

Rationalising the Main River Network: National Overview Consultation

February 2018

Blueprint for Water is a unique coalition of environmental, water efficiency, fisheries and angling organisations, part of the wider environmental NGO coalition, Wildlife and Countryside Link. Blueprint members come together to form a powerful joint voice across a range of issues.

This response is supported by:

- Angling Trust
- Rewilding Britain
- Rivers Trust
- RSPB
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

We welcome the hard work that has gone into ensuring that the pilot projects going ahead are fit for purpose and delaying those projects where issues have yet to be resolved. We also welcome the effort that has been made in engaging with us in the process. Although we support the progress of the three pilots, we remain concerned about rolling out demaining further.

The nine step process, if undertaken robustly, plays a key role in identifying potential issues with handing over flood management responsibility. Through this process the Environment Agency have identified pilot projects that need further work to resolve outstanding issues before being confident in demaining. The identification of such issues, and those potentially affecting the environment in particular, and the decision not to push ahead, is reassuring. However, we need assurance that any further schemes put forward will be undertaken with the same level of scrutiny with which the pilot projects were undertaken. For example, in understanding whether suitable bye-laws and biodiversity action plan are in place and good engagement with Natural England influences decision making. We welcome the development of comprehensive handover packs, although these should make clear any gaps in data and information.

The original announcement from ADA about the demaining pilots suggested that they would also be used to assess how effectively IDBs are governed and report on their work. This is important in improving the local accountability of IDBs. We would hope that decisions about the transfer of responsibility for watercourse maintenance would consider the constitution of a candidate IDB to ensure that it adequately reflects the wider interests of those who fund it and for such an IDB to be able to demonstrate a good track record in reporting and engaging stakeholders in its work.

We recommend that the Environment Agency monitors the environmental management of watercourses affected by these demaining pilots over coming years, to ensure that there is no negative impact of the decision on wildlife. This information can be used for adaptive management and influencing decisions on how any potential future demaining projects are undertaken.

It is important that these pilots are not used to promote roll out of demaining as it is clear that these sites were chosen on the basis of having structures and good management already in



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place. Capacity and ability of risk management authorities to effectively take on responsibility is hugely variable, especially regarding ensuring sensitive environmental management. As such the pilots should be used to highlight process and good practice. Any future remaining sites should be considered equally robustly as the current pilots on a case by case basis.



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