



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Essex Area Environment Group - Second Annual Report April 98 - March 99

Chairman's Introduction

This Report covers the third year of the AEG's work. We have continued to develop the themes of partnership between the Agency and a wide range of other parties, of raising awareness of the Agency's activities, and of giving Agency staff additional perspectives on their work. Members made valuable contributions to the LEAP process, particularly the completion of the North Essex LEAP and its publication in December. Education is developing as an important activity for the Agency, and members are becoming involved in this work.

In Eastern Area there have been a number of management changes, but the staff have continued to support the work of the AEG most effectively, despite increasing workloads arising particularly from new duties. We have increased our membership, building on our experience during the early years of the Agency's life. I would like to thank all Members of the Group (past and present) for their contributions to this evolving process.

JEFFREY JENKINSON
Chairman

AEG Membership

Name	Affiliation
Mr. J JENKINSON MVO	Ports Industry
Mr P BRADFORD	Essex & Suffolk Water
Mr J CHRISTY	Shell UK
Mr C DURDIN	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Mr DJ FISHER	Essex Local Flood Defence Committee
Mr K GREEN MBE	Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee
Mr P HOLLOWAY	Essex Angling Consultative Association
Mr G HUBERT	National Farmers' Union (from March 1999)
Mr BS HURLEY	Environmental Services Association
Cllr R LAWES	Tendring District Council (until August 1998)
Cllr R LEE	Thurrock Borough Council
Dr P LORNIE	Magnox Electric
Lt Col DL MACKAY	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Mr AJ McDOUGAL	National Power
Dr CF MASON	Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee
Ms C REID	English Nature
Cllr D ROBINSON	Essex County Council (from October 1998)
Mr R SMITH	Anglian Water Services
Cdr WA TWIST OBE	Crouch Harbour Authority (until August 1998)
Cllr P WREXHAM	Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Cllr M WILLIAMS	Braintree District Council (from March 1999)

Sub-Groups

North Essex LEAP

Mr J Jenkinson
Ms C Reid
Mr R Smith

South Essex LEAP

Mr J Jenkinson
Dr C. Mason
Mr. K Green
Mr P Holloway
Cllr P Wrexham
Mr P Bradford
Mr B Hurley
Mr A McDougal

Communications

Mr J Jenkinson
Mr C Durbin
Mr B Hurley
Cllr R Lee

Four business meetings were held during the year, in April, July, October and February 1999. An annual site visit took place in June 1998.

AEG Key Considerations

A wide range of subjects and issues were considered (see Appendix) many of which related to the Agency's 10 Point Action Plan. In addition to Local Environment Agency plans those topics giving rise to particular debate by members included **Water Use and Reuse (surface and waste water), Sustainable Urban Drainage, Consultation of Water Companies Asset Management Plans (AMP3), Review of the role of AEGs, Waste Operator's view of the Environment Agency, the Thames Estuary Management Plan, Disposal of Sewage Sludge, and the Value of Multidisciplinary and Partnership Approach to Environmental Enhancement.** Members also had the opportunity to discuss their feedback on issues that were felt to be important over the coming year. Links between the Agency's 10 Point Action Plan and the local focus for this were also considered important and views were fed through to Region.

Consideration of the **Disposal of Sewage Sludge to Land** followed a presentation about the Government sponsored research and development project looking at the basis of the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 and the Code of Practice for the Agricultural Use of Sewage Sludge. Agriculture is the dominant land use in much of Essex and agricultural activities are closely related to environmental quality. Members also received Parliamentary reports and officers explained reasons for supporting the beneficial use of sewage sludge on agricultural land provided that this was carried out in a sustainable way, met the criteria for Best Practicable Environmental Option and – importantly – caused no harm to human health. Members felt that this was an important and complex subject that included the role taken by supermarkets in dictating to farmers how their products should be grown. This being accompanied by a growing refusal on the part of supermarkets to accept products grown on land treated with sewage sludge. It was important to ensure that the agricultural route for disposal of sludge in an environmentally sustainable way was not lost. This subject had been excluded from the Agency's document **Outlook for the Environment** and following representations to Region it was subsequently included.

