

A vision for land and water management in the Government's 25 year environment plan



A unique chance to develop forward thinking and effective policies

The Government's 25 year environment plan and subsequent reform of our agricultural system is an opportunity to bring together water, land and food into one overarching management framework with climate resilient environments, infrastructure and places to live and work.

To achieve the government's ambitious target to leave the environment in a better state than was inherited, the plan should be genuinely cross-government with Prime Ministerial support and owned collectively by appropriate departments (including Defra, DCLG and BEIS). This is vital so that policies across government are integrated to reach this common goal. In the past many of the environmental failures and declines have been, at least in part, because different functions within government have operated in isolation, failing to consider wider impacts of policies or decisions. The plan must also make the most of its 25 year time horizon, setting out a strong vision for the environment in the 2040s, as well as milestones so progress can be assessed, and plans and policies adjusted accordingly.



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CIWEM is the leading independent Chartered professional body for water and environmental professionals, promoting excellence within the sector

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CIWEM's three aims for the 25 year environment plan

1. The transition of governance arrangements to the catchment scale

The catchment based approach should be mandated as the key mechanism to ensure integrated land and water management. Well-supported and resourced catchment partnerships should ensure that local priorities are identified through strong stakeholder engagement and delivered effectively, in alignment with national environmental, agricultural, planning and economic policies.

2. A review of farm payments to deliver progressive agriculture and land management

The UK needs an economically viable agricultural sector which can also effectively enable farmers, who manage most of our landscape, to also deliver wider benefits. The plan should create a new farm payments system which minimises risks to farm incomes from factors such as price volatility, whilst providing farmers with an income stream associated with providing an extensive range of benefits to society. These benefits might be anything from flood storage to forestation for carbon sequestration, to protecting pollinator species or valuable landscapes. They would be prioritised at the catchment scale, using a natural capital accounting and valuation approach, and commissioned by government on behalf of society with farmers contracted to deliver them.

3. Monitoring and reporting to achieve the government's vision

The plan should set out the terms of reference for a new statutory body to provide genuinely independent scrutiny, monitoring and to test all relevant policies against the government's vision and report back regularly to Parliament.



The 25 year environment plan should set out a strong vision for the environment in the 2040s, as well as milestones so progress can be assessed and plans and policies adjusted accordingly

The transition of governance arrangements to the catchment scale

CIWEM considers that the catchment level¹ is the most appropriate scale to organise and plan effective land and water management. There are examples where this works well; now the approach should be expanded.

Launched in 2011, Defra's catchment based approach (CaBA) was originally devised to achieve water quality objectives required under the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), alongside enhancements to biodiversity, reductions in flood risk, increased resilience to climate change and greater engagement between the local community and their environment. These are achieved more efficiently by using an integrated 'systems approach' which sets out collaborative actions that are commonly more cost-beneficial than projects tackling single issues. Partners share the cost burden, whilst still meeting their own objectives.

CaBA now has full national coverage in over one hundred catchments and delivers approximately £8 in value for every £1 invested. Initially heavily focused upon WFD objectives, increasingly partnerships are working to an integrated land, water, environment and local economy agenda and there are many examples of how this approach can deliver extensive benefits. However, CaBA relies mainly on voluntary contributions and engagement and to enable catchment partnerships to build on and mainstream best practice. Whilst some partnerships have extensive and diverse representation, others do not, so government should play a role in ensuring that all parties who should be engaged in management and decision making are involved.

There are growing calls for catchment partnerships to play more of a role in understanding the level and variety of flood risk at a catchment scale, prioritising the work of relevant risk management authorities, facilitating sharing of water resources and coordinating environmental programmes by farmers. For all partnerships to achieve their potential and deliver such a wider range of outcomes, there is a need for greater central government strategic oversight and facilitation providing a clear, expanded mandate to operate, which must be matched by an appropriate level of resources.

How it would work

- The framework should be coordinated at a national scale (by Defra or the Environment Agency) with a dedicated officer in each catchment and the ability to strategically coordinate activities between catchments where appropriate.
- Each catchment partnership should as a minimum include representation of all relevant environmental regulators and risk management authorities, including the local water company, lead local flood authority and local planning authorities, plus wider agricultural, business and

¹ As defined by the Environment Agency *management catchments* that it uses for managing availability of water for abstraction

industry, civil society and environmental interests (such as rivers trusts, who often currently play a very valuable role in leading or assisting catchment partnerships).

