

Hydro-ecological Review of 86 Habitats Directive Sites Across Anglian Region Environment Agency (Anglian Region)

The Habitats Directive, and associated legislation, requires the Environment Agency (EA) to undertake a review of consents that may affect designated European sites of nature conservation importance. This is a four-stage process requiring that all relevant permissions likely to have a significant effect on a European site are identified by the end of Stage Two (April 2002).

The EA (Anglian Region) has one of the largest number of European Sites within its boundaries and decided that it needed to develop a better understanding of the hydro-ecology of each site before completing Stage Two. Entec was commissioned to undertake hydro-ecological reviews for 49 wetland sites (mostly within Norfolk and the Broads and the Ely-Ouse catchment). The commission was subsequently extended to cover a further 37 sites, ranging from the Thames to the Humber and including the majority of the estuarine and coastal European sites within the region.

Habitats are wide-ranging and include fens, bogs, floodplain and coastal grazing marsh, open water (rivers, broads, clay pits and ponds), estuaries and coastal sites.

For most of the 86 sites, a desk study has been undertaken drawing together existing GIS-based hydro(geo)logical and ecological information and examining the relationship between water supply and the sites' European features. Based on this information, the potential effects of licensed abstractions on the sites' conservation interest has been reviewed. Where this information shows that one or more consents are likely to have an effect, it has been recommended that the site is taken forward for 'appropriate assessment' at Stage Three.

Where insufficient data exists a business case has been made for further monitoring and investigation that will provide the EA with better information to assess the freshwater dependence of the site and to identify any consents that are having an effect on the nature conservation interest. The project has established common ground with English Nature and should provide the EA with a sound basis for later stages of the process.

*Meeting the
Environment Agency's
obligations under the
Habitats Directive*

