**THE APPROACH ADOPTED TO THE ABBERTON SCHEME ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT**

**Introduction**

In 2007, Northumbrian Water Ltd. (NWL), now Northumbrian Water Group, submitted planning applications for the Abberton Scheme (see Box 1). Due to the extensive geographical spread of the Scheme, planning permission needed to be sought from four planning authorities across three counties.

**Box 1: The Abberton Scheme**

Following options appraisals, NWL decided to take forward a scheme that included the raising of Abberton Reservoir Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, which is located near Colchester, Essex, in order to increase its storage capacity. To support the raised reservoir, NWL applied for consent to increase abstraction from the River Ely Ouse near Denver (Norfolk) and increase conveyance of water from Denver to the reservoir by enhancing the capacity of an existing water transfer scheme, as part of which there was a need to construct two new long distance pipelines. The project is under construction and due to be operational during 2014.

AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Ltd. believes that the approach that was taken to preparing the ES played an important part in enabling the smooth process of obtaining planning permission. Aspects of this approach were described in a previous IEMA case study that was prepared by AMEC. This case study focuses on a different aspect of the approach, relating to the evolution of the Scheme.

**Dealing with scheme evolution**

The approach that we adopted with the Abberton Scheme, whereby EIA work started at an early stage in the design process, reflects good practice in environmental impact assessment (EIA). This enabled the Scheme design to evolve in response to new environmental information.

Some of the changes to the Scheme reflected the adoption of best practice, mitigation, enhancement or compensatory measures. We did not seek to differentiate these measures but instead labelled them all as ‘environmental measures’. We then checked with all the environmental specialists in our team to ensure that any measure would not unwittingly causing adverse as well as beneficial effects; we also sought the client’s approval for including the measures in the Scheme. Once included, they were treated not as an optional measure that the authority that determines the application could require but as a fixed part of the Scheme.

By the time of the design freeze, we were able to include in the Scheme description within the ES a list of incorporated environmental measures. All the environmental specialists then assessed the evolved Scheme incorporating these measures; there was no need to assess the Scheme in the absence of these measures because there was no intention of applying for such a Scheme. This contrasts with the approach that is taken by some other consultancies, which assess the development both excluding and including environmental measures.
Under our approach, the likely effectiveness of the various environmental measures was reflected in the assessment, so that if for any reason measures that were not likely to be effective were built into the scheme, they did not influence the results of the assessment.

**Benefits of the AMEC approach**

Our approach to preparing the Abberton ES (which is now our standard approach for ES preparation) delivered a number of significant benefits. The approach has been used successfully with a wide range of other developments including Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

- By making it clear that the defined environmental measures are part of the development that is being assessed, we avoid the uncertainty that often applies to others’ ESs as to whether ‘mitigation’ etc. is actually part of the development or being flagged as something that the developer could offer if pushed.
- By assessing the specific scheme for which consent is being sought (i.e. including all specified environmental measures), we ensure that interactions between different environmental topics are fully assessed (e.g. the landscape and ecological effects of a noise bund would be assessed whereas this might not happen if a noise bund is offered as potential mitigation).
- Our list of environmental measures for the Abberton Scheme was accompanied by a schedule detailing any monitoring that is required, who would have responsibility for implementing the measure and the mechanism for ensuring its delivery. This provides an excellent basis for helping determining authorities in deciding what planning conditions/agreements are needed which in turn plays a key part in helping to ensure that all relevant measures are delivered.

A similar approach has been adopted with more recent ESs, which in one recent case has been flagged by the Planning Inspectorate as being very helpful with regard to a (successful) Development Consent Order application.

- Our ESs are shorter than would be the case if were also to assess a hypothetical scheme that our client has no intention of constructing. This delivers costs savings to our client but also to determining authorities and consultees who have less to comment upon and improved clarity regarding what is being proposed as part of the scheme. This typically reduces the extent of the responses that are needed (helping to explain the absence of Regulation 19 requests with the Abberton Scheme). Our approach also makes our ESs easier for the general public to understand.

All in all, therefore, the evolved scheme approach and the approach to environmental measures that underpins it, gives the potential for a win-win scenario, benefitting the environment, the developer, the competent authority and other stakeholders - although perhaps not the consultant, who will have had less work to do!

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1 Hereafter referred to as AMEC

2 Regulation 22 requests under *The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 - SI No. 1824*

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