- Through the involvement of all appropriate stakeholders, catchment partnerships will be able to identify and consider the needs of any given catchment whether rural or urban. In taking such an approach, the 25 year environment plan could promote integrated approaches that add value to any land or water use schemes so that they maximise opportunities to deliver multiple benefits and/ or multifunctional spaces more effectively than is currently commonly achieved.
- Catchment partnerships should coordinate environmental programmes with other land use policies within the catchment. It should also advise on payments for ecosystem services schemes within the catchment or procurement of social benefits. With local planning authorities on board, it would ensure that environmental and agricultural priorities are as closely aligned as possible with those of housing and wider development (such as transport and industry).



Farm payments that deliver progressive agriculture and land management

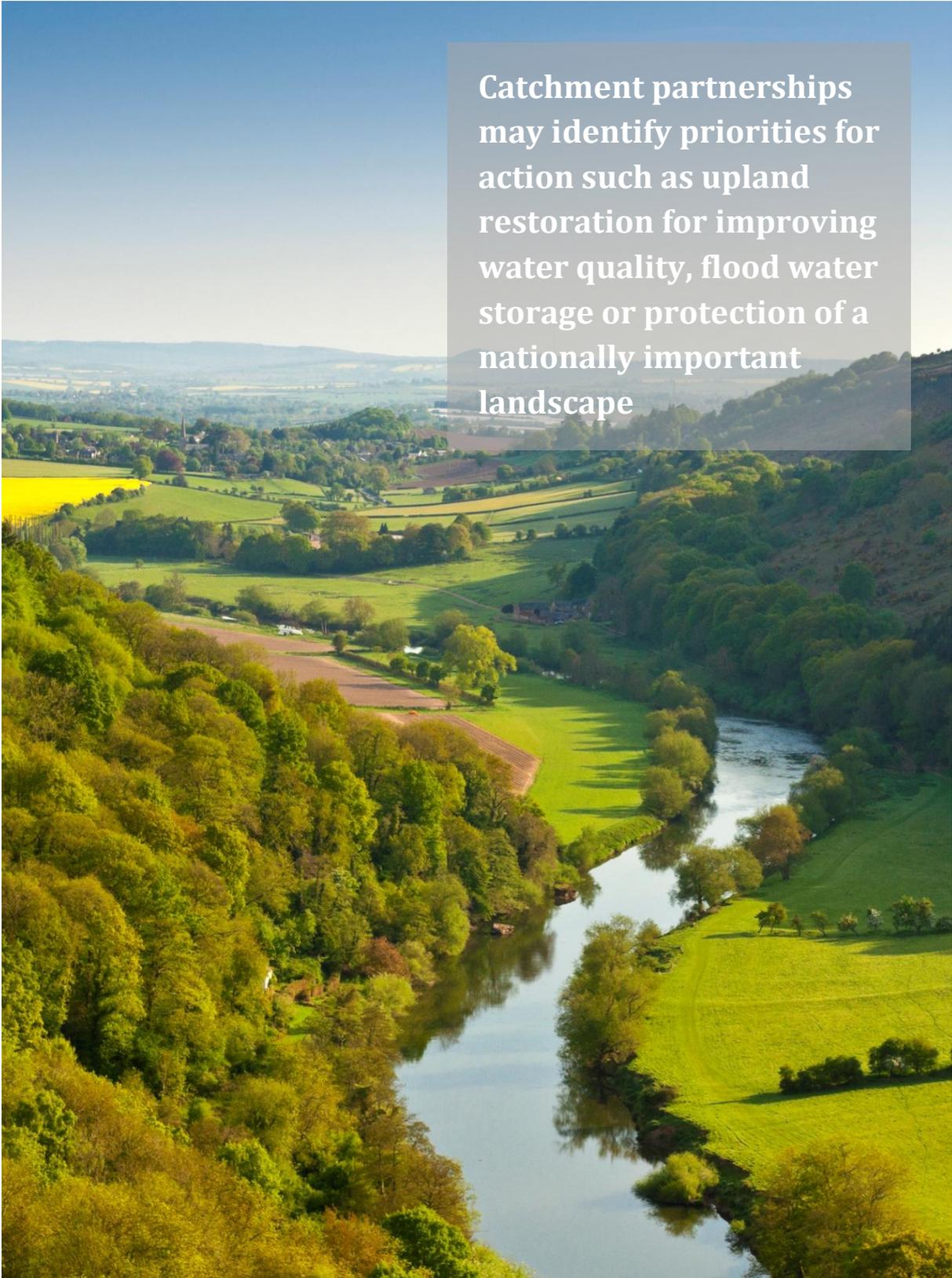
Following exit from the European Union, the UK's current regulations and subsidies will be able to be fine-tuned to suit UK needs. This will provide the opportunity to manage our landscape and wider environment to reduce pollution and deliver both agricultural productivity and broader social benefits.