Members had a number of opportunities to contribute to the **AMP3 Consultation** and to receive feedback from officers. This included awareness of the **Water Companies' submission (The Cost of Quality)** and the Agency's advice to the Secretary of State (**A Price Worth Paying**). In addition members discussed a summary of the Agency's consultation on priorities in investment by water companies in environmental improvement as part of the AMP3 process (**Responses to : Outlook for the Environment**). Of the 160 replies received by the Agency nationally, 14 came from members of the Essex and the Norfolk and Suffolk Area Environment Groups. Responses to the consultation indicated a wish to see a wide range of environmental improvements. Highest amongst these nationally were those dealing with water leakage, wetlands and river water quality. Responses from AEG Members had reflected these outcomes although the water company representative on the AEG expressed

concern that the AMP3 process might raise expectations that could not be fulfilled. The eventual outcome from DETR supporting environmental initiatives was a particularly pleasing outcome for Members.

These themes were expanded to cover the related subject of Sustainable Urban Drainage. Members received a copy of the Agency's environmental Good Practice Guide on this topic which had also been distributed to relevant managers in all local planning authorities. The Guide includes a comparison of conventional urban drainage systems and sustainable approaches designed to promote infiltration, reduced run-off speed and promotion of natural ways of treating run-off prior to reach water courses. Members advised that local planning authority members should be made aware of this initiative and that the Agency should consider approaching local authority members directly. The AEG Chairman subsequently sent copies of the Guide to all relevant chairmen of local planning authorities.

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTION

Members were encouraged to give presentations on their business/activities and how they related to the Agency. These included three individual members, a water company representative and a waste operator. These were found to be valuable in increasing and understanding of the Agency's role and interfaces and in providing new perspectives to officers on the external perception of the Agency at work. This is part of a continuing programme.

THAMES ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Agency's Thames Region is the lead region for this plan which also covers the Anglian Region (Essex) and Southern Region (Kent). Members received a presentation from the lead officer in Thames Region explaining the background to the plan and the broad range of issues covered. Some of these linked to issues in the South Essex LEAP and the local Shoreline Management Plans. Successful outcomes of the Thames Estuary Management Plan depend on close co-operation between the three regions and key partners in developing the plan. This will involve AEG and LFDC chairman in the three Areas involved working closely together.

REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF AEGS

The Chairman attended the national meeting of the AEG Chairmen and advised members of an initiative to improve communication not only with local authorities but also with the wider public. Integration of the role of the AEG into the Agency's Area business was important and needed to be enhanced. Good communication between AEGs and REPAC was necessary and the Chairman welcomed the invitation to attend all REPAC meetings. Communications with the wider public would be improved by ensuring that membership of the AEG was kept up to strength with good geographical coverage and wide interests represented on the AEG. New members were invited to induction sessions for new members of staff.

Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs)

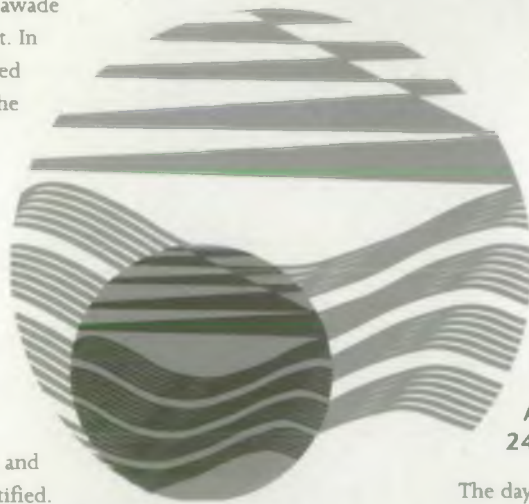
AEG members were made aware of revised national guidance which was released during the year.

