



For the future of our environment



River Basin Management Planning in the Solway Tweed,

Significant Water Management Issues report

Introduction

A healthy water environment is part of the identity of the Solway Tweed. Our shared water environment is essential to the health and wellbeing of people, the local economy and nature. The shared water bodies within the Solway Tweed river basin district are representative of this wide spectrum of uses. The Solway estuary and lower sections of the Tweed are of international significance for nature conservation; major infrastructure such as the M6/M74 and West Coast rail line cross the River Sark at Gretna; agriculture and forestry dominate the landscape and along the length of the Solway shores there are bathing beaches and tourist attractions.

Increasingly, the benefits wildlife, people and the economy derive from our shared water environment are being impacted by climate change. The Met Office are reporting that the Spring of 2025 (April, May, June) has been the warmest on record and the driest for fifty years resulting in lower water levels in rivers. The changing climate can also bring unsettled weather patterns and periods of intense rainfall with the risk of flooding. Although there are only a few settlements beside the cross-border water bodies, flooding of individual properties is devastating for the occupiers. Farmland is also at risk. Any future programme of measures to protect the water environment must take account of these increasing and changing pressures on our environment.

The cross-border water bodies of the Solway and those within the Tweed are recognised as internationally important sites for their wildlife and habitats. The Tweed has a reputation as a salmon river that extends beyond the Solway Tweed and is a vital part of the local economy. Actions to improve the water quality and condition of the river can also be tailored to support the existing biodiversity and allow for multiple gains.

Although not within the Solway Tweed river basin district, there are designated bathing waters along Solway Firth and Tweed estuary, which contribute to our health and wellbeing and rely on clean water. Working with farmers and landowners to prevent pollution entering the upstream rivers has the knock-on benefit of helping to maintain water quality, as does the maintenance of public wastewater treatment works, CSOs and individual septic tanks.

The respective Scotland and England SWMI consultations are the starting point for this discussion. Our main aim must be to meet the good ecological standards set out in legislation. Our ambition is to ensure that a healthy water environment is one that can help mitigate the impacts of climate change and continue to support thriving biodiverse wildlife, meets our health and wellbeing needs and underpins our successful economy.

Bringing together impacts on our water environment and the consequences these impacts can have on us and wildlife, helps to identify a wider range of partners who can deliver the required improvement measures and provide multiple benefits from individual actions.

What are the significant issues affecting the Solway Tweed water environment?

Significant issues are defined as having a significant adverse impact on the condition of the water environment and where we have a clear understanding of the actions required, although there may be gaps in the policies and mechanisms required to deliver those actions. To safeguard and grow the benefits of the water environment for wildlife, people and the economy requires effective management of the issues that are having a negative impact on those benefits.

Not all the cross border water bodies in the Solway Tweed are impacted by issues, although we still have to make sure that we maintain that condition by identifying and managing risks.

From the SWMIs identified respectively by SEPA and the EA in our national consultations, the common themes affecting the Solway Tweed are due to:

- Rural diffuse pollution – in particular increased nutrient levels
- Physical modifications to the water environment
- Artificial barriers to fish migration
- Wastewater and sewer networks
- Water use and changes to water levels and flows
- Chemicals in the water environment

Please refer to the national plans for details on these significant issues and other significant issues impacting on the water environment.

Working together to improve the water environment

SEPA and the Environment Agency are required to work together to improve and safeguard the water environment. However, the significant water management issues are indicative of wider systemic problems we face with the management of the environment. Public bodies, businesses and other stakeholders will need to find new ways of working to tackle these issues and put in place the actions needed that will safeguard the water environment now and into the future. This will require coordination across different policy areas, public bodies and sectors. It will also require an understanding of the interdependencies between the water environment and the management of other natural assets within catchments, such as soils, peatlands, floodplains and woodland, leading to a better understanding of our natural capital to help inform investment decisions by the public and private sector.

Next steps

If there is consensus from the respective national consultations that we have identified the right significant issues we will take this approach forward to the river basin management plan. In the plan we will detail the measures necessary to bring about improvements on a water body by water body basis. The draft RBMPs are planned to be published for consultation by December 2026.

Your feedback

[Safeguarding Scotland's Water Environment](#) provides you with information and consultation questions on the significant issues in Scotland consultation.

This is where you can find information on the [challenges for the water environment](#) in England.

Any additional comments of this report can be submitted to consultation@sepa.org.uk

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