Effective use of EIA to ensure compliance with the Water Framework Directive - limiting the need for multiple assessments and lost time.

Alexander Scorey, of Hyder Consulting, discusses the integration of Water Framework Directive assessments within wider Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) practices to drive efficiencies in projects.

**The aim of the Water Framework Directive**

‘Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for the Community action in the field of water policy’, or the Water Framework Directive (WFD), was adopted by the European Union (EU) in 2000. It established a framework for maintaining and improving the quality of the coastal, estuarine, river, lake and ground waters and water bodies within the EU. This quality is derived from a number of chemical, biological and hydromorphological indicators which are used to report on the overall ‘status’ of each water body. The aim is for each water body to achieve ‘good’ status, which means that the water body has the optimum chemical, biological and hydromorphological qualities for a safe, clean and biodiverse water environment.

Every six years, each member of the EU must report on their progress in achieving the target of ‘good’ status in their water bodies. The United Kingdom reported in 2009 through the River Basin Management Plans, and will be reporting again in 2015.

Progress will have been made towards the achievement of ‘good’ status in all water bodies, however the target will not have been reached and further measures will be set out in the 2015 River Basin Management Plans to achieve this target.

**Achieving compliance with the Water Framework Directive**

Projects within, or that could potentially affect, the water environment must demonstrate that they will not cause a deterioration of the status of any water bodies within their zone of influence, or that they will not inhibit the future achievement of ‘good’ status of any water bodies within their zone of influence.

To demonstrate this compliance, an assessment must be made of the effect of the project on the various indicator criteria for each water body.

In order to integrate this assessment with other wider environmental assessments, such as EIA or HRA, an initial assessment should be made of the project against the WFD quality criteria. This can be undertaken during the scoping process of a statutory EIA or HRA.

Simple baseline data for each water body can be found within Appendix B of the 2009 River Basin Management Plans with more complex baseline data on the indicators used to classify water bodies within the UK to be found here: [http://www.wfduk.org/](http://www.wfduk.org/).

This information is useful in developing the context for an initial assessment and identifying the critical thresholds that a project must not affect, to achieve compliance.
This initial assessment should take a systematic approach in considering each aspect of the project during construction, operation and decommissioning (if applicable) individually, and identify whether an aspect could potentially compromise the achievement of the various chemical, biological or hydromorphological criteria of the water bodies in question. Dependent upon specific skills and experience, this assessment can often be done by an environmental coordinator which can save time and expense to project developers.

The outcome of this initial assessment should identify any potential effects from the project that could compromise the achievement of WFD objectives. This can then be used to scope more detailed assessment work required to demonstrate the necessary compliance. Initial assessments should be informed by consultation with the regulatory bodies (Environment Agency in England, Natural Resources Wales in Wales) and the outcomes should be discussed with them also to agree the methodology and scope of the assessment.

With the initial assessment undertaken concurrently with the EIA or HRA scoping, and early in the project, a comprehensive scope of works can be drawn up which covers all the survey and assessment requirements to comply with this legislation. This will minimise prohibitive costs and programme delays during the later stages of the projects. Also it is often the case that assessments required for an EIA or HRA are similar to those required for a WFD assessment, so the overlapping nature of the requirements can drive efficiencies within projects.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, by considering the WFD early in a project, engaging with the appropriate regulatory body, and integrating the process into wider environmental assessments, the burden of demonstrating compliance with the WFD can be greatly reduced for project developers.

*Hyder Consulting, July 2014.*

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