

The Catchment Based Approach in England

Published On: 03 November 2015

Organisation: U.K. Environment Agency

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type: Organisational Design, Partnerships

Launched in: 2011

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Like this innovation

0 persons like this innovation

Description

In England, since 2011, the UK government, the Environment Agency and a variety of other organisations have been experimenting with the development of a new catchment-based approach. It aims to better engage river catchment stakeholders; establish common ownership of problems and their solutions; build partnerships that balance environmental, economic and social demands; and align funding and actions within river catchments to bring about long-term improvements.

The purpose of the new approach three-fold: i) generate more co-ordinated “on-ground” local action; ii) generate more evidence for buy-in to problems; iii) look for innovative, more cost-effective solutions. Following a 12-month pilot phase in 2012, a formal independent evaluation of the 25 catchment scale trials across England was carried out to assess how catchment-level planning and collaboration can better inform planning and delivery of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The UK government formerly announced the launch of the catchment-based approach in June 2013. Since then, the Environment Agency has worked with public, private and not-for-profit sectors to set up over 100 collaborative “catchment partnerships” in the 87 management catchments across England (plus 6 cross-border catchments with Scotland and Wales). The Environment Agency now employs over 60 dedicated “catchment co-ordinators” to support these independently-led groups and enhance engagement and partnerships for effective catchment governance across England.

A Guide for Catchment Management has also been developed as a “how to” handbook to translate lessons learnt from the pilot phase into useful guidance and reference materials. A national support group has also been established to help transition and mainstream the approach in England.

Why the innovation was developed

- The UK Government’s Natural Environment White Paper: The Natural Choice (June 2011), highlighted the economic and social benefits that can result from managing environmental activities at a catchment scale. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment analysed the UK’s natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and our continuing economic prosperity based upon an ecosystems approach. The Water White Paper: Water for Life (December 2011), set out the challenges of water availability; placed an emphasis on planning for resilience; and stressed the importance of catchment management. Together, they provide the strategic direction that informs a catchment based approach.
 - The UK Government’s CaBA Policy Framework (May 2013), outlines 3 principles aimed at creating a better quality water environment: an environmentally focused planning and management process covering every catchment in England; the importance of catchment partnerships in looking at the water environment in terms of all the ecosystem services connected to a healthy catchment and increased integration activities to deliver multiple benefits; and catchment partnerships to inform the river basin planning process and become integral to the way that WFD objectives are delivered.
-

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve effectiveness, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Deliver positive and sustained outcomes for the water environment by promoting a better understanding of the environment at a local level.
 - Encourage local collaboration and more transparent decision-making when both planning and delivering activities to improve the water environment.
-

Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Citizens
- Government (Environment agency)
- River catchment stakeholders

Results

Effectiveness

- One of the key elements of emerging thinking on project and programme delivery is looking at the multiple benefits that can be derived. If these benefits are identified, then multiple partners can be drawn into partnership projects to maximise funding.
- The prospect for multiple benefits has been a key finding from the pilot phase. Integrating the CaBA with flood risk management, an ecosystem approach alongside urban and regional planning will ensure effective action is taken following meaningful engagement with key stakeholders, and the pooling and effective allocation of limited resources.
- Effective water and land management requires cooperation from a variety of organisations with different responsibilities operating at different scales. CaBA centres on effective stakeholder engagement. It involves translating problems using language that people understand and connecting them with issues they recognise.
- By considering a wider range of issues across a catchment and explaining the benefits of action, more innovative and collaborative solutions can be explored and more economic and social benefits can be identified. Through working with local people, communities can take ownership of problems and commit to take the appropriate action.

Development

Design

Since March 2011, the UK Government, the Environment Agency and a variety of other organisations have been experimenting with the development of a new Catchment Based Approach (CaBA). Central to this approach is the engagement of local stakeholders to establish common ownership of problems and their solutions, building partnerships to implement actions at the local level.

The aim for this approach is to balance environmental, economic and social demands and align funding and actions within river catchments to bring about long term improvements.

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.
-

Implementation

Tools used:

- To develop an understanding of how CaBA could work in practice, a series of catchment-level partnerships were developed through a pilot phase (May 2011 – December 2012) to test this new approach.
- Ten of these partnerships were hosted by the Environment Agency and 15 are being led by a range of other stakeholders.

Resources used:

- Funding is and has been one of the key discussion points throughout the development of the CaBA process. There is evidence from the pilots and other sources that this aspiration can be realised. One possible route for funding is to maximise the potential of the multiple benefits outlined above.
- Using the CaBA as a framework for planning and organising the ecosystem approach, flood risk management and meeting the requirements of the WFD means that funds could be allocated effectively maximising environmental, economic, and community gains.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Better co-ordination of projects and programmes should arise from more effective stakeholder engagement processes within each catchment. Collaborative working should be encouraged to support transparent decision making.
 - Communication is both top down and bottom up. Empowering catchment partnerships further to include a range of land, water, and biodiversity outcomes in catchment plans will help to deliver multiple benefits and illustrate how CaBA can manage environmental goods and services as opposed to merely being a tool to deliver WFD objectives.
-

Other information

In preparation for WFD 'Cycle 2 River Basin Management Plans' (2015-2021), the Environment Agency has been working with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to set up collaborative catchment partnerships.

Since the launch of the Catchment Based Approach in June 2013 the Environment Agency has worked with the public, private and voluntary sectors to set up 111 collaborative 'Catchment Partnerships' in the 87 management catchments across England (plus 6 cross border catchments with Scotland and Wales). The Environment Agency now has over 60 dedicated 'Catchment Coordinators' to support these independently led groups enhance engagement and partnership for for effective water governance across England.

A Guide for Catchment Management has been developed as a 'how to' handbook developed to translate the lessons learned from the pilot phase into useful guidance and reference materials (see Annex 1) for others. Since June 2013 a CaBA National Support Group has been established. This is an independent national steering group comprised of representatives of the key practitioners set up to steer the evolution of the CaBA in England

It is expected that the Catchment Based Approach will mature as a mechanism for ensuring local support, consensus, coordination and channelling of funding and other resources to deliver local aspirations for the water environment.

Copyright OECD. All rights reserved.