same representatives.

Social media is now playing an important part in engaging with local angling groups. A member of the EA fisheries team uses Twitter to promote their work. To date this officer has 161 people following his “tweets” which is above average for an individual.

The EA have also set up web chats through online angling communities. For example, with the permission of the administrators at www.yorkshirerfishing.net they offered anglers a two-hour online questions and answers session with our Fisheries and Biodiversity team. Anglers were invited to submit their questions before the Q&A session. On the day 50 anglers were online viewing the session at one time, and 135 posts were received on a total of 21 different subjects. The session was received positively by anglers online who said they would benefit from a follow-up.

Social media – working in partnership

Social media has been an important part of developing EA partnership work with other organisations. For example the Fish Active website www.fishactive.com which has the full support of the Angling Trust and other key fisheries associations and interest groups. It is designed to provide a central resource for all matters of interest to the fishing community and a platform for constructive debate on matters of local as well as national interest.

Incident management

Social media also offers the opportunity to exchange real time information and allow accessibility and transparency of date. This has allowed for good results with regards to environmental protection. For example, an incident in November last year relating to a lorry turning over on the M1 and spilling its load of brewers’ waste which was threatening the River Rother and it’s important fishery. The incident trended on Twitter as the [Marmite Spill](#) and was the most discussed, emerging topic on Twitter in the UK at that time. The EA used the opportunity to proactively promote their role in preventing any harm to fish in the River Rother. EA tweets reached an audience of nearly 74,000 via 68 re-tweets. Within minutes of tweeting the EA had calls from

both ITV Calendar and BBC Look North who went out to film environment officers testing for pollution in the river.

Customer and Stakeholder engagement panels

We have developed new online panels that will enable us to seek customer and stakeholder views about aspects of our service. We'll be using these to seek views across all aspects of our business – and they will be an additional tool for engagement.

E-Consultations

All of our consultations are published online using our 'e-consultation tool' which allows customers and stakeholders to share their views and comments with us and shape our decisions. Previously EPAC and RaLFAC Committees were used to obtain views on consultations – now everyone is able to comment using this system. We will use the national and local groups and approaches detailed in the consultation to ensure people are aware of this service / specific consultations.

All of these approaches will help to support the Environment Agency's future approaches to engagement and allow communities to be reached in a flexible and effective way without the traditional structure of Advisory Committees. The EA are committed to using social media to provide information transparently – nationally and locally – and to enable partnership working with civil society.

Annex E – Case Study: EA South West future engagement with fisheries and biodiversity stakeholders and partners

EA South West (EA) has a number of ways to engage with angling and biodiversity stakeholders – and have developed this further since the proposed abolition of RaLFACs. Key examples are detailed below.

South West Rivers Association

The South West Rivers Association (SWRA) is a political lobbying body representing around 20 salmon and sea trout rivers in the South West. The SWRA were the body who, during the Fisheries Review of 2000, recommended that fisheries work and money should be taken out of the Environment Agency and given to private bodies. Two SWRA/EA meetings per year are attended by managers to discuss our high level approach to fisheries matters, including operational delivery. The EA also attends their quarterly Council meetings to answer questions of policy enactment around hot topics such as fish stocking, netting and land-use impacts.

Rivers Trusts

There are 2 Rivers Trusts in the South West – West Country Rivers Trust (WRT) in Devon and Cornwall, and Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust (WCSRT) in Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire. The EA has regular high level liaison meetings with each Trust to discuss partnership working and to share best practice. The WRT have taken on many projects related to Water Framework Directive (WFD) delivery, including fish passes and habitat improvements. Many of the local fisheries interests are supportive of the rivers trust activities. With WCSRT, the EA are helping to fund a Project Officer to help them build capacity to deliver WFD improvements. We're developing a National Memorandum of Understanding with Rivers Trusts to make our partnership working even easier and to allow us to share data more easily.

Environment Agency-led liaison

EA South West holds a local fisheries Forum meeting twice a year in each area. These are aimed specifically at angling interests and include representatives from rivers trusts, salmon netting and fish farming. The agendas are set jointly with local members inputting their own issues and initiatives. Generally, these meetings are funded and hosted by the Environment Agency. In addition locally specific Coarse Fish Seminars are held throughout South West as many of the other meetings are salmon/trout-centric. These Seminars are attended by around 100 external people from coarse fishing clubs, private fisheries, fisheries consultants and anglers. They aim to raise and debate issues of local concern and provide a mechanism of linking local people to national strategies.

The EA also runs some specific issue-led meetings such as the Hampshire Avon Salmon Group about issues specific to salmon stocks on this specially designated salmon river. Local interested people attend and the meeting is used to educate, inform and direct local support for action on the ground. The EA attend a regional Hatchery Forum led by river associations, in order to guide local interests in their fish stocking programmes and to ensure best use of resources, including fish for spawning.

External-led liaison

The national Angling Trust (AT) holds a quarterly regional forum meeting. EA South West provides funding nationally to support an AT Regional Officer to help build up the effectiveness of these regional forum meetings.

The Angling Development Board (ADB) is tasked with promoting angling across the country. EA South West has committed funding to provide a local ADB Angling Development Officer to help build civil society capacity so as to move towards more of a 'Big Society'-led approach to developing and promoting angling locally.

In Devon, local fishing associations have set up River Association Partnership Meetings in order to liaise with local EA staff to help deliver a more integrated, civil society approach to river improvements, especially directed at Water Framework Directive work. These have been very well received and have already led to projects on the ground led by external people with expert advice from EA staff.

Wildlife Trusts have also set up partnership meetings following the proposed cessation of RaLFACs. EA staff attend many of these meetings to discuss joint working and to ensure co-ordination of workplans.

Individual angling clubs hold Annual General Meetings to which EA staff are invited so as to give the grass roots angler the information normally only supplied to club officials in high level meetings. This is a great way of gathering local issues and intelligence. At these meetings the EA receive a lot of feedback on how they are doing as an organisation and on how they are seen to be spending rod licence money. This feedback helps the EA to develop ways of working and to prioritise their work to fit local needs.

Post- RaLFAC electronic network

The South West RaLFAC Chair has set up an electronic group of interested fisheries and biodiversity externals to which is sent a regular briefing of local and national issues. This ensures that those from RaLFAC, along with a much bigger added audience, receive up to date information and briefings on fisheries and biodiversity matters. This will be continued and developed into the future.