

The State of England's Chalk Streams

Chalk stream health update

Background

In 2014, WWF-UK's report ['The State of England's Chalk Streams'](#) showed that:

- 77% of chalk streams were failing to meet Good Status under the Water Framework Directive.
- Overall, 74% of rivers in England were failing to meet Good Status under the Water Framework Directive.
- Only 12 out of our 224 chalk streams had protected status.
- The chalk aquifer was classed as in poor health with phosphate and nitrate levels dangerously high.
- Chalk streams were facing a multitude of threats – physical modification; over-abstraction; pollution from sewage works, septic tanks and agriculture; and pressure from a growing population, climate change and non-native invasive species.

Update – chalk stream health in 2015

The Environment Agency subsequently changed how it monitored river health, which included changing the standards and number of rivers monitored. To understand what this means for chalk streams, WWF-UK commissioned APEM consultancy to provide an update on chalk stream health.

There has been a decrease in the number of chalk streams classified as in Good Status. Chalk stream health has deteriorated across all regions, but the most significant decline is in South West England.

- 81% of chalk streams are now failing to meet Good Status under the Water Framework Directive. This is an increase in failure of 4% since 2014.
- Overall, 83% of water bodies in England are failing to meet Good Status. This is an increase in failure of 9% since 2014.

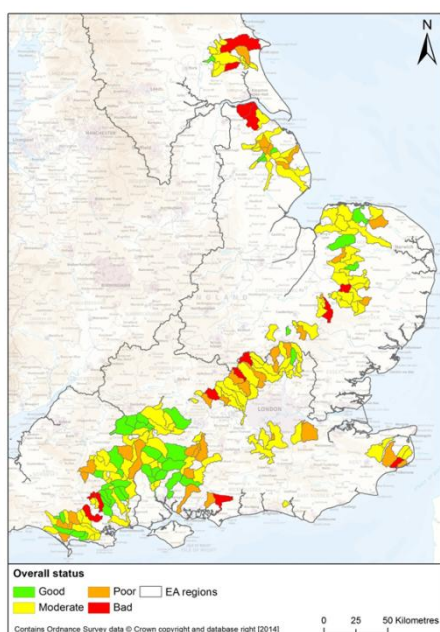
What else has changed?

- There has been a 14% decrease in the number of chalk stream water bodies classified for the WFD, which will mean a reduction in the number monitored by the EA.
- A number of previously classified 'Chalk Stream Heavily Modified Water Bodies' (HMWBs) have been de-designated, most significantly in the South West.

Why does this matter?

- Fewer chalk streams are now classified as meeting Good Status.
- However, due to greater reductions in overall river health, chalk streams are faring marginally better when compared with all water bodies.
- There will be less data available as the EA will monitor fewer chalk streams in the future.
- Chalk streams continue to face significant challenges. Physical modifications, phosphates and abstraction (and other flow-related pressures) are still the main reasons causing chalk streams to fail to meet Good Status.
- Therefore, we continue to call on government to deliver the actions we set out in our **Manifesto for Chalk Streams**, contained in 'The State of England's Chalk Streams'. These are to reduce abstraction; decrease pollution; revive natural river processes and habitat; and promote better river management.

Overall WFD status



Percentage of Chalk Streams failing to meet Good Status

	2013	2015
North West	87	92
Anglian	85	88
South East	84	81
South West	48	68
Overall	77	81

Percentage of HMWB Chalk Streams

	2013	2015
North East	38	46
Anglian	56	62
South East	42	30
South West	22	6
Overall	40	36