

# science summary

## Managing flood risk through effective stakeholder engagement: a scoping study on the Aire and Calder

During spring 2005, researchers from the consultancy Whole Systems Development undertook a scoping study to establish appropriate and realistic ways for the Environment Agency to engage with stakeholders in the development of strategic Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMPs) for the rivers Aire and Calder.

The study found that many significant stakeholders in the Aire and Calder catchments were not clear about the purpose of CFMPs and how they could contribute to them. Many expressed hope that CFMPs would be the basis for partnership working on integrated, holistic, long-term catchment plans for water management and flooding of all types. This hope is consistent with the approaches expressed in Defra's *Making Space for Water*. But stakeholders feared that in practice, CFMPs were narrowly focused on improving hard defences on main river courses and that consultation with stakeholders was little more than a box-ticking exercise that the Environment Agency had to do. In short, they felt that CFMPs might be little more than old wine in new bottles.

To a degree, the study also found a similar confusion about the overall direction of the CFMP philosophy, approach and process among Environment Agency staff. Despite these uncertainties, personal relationships at the area level between Environment Agency staff and stakeholders were good.

The report makes the following recommendations:

1. There needs to be a single agreed narrative about what CFMPs are for and who they are aimed at. This needs to embrace clearly the philosophy and approach expressed in Defra policy in *Making Space for Water*. It should explain links to the Water Framework Directive River Basin planning process and other land use plans. The River Teign model plan offers a starting point for this.

2. This narrative needs to be brief and written in plain English.

3. The Environment Agency should build partnerships with stakeholders as early as possible in the CFMP. This should start with dialogue between all stakeholders on the purpose and role of CFMPs and the relationships needed for their development, implementation and renewal. The dialogue should identify the types of relationship required at different times and for different purposes – clarifying where, for example, partnership, consultation and information giving are needed.

4. Through this inclusive dialogue approach the Environment Agency would not only clarify its relationships with other stakeholders in the overall CFMP process, but also encourage stakeholders to develop partnership relationships with each other.

5. This scoping study should be followed by a demonstration project to develop the dialogue approach discussed above. The proposals outlined in the report include two linked streams for future work: the development of participatory stakeholder events and the establishment of learning frameworks both laterally and hierarchically inside and outside the Environment Agency. The purpose of the demonstration project would be to spread learning and good practice as rapidly as possible through the Environment Agency.

6. The scoping study findings suggest that building partnerships with stakeholders at the early stages of the CFMP development process would improve and speed-up the process, increase feedback, and increase stakeholders' ownership of the CFMP. Early partnership building would also lay the foundation for improving the implementation of holistic, catchment-wide water management and flood risk management of all types.

7. The lessons learned from this scoping study and the proposed demonstration study on the Aire and Calder should then be applied from the start of the CFMP development process for the Don and the Hull in 2006. The aim would be to improve, streamline and speed up the CFMP process and its future implementation.

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