

# CHC & HBF Webinar: exploring nutrient mitigation solutions

## Quick recap

The meeting focused on the Welsh Government's efforts to address development issues in West Wales through the Marine Nitrates Development Task Force, which has made progress in developing tools and guidance for nutrient management. Natural Resources Wales presented their work on nutrient compliance assessments and management approaches, while Welsh Water discussed mapping efforts and modeling programs for phosphorus and nitrogen levels in marine SACs. The discussion concluded with presentations on achieving nutrient-neutral developments, exploring various mitigation options and regulatory approaches, and emphasizing the importance of collaboration between stakeholders to address environmental compliance in planning.

## Next steps

- Calum/Welsh Government: Chase Alison Francis to establish better link between task force work and CHC/HBF organizations
- Welsh Government : Lead review of all existing groups to rationalize membership, remit, and ownership before task force closes
- Welsh Government: Produce flowchart/documentation showing all groups, their linkages, and responsibilities
- Welsh Government: Ensure clear roadmap is documented when task force closes, showing where each action will be accountable
- DTA: Deliver specialist guidance on how developers can use mitigations by end of this month
- Welsh Government: Deliver nutrient calculator by end of this month
- Welsh Government: Continue receiving and monitoring intelligence about impacts from contractors, developers, and schemes
- NRW: Finalize and upload updated Nutrient Neutrality principles to website
- NRW: Develop further workshops for local planning authorities on planning advice
- NRW: Share frequently asked questions document with stakeholders once finalized
- Welsh Water: Continue 12 months of sampling and survey work across 200 treatment works in 9 water bodies

- NRW and Gabriel/Green Shank Environmental: Have conversation about using NRW's discretionary advice service for private mitigation schemes and discuss timescales
- Mark Harris/Hayley: Send emails to coordinate conversation between NRW and potential credit providers
- Welsh Government : Reconsider Welsh Government Circular regarding NAVs and private treatment works
- NRW: Work internally to ensure right resources are targeted at development advice service for this type of work

## Summary

### Marine Nitrates Development Task Force

Calum White, representing the Welsh Government's Cabinet Office, provided an update on the Marine Nitrates Development Task Force, established by the First Minister to address development issues in West Wales. The task force, chaired by Tracey Burke, focuses on planning and aims to resume development as quickly as possible. Key achievements include the development of a nutrient calculator, specialist guidance for developers, and the establishment of a Nutrient Trading Platform Group. Calum emphasized the high priority of the issue for ministers and offered Welsh Government's support to attend local authority events and receive updates on impacts related to the issue.

### Nutrient Trading Pilot Initiative Overview

Alice, the Deputy Director for Marine and Biodiversity in Welsh Government, provided an overview of the Nutrient Trading Group, emphasizing that it is a pilot initiative aimed at improving water quality and enabling sustainable development through a market-based approach. She highlighted that the group is drawing on existing work in Wales and England to develop a scheme, focusing on learning from practical experiences and challenges. Eifiona discussed the feasibility study conducted following the Riversax work and the ongoing efforts to implement a nutrient trading platform in Wales, including collaboration with England's pilot schemes and the BSI's nature investment standards. Both Alice and Eifiona stressed the importance of engaging the agricultural sector in developing nutrient trading solutions.

### Nutrient Management in Welsh Waters

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) presented an overview of their work on nutrient management in rivers and marine environments. They discussed compliance assessments for phosphorus in SAC rivers, which showed improvements but still had several rivers failing targets. The presentation also covered marine SAC features affected by dissolved inorganic nitrogen, with 20 features assessed as unfavourable. NRW outlined their approach to

identifying areas requiring nutrient neutrality measures, focusing on specific catchments and features. They provided advice to planning authorities on how to address nutrient discharges from new developments, emphasizing the need for appropriate mitigation and demonstration of nutrient neutrality.

### Nutrient Pollution Challenges in Welsh Waters

Marc discussed the challenges and progress related to nutrient pollution in Welsh water bodies, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to improve water quality. He highlighted the role of diffuse agricultural sources and continuous sewage discharges as major contributors to nutrient loads. Marc also mentioned the nutrient trade-in initiative and the importance of engaging the agricultural sector in addressing these issues. He concluded by outlining ongoing projects, including compliance inspections, modeling methodologies, and the establishment of evidence-based standards to improve water quality in failing water bodies.

### Nutrient Mapping and Management Strategy

Sean Jones, Welsh Water's Development Growth and Strategy Manager, presented a detailed explanation of mapping efforts related to phosphorus and nitrogen levels in marine sacs, particularly in Carmarthen Bay and Pembrokeshire. He clarified that while some areas outside the freshwater catchment may drain to affected water bodies, others within the catchment might not, emphasizing the complexity of the drainage patterns. Sean also outlined an ongoing modeling program involving nine water bodies, with sampling and survey work already underway, and noted that while there are no current regulatory standards for phosphorus, the focus is on managing dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN). Welsh Water is collaborating with NRW and other stakeholders to assess and manage nutrient levels, with significant investments required if reductions in DIN loading at treatment works become necessary.

### Environmental Task Force Progress Update

The meeting focused on the progress and future plans of the task force addressing environmental concerns related to housing developments. Calum explained the screening process for non-housing schemes and highlighted the need for coordination between task force activities and other relevant groups. The agricultural sector's engagement was discussed, with Marc noting recent efforts to collaborate with Welsh Government. Mark requested a flowchart to better understand the relationships between task force groups and their responsibilities. Andrew and Dean from Brookbanks and Greenshank Environmental presented on achieving nutrient-neutral developments, drawing parallels to past experiences in Wales and England. The discussion emphasized the importance of collaboration between stakeholders to address environmental compliance in planning.

## Nutrient Neutrality Regulations in Wales

The meeting focused on nutrient neutrality regulations and their implications for development in Wales. Dean Swann explained that unlike England's pay-and-gain model, Welsh regulations require mitigation measures to be in place before development impacts occur, making it more challenging to achieve nutrient neutrality. He outlined various options for reducing nitrogen loads, including agricultural schemes, land fallowing, SUDS systems, wetlands, and on-site treatment works, with foul water being identified as the biggest contributor to nitrogen pollution. The discussion also covered the development of a new calculator tool for assessing nutrient impacts, which is expected to be available within the next month, and the potential for creating and trading nutrient credits.

## Off-Site Nitrogen Mitigation Strategies

Gabriel presented on off-site nitrogen mitigation approaches, highlighting that while some development sites may not need off-site credits through good design, many will require them. He explained Green Shank Environmental's experience in England with drainage ditch management and land use change solutions, noting that Wales lacks established frameworks for these approaches. The discussion revealed that NRW's discretionary advice service can be used for scheme approval, though there are questions about resource allocation and timescales. Ruth confirmed that NRW would be open to discussions with Gabriel's organization about implementing these solutions. The conversation ended with discussions about immediate solutions for schemes in the pipeline, with Dean suggesting that some sites could be assessed and approved quickly using existing scientific evidence.