

Aquatic Eutrophication in England and Wales

A proposed management strategy

A Response by the Institution of Environmental Sciences to the Consultation Report

February 1999

1. Perceived Importance

The perception by the public at large of eutrophication as an environmental problem is largely restricted to a number of isolated situations where the extreme nature of the problem has been worthy of national media coverage or the subject of technical reports. This may also be true, though possibly to a lesser degree, of industrial and commercial organisations.

As the problem is one, which develops slowly over a period of time, it is always possible that a critical stage may be reached before the need for remedial action is accepted. By this time reversal may be impossible. It is therefore important to any management programme that public perception is improved significantly and the problem seen as one of widespread and continuously developing effect.

The measures proposed to achieve this objective are strongly supported by the Institution though availability of funding could prove a limiting factor. We feel that emphasis should also be given to extending the educational process to commerce and Industry.

2. A Partnership Approach to Management

We endorse the proposals for a partnership approach and would give special emphasis to local consultation, which should be on the widest base possible including amenity groups, environmental societies and the general public. At national level, mention is not made of the farming and landowners associations and these should be an important part of the process.

There is no mention of a regional dimension. Some co-ordination of management strategy is needed at this level, probably through the Environment Agency regional offices. Many of the strategies will concern water catchment areas covering a wide extent and there is need for a link between national initiatives and local efforts.

3. A Mix of Regulatory and Other Mechanisms

We agree with the principle. We believe that regulation should be established at national level and deal with basic and fundamental issues - hopefully leaving some degree of flexibility for interpretation for individual situations. At local level, results can best be achieved through persuasion and education.

4. Merits of Economic Instruments and Agro-Environment Incentive Schemes

We are not clear exactly how these systems work. However, on a moral basis we would be opposed to any system of financial incentives NOT to create the problem. These should be achieved by voluntary means.

5. Assessing the Extent of Eutrophication

The accurate assessment of the extent of eutrophication in ALL water areas is important for a number of reasons as is the cause and the rate at which change occurs.

- to provide substantive information to the wider audience (see 1 above)
- to provide a sound basis of judgement for policy makers, legislators and management bodies
- to enable proper priorities to be established in remedial programmes
- to enable crisis situations to be identified early and appropriate action taken
- to enable balanced programmes to be produced and financial requirements accessed on a broad front
- to enable programmes to be reviewed and updated in parallel with updated assessments

6. Prioritisation and Pace of Implementation

This is largely referred to in 5 above and should derive from more accurate, widespread and continuing assessment.

7. Objectives

In our view, avoidance is more important to achieve than remediation as being more economic, more effective and less damaging. However, it is recognised that avoidance may not be achieved or achievable in the short term and in worst cases remediation is required as a matter of urgency. The proposals made in the paper are supported.

8. Other Issues

We have no specific points to raise of the other issues in the paper with which we are generally in agreement.