

United Utilities - Sustainable Catchment Management

Sector: Water

Tools and techniques: Biodiversity and conservation

Awards for Excellence 2004 - Big Tick winner – The Shields Environmental Award

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United Utilities (UU) has a sustainable development policy, in place since 2002, dealing with the sustainable management of their catchments (the land from which they access drinking water). UU operate a total of 404 drinking and compensation water sources, feeding 145 operational water treatment works.

Processes: in the past, they experienced diffuse pollution and microbial contamination of raw water supplies. Biodiversity suffered from farming intensification, and yet many of UU's tenant farmers were struggling to make ends meet. This policy sets out a sustainable approach to protect and enhance water quality and quantity. UU also recognise the need for long-lasting development that protects and enhances the environment, conserves natural resources, maintains strong economic growth and supports the communities in which they operate.

Through consultation, they have been able to identify their key issues and significant impacts of interest to each stakeholder group. Stakeholders include employees, suppliers, investors, customers, community and Government.

Impact:

- As a result of the policy, good quality water is available to their treatment works, which is fundamental to a wholesome drinking water supply.
- Sustainable catchment management has enabled a water abstraction point to be re-opened. The availability of this abstraction point removes the need to pump water from an alternative source, which could cost up to £19,500 per annum.
- Sustainable management initiatives have now become integral to United Utilities' approach towards the development of broader management initiatives delivered at the catchment level.
- UU believe that their approach leads the way in managing water quality risks on catchments. Other water companies have expressed interest in their approach.
- Improvements in raw water quality from catchment management lead to reduced chemical usage and sludge production at water treatment works.
- Improved water quality, reduced sedimentation and soil re-hydration have led to the regeneration of heather moor and improved habitats for fish spawning and bird nesting.
- Through the provision of farm infrastructure, UU has helped farmers diversify their crops, leading to improved vegetation cover and species diversity.

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