

River Basin Management Planning update paper for North East LAG

General

SEPA’s river basin planning unit has been rolling out delivery of the second river basin management plans since they were published end of 2015. We are two and a half years into the second cycle.

Overall classification for North East is that some catchments are excellent and some need a lot of improvements. Less than half (44%) are already at High or Good, and just over half (56%) are at Moderate, Poor or Bad status. Catchments in this geographical area (with waterbody objectives in RBMP2) are listed in Appendix 1.

For those water bodies at less than good status, what were the reasons and what needs to be done about them? The majority are for improving modifications to physical condition (87 water bodies) or removing barriers to fish migration (58), or Rural diffuse pollution which is affecting 59 water bodies.

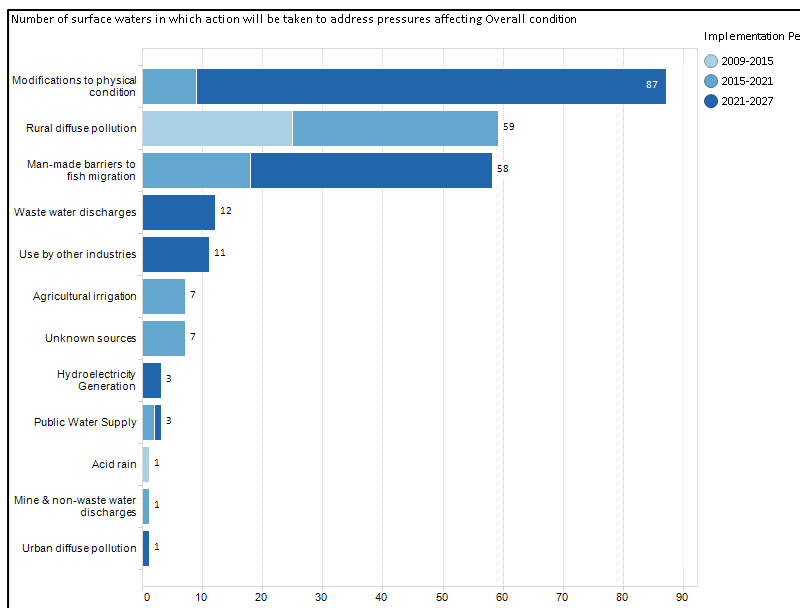


Figure 1. Number of water bodies where action is needed, by RBMP2 themes and timescales

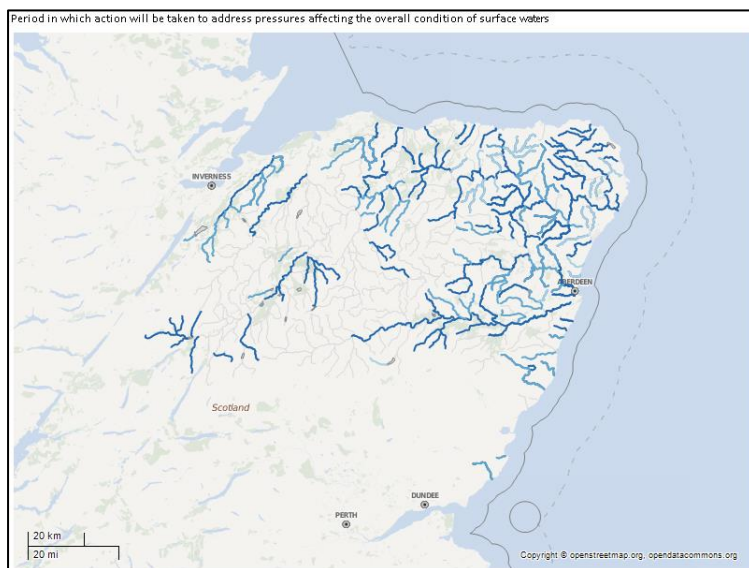


Figure 2. Water bodies in North East where action is needed under RBMP2

Man-made barriers to fish migration/ easing fish passage

SEPA's focus this cycle has been on removing barriers to fish migration and restoring degraded rivers, particularly where we can work with others and maximise benefits for communities. Over 300 waterbodies nationally are downgraded for barriers. The barriers have been split into three categories, described below.

Actives – These are generally the larger structures such as dams for hydropower and drinking water supply, but can be any weir or dam that is in active use, for some business purpose. This includes distillery weirs, for example. SEPA is working with the owners to make improvements via the CAR regulatory process. Already 6 in north east are completed, remainder are on track.

Historics – These are old abandoned weirs with no current use. These are being screened and given a desk based assessment by the RBMP team currently, to ensure our data is correct, and where its possible to go forward under a Water Environment Fund (WEF) project, it is taken forward that way. There are approx. 50 historic barriers in North East AG area – half are complete already, either screened out as providing very little upstream habitat benefit, or reassessed as passable or real upgardes.

Assets – These are crossing structures such as culverts and bridges which are largely maintained for transport purposes. SEPA RBMP team has been communicating with the responsible authorities about these structures and how to improve them for fish passage. There are at least 20 in the North East AG area, that we know of, with 10 already complete. Timescales to plan and implement works are likely to be several years and options are likely to be relatively inexpensive, such as fitting baffles into a culvert or building pre-weirs before a bridge apron. SEPA staff will have been in touch with you already about those in your areas. We are finding that a substantial amount are being screened out once we take a closer look at the habitat quality upstream.

Modifications to physical condition/ River Restoration

SEPA is working with partners to deliver successful river restoration projects. These can often have additional benefits such as reducing flood risk, increasing access to green or blue spaces, improving recreational value or biodiversity. Where these are located close to communities that is where the real additional benefits can be realised.

Where there are flood actions and RBMP objectives on the same water body these should be considered together, particularly including natural flood management options and opportunities for morphology projects into any flood studies.

Funding

The Scottish Government has increased the amount of funding available for river restoration. Potential projects must meet WEF priority criteria, such as improving Water Framework Directive ecological status and benefiting large communities. Any projects which aim to reduce flood risk for sizeable communities or incorporate recreational space could match. WEF is not an alternative source of funding for flood protection works, however it can be used to add additional benefits to a flood project. There is a limited list for this year but more project opportunities in future. Please talk to your RBMP co-ordinator about project opportunities.

Although work to remove or ease redundant structures that are owned by local authorities is not eligible for WEF funding, the Scottish Government may provide up to 75% of the costs. SEPA can help with this process through the usual WEF appraisal route.

For asset barriers which are local authority responsibility, funding should come from the council as part of their maintenance or capital budgets for these structures, which are normally transport routes. SEPA can provide some technical support, such as assessing the structure for fish passage, suggesting fish passage solutions. We will screen and scope the barriers and work with you on improvement plans. The council would be expected to do their own assessments and make independent proposals.

Remediation notices

SEPA has had new powers of Remediation notices since April 2016. How these will work is not finalised yet. SEPA will provide some technical support, such as scoping the barrier in-house and providing a technical report to the LA.

Other - Mimas tool and Morphology

There is a new classification tool in development for how SEPA assesses physical condition of water bodies. Mimas 1 was used for the first river basin plans. It has been through an upgrade and Mimas 2 will be consulted on prior to implementation for future classifications.

Appendix 1.

These are the catchments in RBMP2 which have been selected as basis for data in this paper

Catchment

Aberdeen South

Coastal

Banff Coastal

Bervie Water

Buchan Coastal

Kincardine and Angus

Coastal

River Dee (Grampian)

River Deveron

River Don

River Findhorn

River Lossie

River Nairn

River Spey

River Ugie

River Ythan

Spey Bay Coastal