Water Framework Directive & Flood Risk Management

Common Implementation Strategy
Activity "WFD and Hydromorphology"
Workshop
Manchester, UK

26-27 February 2008

KEY CONCLUSIONS

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Introduction

The aim of the conference was to discuss progress within Member States in implementing the Water Framework Directive requirements on Hydromorphology with a focus on Flood Risk Management (FRM) activities.

Progress was discussed in four key areas and key issues identified together with recommendations for future work under the Common Implementation Strategy. The four areas were:

- Links between River Basin Management Programmes (RBMPs) and FRM activities
- FRM-based Measures for RBMPs
- Designation of artificial and heavily modified water bodies (AWB/HMWB)
- Article 4(7) exemptions for new modifications

A series of results were identified along with the identification of opportunities and recommendations for future activities.

The conference was the 2nd workshop under Phase II (2007-2009) of the CIS activity "WFD and Hydromorphology" organised by lead countries UK and Germany in cooperation with the EU-Commission. The conference consisted of a general plenary session covering CIS progress to date, an overview of key activities and working groups the main ones being the Hydromorphology Activity & Working Group F on Floods as well as workshops on the four key areas and plenary sessions.

More than 75 participants from 19 Member States and Norway, the EU-Commission, stakeholders and non-governmental organisations attended the conference.

These key findings and conclusions as well as the workshop proceedings report will be presented to the Floods Working Group in April, to the Strategic Co-ordination Group in May and to Water Directors in June.

Key Findings and Conclusions

General outcomes

- Communication and transparency of mechanisms, related to hydromorphology and flood risk management measures, both in terms of designation of water bodies as heavily modified water bodies (HMWB) or in relation to artificial water bodies (AWB) as well as assessment of good ecological potential (GEP), for benefit of stakeholders is essential.

- Pilots are in place in some Member States which provide win-win solutions between WFD ecological status/potential benefit and FRM at the local and planning levels. If considered as good practice these

should feed into CIS work through for instance the case studies document of Hydromorphology activity, Working Group F (WG-F) on Floods, the Strategic Steering Group on Climate Change and Working Group A on Ecological Status.

- Need to give greater consideration to the integration of coastal issues into Flood Risk management and River Basin management (where applicable).

Links between RBMPs and Flood Risk management activities and measures

- Inclusion of FRM planning activity into first round of RBMPs is definitely possible, but there is a need to be realistic about level of genuine coordination between WFD and FRM (variation across MS).

- This could vary from basic signposting of existing FRM documents within River Basin Management Plans through to integrated planning where existing FRM plans are embedded with the RBMPs. A variety of levels of integration currently exist across Member States.

- There is a need to have a coherent approach to all aspects of the hydrological cycle in the first RBMP, including flood risk. Multi-benefit solutions should be preferred and measures increasing flood risk must be avoided. The climate change proofing of RBMPs provides an opportunity to consider flooding adequately.

- There is a need to include basic information in the first RBMP on the types and causes of flooding e.g. urban surface run-off/ coastal/fluvial/ice jamming etc. As well as the effects of each specific type on morphology, as flood risk management solutions for each of these cause different hydromorphological pressures. This issue needs to be addressed in urban as well as rural areas.

- Modification of maintenance and withdrawal of obsolete obstacles and flood defence structures as well as providing small streams and rivers room for both morphological development and flood storage may reduce the flood risk and improve natural recovery. Recovery will take time and natural structures and changes caused by flooding should be left intact, where this is compatible with sustainable human use of the water body. This approach requires careful communication. An integrated approach considering the whole stretch of the river basin is required to ensure sustainable flood risk management.

- Greater emphasis on integration of fluvial and coastal planning is required. RBMPs and FRM planning should consider identification of joint probability scenarios for flood events as well as morphological and ecological effects of flood risk management. It is recommended to address coastal flooding in the hydromorphology activity and in WG-F.

- There is a need to consider planning mechanisms and resources (financial) for restoration at the earliest stage possible as these are often barriers to delivery. Recommendation for further comparison and trialling (Hydromorphology Activity & WG-F). There is a need to address the distribution of costs on the catchment scale.

- At present there are a whole range of measures which can be implemented to both have flood risk benefits and ensure the environmental objectives of the Water Framework Directive are met. Such measures are highly site dependent and care needs to be exercised in understanding a hydrological system so flood risk benefits are yielded and flood risk is not compromised. Further information exchange on good practice examples is recommended.

Designation of artificial and heavily modified water bodies (AWB/HMWB)

- Some Member States stated that the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) guidance to designation of AWB/HMWB was followed, however they considered that differing approaches and levels of adherence were necessary to apply. Some Member States for instance apply a quick designation methodology and focus efforts on most difficult cases and use oriented pilot studies.

- Expert judgement has often been used to undertake designation, which requires a more transparent approach. Flood risk management measures are seldom the only reason for designation AWB/HMWB.

- Communication is important, particularly on the topic of transparency of AWB/HMWB designation and the comparability of the approaches. We need to improve communication on the stringency of Good Ecological Potential (GEP), to offset the negative public perception of AWB/HMWB, since the quality objectives as defined by the GEP does not necessarily mean a lower level of ambition and many ecological elements and chemical status are still the same.

- Further links should be made between the Hydromorphology Activity and Working Group A (Ecological Classification) in relation to classification of Good Ecological Potential. This should be progressed before organising the proposed workshop on classification of GEP.

- Stakeholders (especially NGOs) expressed some disappointment at level of consultation on designation so far. Additional opportunities for stakeholder engagement required in AWB/HMWB designation process. This could be addressed through the announced 2009 EC stakeholder conference on Public Participation and River Basin Management Planning.

Article 4(7) exemptions for new modifications

- To date, delegates expressed that there would only be a limited use of article 4 (7) for the specific purpose of new flood defence infrastructure, as planned flood management measures are not foreseen to lead to a deterioration of the status of relevant water bodies, but it was however felt that the use may grow with the increased need for climate change adaptation, and this article provides procedures and requirements for striking the right balance between different sustainable human development objectives.

- There is a need to consider impact of smaller cumulative modifications when using article 4 (7). The role of long term land use developments in relation to the use of 4 (7) also needs further consideration.

- There is a need to maximise synergies in carrying out the assessment with other environmental impact requirements, e.g. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) Directives to fulfil the requirements of article 4 (7) (WFD).

- Article 4 (7) provides an opportunity for environmental and sustainable FRM consideration, and early consideration on better environmental options and national guidance on how to apply 4 (7) is important.

- Member States would benefit from further comparison and information sharing on application of article 4 (7). (Recommendation to the Exemptions Drafting Group and the Hydromorphology Activity Group).

- Forward planning of measures should, where possible be included in the first and subsequent river basin cycles, however it is possible to apply new developments & modifications within the cycles.