

Building sustainable partnerships with the private sector to implement the Water Framework Directive

European River Symposium, Vienna, 3rd March 2016

Background

WaterLIFE is an EC LIFE funded project working towards delivering healthy rivers for people and nature by bringing together communities, business and government. The project focuses on accelerating delivery of the Water Framework Directive in five catchments across England and Wales, as well as working at the national and EU level to identify and implement the enabling conditions for wider implementation.

This workshop was one of four side sessions included in the 2016 European River Symposium in Vienna. It is one of a series of WaterLIFE knowledge exchanges. Visit www.waterlife.org.uk to read previous workshop reports.

Workshop objective

1. To share our experiences and understanding of engaging in collective action towards private sector Water Stewardship and WFD implementation in the UK with a European audience. We discussed two approaches:
 - The Water Stewardship approach, which encourages the private sector to engage in sustainable water management through collective action and by influencing governance.
 - The Catchment Based Approach, which brings together stakeholders from different sectors at the catchment level to collaborate to improve water environment.
2. To seek feedback from a European audience with regards to the applicability of our two approach within other European contexts.
3. To seek feedback about what tools, support and guidance WaterLIFE can provide to support the implementation of our approach across Europe.

Format

The workshop format was a short presentation from WWF-UK following by facilitated break-out groups. The presentation communicated four key points:

1. We think it makes business sense for the private sector to play a long-term role in WFD delivery.
2. We think businesses will be most impactful when working collectively and when influencing water governance.
3. We have begun to test this and want your feedback.
4. This approach differs across different environmental, social and political contexts and we want your feedback.

An electronic copy of the presentation can be viewed on the WaterLIFE website:

www.waterlife.org.uk.

Tools and materials

Throughout the workshop, several tools were referenced as useful for organisations wanting to work with the private sector to explore how they could contribute to WFD implementation. More information about these is available online:

- [WWF Water Stewardship ladder](#)
- [From Risk to Resilience report](#)
- [Water Risk Filter](#)
- [The Catchment Based Approach](#)

Participants

13 participants attended the workshop from a range of countries including Finland, Italy, Serbia, Hungary, Spain, the UK, Switzerland, Poland and a pan European organisation. Most participants came from the conservation sector (NGOs and research organisations), with representatives also from public administrations and two specialist consulting companies.

Objective of facilitated discussion

Following the presentation, delegates formed two groups and spent 1 hour answering the question posed at the end of the presentation:

Would the approaches discussed (Water Stewardship and the Catchment Based Approach) be useful for delivering the Water Framework Directive in your country/region/context?

We wanted to understand:

- Which parts of the approaches we discussed would and wouldn't work given the different contexts of delegates.
- What the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches we discussed may be in delegates' contexts.
- What would need to happen for these approaches to work in delegates contexts (where environmental risk, cultural barriers, political barriers may be different). For example - a water campaign, the water risk filter or understanding of compliance rates.

Outcomes of facilitated discussion

The following themes emerged from the discussion with participants¹:

A need for more guidance

1. Given increasing water-related business risks, it's inevitable that elements of the private sector will get more involved in water issues. However, companies need guidance to help them make the right kind of interventions.
2. Any private sector interventions or collective action will take place within a wider water governance context which is political, messy and multi-scale. Guidance and examples will be needed on how to shape water stewardship approaches within that political, messy and multi-scale context.
3. It will be important to mobilise more companies to engage with tackling shared water risks, beyond the usual suspects (for example, water utilities, beverage companies). Guidance and examples are needed on how to do this across locations and sectors.
4. Water stewardship actions are a response to perceived water risks. However, there are risks to companies from taking water stewardship actions, e.g. risks that they will be perceived as trying to capture policy if they influence governments on water issues; or risks that they will be liable to litigation or insurance claims if they take action which is perceived to exacerbate water risks to other stakeholders (the example was given of house-builders being very nervous to invest in green flood defences for fear of being sued). Guidance and examples are needed on how

¹ Views expressed by workshop participants do not necessarily reflect WWF views

companies can manage the risks of action on water issues, as well as the risks of inaction.

5. Organisations wanting to engage businesses must do their homework. Many businesses have complex supply chains and there are many different links between supermarket, for example, and farmer. For us to create links between different players, it is essential we understand our markets. Guidance on how to do this, with examples, could be useful.

Targeted dissemination

6. It will be critical to engage farmers positively in most water stewardship/collection action initiatives – but this can be a challenge as it can be difficult to reach farmers across this diverse sector. Guidance and examples are needed to show how to do it that and take local contexts into account. These case studies may be different across Europe. For example, in Poland there are multiple small scale farmers which are hard to reach, whereas in Spain there are farming associations which make it easier to outreach to the farming community.

Demonstrating good governance for Collective Action

7. Formalised catchment agreements might be useful in some contexts to ensure that all partners in collective action have clear expectations and to set out “rules of the game”. These could help to build trust between disparate partners and help to address some of the messy issues set out in point three above. The CaBA might provide some guidance and examples on this, but we could look elsewhere too, e.g. the New York City Watershed Agreement or The Nature Conservancy’s Water Funds in Latin America.

Demonstrating Impact

8. It will be critical to monitor and communicate the impact of any Water Stewardship or collective action initiative. This can help to ensure that lessons are learned, initiatives are appropriately adapted for optimal impact and enthusiasm is engendered. It could also help shape penalties or rewards for initiatives, e.g. more government funds for initiatives that have proven results. Guidance and examples are needed on how to monitor outcomes and impacts.

Water Awareness

9. There is generally a low awareness of water risk amongst businesses in Europe. If businesses do recognise it, it is more about water efficiency. The WWF Water Risk Filter was identified as a useful tool for this.

Next steps

A large proportion of feedback expressed a need for more guidance and better dissemination. For example, it was felt that:

- more guidance was needed to support businesses towards the right type of interventions (point 1) and to demonstrate their impact (point 8);
- general water awareness amongst businesses in Europe was low (point 9);
- any such guidance must reflect different multi-scale, messy and political situations (point 2).

We think that there are existing tools which could support businesses in this thinking – for example the WWF Risk to Resilience report provides a broad framework for engagement and a series of case studies. However, we felt that there may be a need for more specific examples to demonstrate a step by step approach, including demonstrating how to monitor impact. We will explore opportunities for creating more bespoke advice.

The WWF Water Risk Filter was identified as a useful resource for raising water awareness amongst businesses during the workshop. We have recently updated the data granularity for the UK and we will use this as an opportunity to increase awareness about the tool. We will also explore other opportunities to raise awareness of this tool along with others across Europe.

We felt that much of the feedback could be addressed through improved dissemination of resources and we will explore the creation of an information hub for Water Stewardship resources with strong dissemination opportunities across Europe.

There was also feedback that guidance was needed for stakeholders wishing to engage with businesses so that they can better understand their market drivers (point 5). We felt that WaterLIFE could support this and we will explore the creation of stakeholder resources and tools.

It was felt that it would be useful to understand how catchment agreements can be set up and organised (point 7). We will share details of how collective action is organised and implemented within our five WaterLIFE catchments and we will investigate how other catchment agreements are governed.

Further feedback was provided about the importance of communicating with farmers, however it was noted that this may look very different across Europe (point 6). We will share details of our targeted dissemination with farmers in England.

Contact

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Workshop evaluation

All participants completed an evaluation form to help assess whether the workshop had achieved its objectives. Feedback was overwhelming positive.