Particularly in rural areas, agriculture represents the most active form of land management. Seventy percent of farmers currently receive support from agri-environment schemes. It is vital that the level of funding currently received from the Common Agricultural Policy (~£3.5bn) is maintained after 2022, if the government is to achieve its aim of leaving the environment in a better state than it inherited it. This is because without farmers, tax payers would have to pay dedicated land managers to maintain our environment. As farmers work the land to produce food, it makes sense to help them do so in a way which also protects and enhances the health of our environment and the services its ecosystems provide to society – like pollination, carbon sequestration, water storage or purification.

Farm businesses are exposed to many risks which might put their operations in jeopardy, for example the very significant impacts weather variations can have on harvests. For farmers to manage land in a way which allows them to care for the environment as well as produce food, they need to be secure in their business.

In recent years farm biodiversity and soil fertility have been declining and diffuse pollution from agriculture has become the most frequent cause of WFD failures. Processes at water treatment works to address agricultural pollution are expensive, energy intensive and ultimately increase customer bills. It is much more cost-effective to prevent pollution at its source than to treat it at the 'end-of-pipe'. Additionally, such pollution often means losses of soil and valuable nutrients to the farmer, washed away in water which runs off the land into rivers and ultimately, the sea, resulting in serious reductions in soil fertility. Catchment sensitive farming techniques have proven effective at minimising these farm nutrient losses, with more efficient use of fertilisers and improved levels of carbon sequestration. They also deliver cleaner water, meaning less treatment is needed further downstream.

Catchment partnerships would identify certain priorities for action to maintain and improve the environment, or to provide certain services to communities or wider society, such as upland restoration for flood water storage or protection of a nationally important landscape. Farmers in appropriate locations to deliver such services should be commissioned by government, through the catchment partnership, and be paid accordingly. This may be at the individual farm scale or in partnership with several neighbouring farms.



Catchment partnerships may identify priorities for action such as upland restoration for improving water quality, flood water storage or protection of a nationally important landscape

Upon leaving the EU (and dependent on the form of any potential trade deal) there may be scope for more innovative schemes such as extended producer responsibility and labelling as farm welfare and environmental standards may become a greater concern to consumers. Improved labelling schemes, such as an enhanced Red Tractor label could be used to identify farmers that are going further to deliver wider societal and environmental benefits. Extended producer responsibility could encourage fertiliser companies to work more closely with farmers to use their products responsibly, or supply chain assurance could see more supermarkets working closely with their farmers to employ catchment sensitive techniques.

How it would work

- The government should develop an approach to farm payments which ensures a basic level of support is available to farmers to provide a buffer against price volatility in food markets, to provide them with the security they need. This investment should be contingent on minimum standards being met for animal welfare, soil protection, biodiversity and water quality.
- Schemes which deliver wider societal benefits, ecosystem services and/ or improving natural capital would be eligible for further financial support as prioritised and coordinated by the catchment partnership.
- The plan should set out the process to align future WFD management cycles with those of water industry investment periods (AMPs) to enable more effective planning and provide for more efficient delivery.
- The plan should commit to review and enhance the scope of farm assurance scheme labels and their promotion to consumers, engaging with supply chains from 'farm to fork' and bringing the power of big retailers to bear on responsible management of our environment.



As farmers work the land to produce food, it makes sense to help them do so in a way which also protects and enhances the health of our environment and the services its ecosystems provide to society

Monitoring and reporting to achieve the government's vision

The UK has a unique chance to develop forward thinking and effective policies that are tailored to the specific needs of our economy, environment and society.

Leaving the EU will bring an end to the investigative and reporting role of the European Commission and the direct jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, which enables civil society to challenge policy when governments fall short. An independent, well-resourced expert body reporting to each of the four Assemblies/ Parliaments should be created to take on this role after exit. The Committee on Climate Change provides a good example of an independent organisation providing sufficient scrutiny of this kind.

How it would work

- The plan should provide the terms of reference for a new body to undertake a reporting and investigative role. The new body should be created in forthcoming legislation which should also establish in law that environmental principles, such as the precautionary, and the polluter pays principles, must be followed, as these have not been included in the government's EU Withdrawal Bill.
- To ensure an appropriate level of independence and authority, the new body should be funded by, and directly accountable to, the UK Assemblies/ Parliaments, in a similar way to the National Audit Office.
- The plan should set out tangible targets and milestones and describe how monitoring of progress against these will take place. For example, monitoring whether targets relating to biodiversity indicators, WFD status or soil fertility have been met and the value these bring to the economy through natural capital accounting.
- The new body should identify any conflicting policy and priorities in differing parts and at different levels of government. It should work closely with the Natural Capital Committee, the Committee on Climate Change (particularly its Adaptation Sub-Committee) where there is common focus and with the National Infrastructure Commission to ensure that strategic scale plans and investment consider the natural environment and the added benefits of blue and green infrastructure.

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