Blueprint for Water
WATER PEOPLE NATURE

Wildlife and Countryside LINK

Water Resources South East Resilience Framework Feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to input into your resilience framework. Unfortunately, due to lack of capacity within the Blueprint for Water membership, we have been unable to go through our usual detailed sign on process. Please, therefore, take this feedback as a note from the Acting Chair of Blueprint for Water, Ali Morse.

Q1. Are the four systems we've suggested the right core systems for a regional multi-sector resilience plan? If not, which systems should we consider?

- The Naturally Resilient Project, delivered by Blueprint for Water in partnership with the Water Industry considered the interplays between resilience in the water sector and the natural environment, highlighting how resilience in the two systems is co-dependent. We therefore welcome WRSE's recognition of the natural environment as a core system and one which underpins business resilience. This drives a need to focus on nature-based solutions to climate change, including building resilience through mitigation measures. Find the report here.
- In considering the resilience of the environment there is a need to account for all uses of water, ensuring sufficient supplies to maintain watercourses, wetlands and protected sites, and not just the communities, industry, agriculture and power generation that require a water supply. The needs of EVERY sector must be considered.
- An approach which properly considers the resilience of the environment is needed to ensure that industry obligations and aspirations are achieved, including compliance with environmental legislation (including the forthcoming Environment Bill), the Industry's commitment to achieving net zero, and wider contributions to a green recovery in line with the Industry's Commitment to "enshrine what it means to operate in the public interest".

Q2. Do the three characteristics of our framework – Reliability, Adaptability and Evolvability – cover the key elements of resilience? If not, what other characteristics should we consider?

- This section outline's WRSE's plan to develop 'a best value, multi-sector regional resilience plan'; it is vital that best value is defined in broad terms, encompassing environmental and social benefits rather than narrow economic value, if the plan is to truly build in benefits to the 4 core systems identified.
- The characteristics resonate with the definition of resilience developed by the Naturally Resilient project: "**Resilience is the extent to which a system can withstand stressors and continue to provide benefits in the long term. Improving resilience requires taking into account the system dynamics and implementing effective measures to facilitate long-term flows of benefits, whilst protecting and enhancing society, the environment and the economy."** Essentially, key characteristics include resistance to and recoverability from shocks and stressors, - or Reliability, Adaptability and Evolvability.
- The environment is an essential cog in these three characteristics. Particularly regarding Adaptability and Evolvability, environmentally-focussed delivery such as green infrastructure is more likely to stand the test of time, and to mitigate (in the same way that nature-based solution to carbon storage also reduce the *effects* of climate change, ecosystem approaches

in the water industry can provide similar benefits, e.g. treatment wetlands can enable whole networks to function better, improving quality, and also potentially resource management).

Q3. Do you think looking at testing the resilience of options and systems in this way will help deliver a more comprehensive plan?

- Potentially, although it is important that when thinking about the water environment system that resilience is considered not just in the reactive sense; resilience shouldn't just be about a good response/recovery once disasters hits, but about mitigating the risk (e.g. by using nature-based solution). The testing must ensure that proactive approaches are considered. The Naturally Resilient project shows that building resilience into the water environment will help the water industry to be more resilient to shock (and consequently cyclically benefit the environment).
- Regarding 'Undertaking assessments and generating scores' the Naturally Resilient project found that metrics are currently lacking. (Please see section 4 of the report for more detail) Whilst analysis might be easier across water industry parameters (e.g. by using Performance Commitment metrics), assessment re resilience of the environment is more complex. We would be interested in how this would work in practice.

Q4. Are the sub-metrics we've chosen appropriate and, if not, which others should we consider? Do you think we should include metrics which can't be fully objective?

- As outlined above, metrics regarding the environment are complex. For example, R4 – frequency/extent of drought order/permit effects on water bodies – how will resilience in terms of the environment/biodiversity be considered? Will factors be weighted, and how will 'known' versus 'potential' impacts be considered? How will the scoring balance negative and positive impacts, including the provision of mitigation (for example, by taking an approach akin to that for SEA/HRA)?
- Whilst resilience in core systems will often be complementary, this won't always be the case - How will trade-offs between industry/agriculture vs environmental resilience feature in the metrics? Whilst all are important, there should be recognition of the role that the environment plays in building resilience into other sectors. This 'underpinning' role should also be considered when looking at the environmental scenarios set out in Appendix 4 of the National Framework; in regional discussions on level of ambition, the need to set sufficient water aside for the environment must be informed not only by drivers for the 'environment's sake' but also in recognition of the role that the environment plays in wider system resilience.
- Metrics relating to different parameters or sectors will be measured differently so thought will need to be given to how to compare or combine different sub-metrics.
- We recognise that subjective sub-metrics will be necessary in some cases but wherever possible these should draw upon objective data to provide as much of the 'picture' as possible. In particular, metrics related to the environment may in part need to be subjective; this would be a concern if they were not considered to be of equal importance as the objective metrics that may be available relating to the other core systems. The nine

overarching metrics (informed by the 20 sub-metrics) would preferable be quantitative for ease of comparison and communication to stakeholders.

Q5. Do you believe changing our planning approach to a regional multi-sector resilience plan will help us plan better for future shocks and stresses

- Yes – the Naturally Resilient project (see section 8 of the report) identified collaborative working and multisector approaches as being important in establishing a common view of resilience and in managing risks to resilience. Given the growing importance of regional planning (for example, as promoted through the Environment Bill) it would seem increasingly important to consider resilience risks at the regional scale.