NORTH ESSEX LEAP:

Comments on the Consultation Report were received. Members were impressed by the quality of the document but were keen to see achievements against targets given more prominence and issues prioritised. Progress towards closer links between LEAP actions and the Area Business Plan were discussed. Publication of the Action Plan in November 1998 had attracted interest from four local radio stations about waste disposal issues. Achievements during the year included AMP3 agreement to enable Water Companies to fund and undertake investigations where abstraction of water appears to have caused environmental damage – notably at Cattawade Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest. In addition, a successful campaign organised jointly with Anglian Water to improve the performance of industries which discharge to Haverhill sewage treatment works, resulted in a major reduction in the incidence of odours occurring in the River Stour.

SOUTH ESSEX LEAP:

A consultation meeting was held in March 1999 to discuss potential issues for the Draft LEAP to be published by 2000. This was attended by fifty people and a number of areas of interest were identified. Progress against issues in the former Catchment Management Plan included successful anti pollution campaigns at industrial areas in Basildon and productive waste minimisation initiatives with local businesses. These have improved environmental performance and secured better protection of the environment.



ANNUAL SITE VISIT – 24 JUNE 1998 NORTH ESSEX

The day covered aspects of new housing development around Colchester, landfill and mineral extraction at Bellhouse Colchester, water resource issues were discussed at Abberton Reservoir and also at Essex and Suffolk Water Company's intake at Langford on the River Chelmer. Members were able to walk through part of the Old Hall Marshes National Nature Reserve where issues associated with conservation and water level management planning were discussed. Bradwell Nuclear Power Station was also clearly visible on the other side of the Blackwater Estuary and was the subject of discussions led by the member representing the nuclear industry.

Forward Look

There is increasing awareness of the AEG and its role within the Agency. In partnership with management we are developing initiatives to enhance our "ambassadorial" role. AEG representatives are becoming involved increasingly with external contracts and activities alongside management. We are looking forward to the developing relationships between LEAPS and the Agency's business plans, as this will add credibility to the LEAP process and enable us to understand better opportunities for, and the constraints on management and the Agency's resources. Our new Area Manager, Hilary Aldridge, and her team are working with us to ensure that the valuable knowledge and experience Members bring to the Group, is used as effectively as possible.

Finally....

On behalf of our Group I would like to thank all the staff who support our work, particularly Jonathan Wortley and Pat Beard who have been with us since the beginning!

Appendix

OTHER KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Sustainable Development
Regional Development Agencies
Essex and Southend Structure Plan
Essex and Southend Waste Plan
Area Manager's Quarterly Reports on Functional Activities
Importance of Cross linkages with other Regional Committees
Feedback from meetings of REPAC, RFERAC and ELFDC
Drought Management Strategy
Waste Arisings Survey
DETR Review of Water Abstraction Licensing System – Agency Response
Nitrate Vulnerable Zone enforcement
Habitats Directive-Review of Consents
Review of Committees Conference
Secondary Treatment at Holland Haven (HNDA Review)
Links between industry and the Agency
Air Quality
Bringing in Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control

INFORMATION PAPERS RECEIVED

Consultation Paper on Prosecution and Enforcement Policy
The Environment Agency's National Education Strategy
Regional chambers and RDAs
Agency videos

ITEMS REFERRED TO REGION

Devised Fisheries Byelaws (otters and fyke nets) and AMP3 comments.
Disposal of sewage sludge to land and water resources strategy.
Four aspects of sewage sludge to land: educate public perception, soil improvement, a clear definition of ecological improvement, and quality control.
Sustainable development; involvement with RDAs and inter-regional linkage on the TEMP.
Public launch of North Essex LEAP Action Plan and concerns re 10 Point Action Plan and the manner in which actions are expressed at national level.
Water resources difficulties relating to regulation and persuasion.
Recycling should not be left to market forces.



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