UKTAG work priorities 2014-2017

This paper summarises UKTAG's proposed high level work priorities over the next year and beyond. These work priorities are designed to address concerns about some of the existing standards, gaps in our understanding of the relationships between pressures and ecological impact where we may be subject to challenge, and interlinkages between Natura protected areas and WFD. The work priorities also aim to look at likely future issues, develop guidance on national measures and investigate an integrated catchment approach.

It is UKTAG's aim that all of the items in the table are undertaken over the next 2-3 years, with the latest deadline for standards work being late 2016 / early 2017 in order to feed into the 3rd river basin planning cycle. Some items will be fast-tracked to address gaps in our understanding of impacts this cycle, for example ecological tools sensitive to the impact of water resources pressures and a lake fish classification method. Given the potential changes in staffing levels, on-going checks will be made throughout this period with regards to staff resources for the work.

Summary of UKTAG's proposed high level priorities

	Task	Justification
Ecological standards and assessment methods		
1.1	Development of ecological classification tools sensitive to the impact of water resources pressures.	A major gap in our understanding. More robust prioritisation of improvements based on evidence of ecological damage. Remove concern of regulated sectors about lack of ecological basis. This is the highest priority work item and work has already begun.
1.2	Deliver intercalibrated methods for fish in freshwater environments: lakes - Scotland, England & Wales; rivers - England & Wales.	Infraction risk. Lake method already available in Northern Ireland. Expected end 2015. England & Wales need to intercalibrate their river method.
1.3	Complete biological methods that describe the impact of fine sediments in freshwater habitats (PSI), and devise relevant environmental standards.	A current gap in our standards that can be filled with minimal effort as a tool exists that can be used. Temporal and spatial impacts of sedimentation, along with biological and chemical impacts, can be considered, giving a more robust prioritisation of improvement actions. Particularly important for some Natura sites e.g. pearl mussels.
1.4	Ecological methods for assessing the impact of morphological alterations, including fresh and salt waters.	This is a current gap in our assessment methods and is now more important given the drive for evidence for improvements through restoration.
Other standards		
2.1	Review of groundwater hazardous substance standards and associated guidance (started)	Stakeholder concerns and disparate approaches between agencies need to be addressed so a consistent approach can be developed across the UK. To ensure complete compliance with the Directive in terms of preventing inputs of hazardous substances to groundwater.
2.2	Eutrophication. Reduce mismatch between nutrient standards and biological tools in	Reduce the mismatches between chemical standards and biological tools, particularly N in estuaries, to align standards in a better way, improve validation and reduce the need for

	fresh and salt waters. Assess potential to derive freshwater N standards. Share understanding of eutrophication assessments (including weight of evidence approaches) in classification and targeting measures across the UK. Input into Ecostat work on nutrients / eutrophication. Scoping assessment of nitrogen deposition for wetlands.	derogations/alternative objectives. Further refinements to the existing standards are likely to have a significant beneficial impact. There is currently a risk of over/under regulation and unnecessarily constraining development. N standards in freshwater were postponed from last year. Eutrophication is a major focus of the Commission. Includes SW/GW & wetlands.
2.3	Review of specific pollutant and priority substance standards e.g. iron standards in freshwater	Iron was postponed from last year whilst Iron Platform, an industry consortium, completes relevant work. Expected mid-2014. Other candidates for review include silver in TraC waters and possibly ammonia standards (some evidence of under-protection of fish).
2.4	Analytical method development for priority substances and specific pollutants prioritised by risk and gaps	To develop methods to permit analysis of priority substances and specific pollutants for complying with the QA/QC Directive, ensuring consistency across the UK.
2.5	Implementation of bioavailable metal standards	Information sharing on approaches for introduction of new bioavailability-based EQSs for metals, focussing on classification and permitting, to ensure consistency across the UK.
2.6	Implementation of biota standards	To develop a UK approach for implementing biota standards, including derivation of equivalent water standards and potential role for passive sampling to assess compliance with equivalent water standards.
2.7	EQSD Strategic Implementation	To develop a UK position on approaches to emissions inventory and approaches for trend monitoring of Priority Substances. To influence EC prioritisation, Watch List preparation and anticipated review of Priority Substances in 2018
2.8	Less than moderate status definition; review of nutrient standards for which widespread breaches of good status standards are likely.	Less than moderate status classes are important to define where achieving good status would be disproportionate to help prioritise action and improvements.
2.9	Review scope for using a common method for assessing morphological status across UK, including definition of heavily modified.	To align and improve methods across the UK so by improving the confidence in classification and requirement for improvement action.
2.10	Water level standards for wetlands dependent on groundwater.	To ensure groundwater dependent wetlands and associated groundwater bodies are protected in accordance with the Directive. Expected end 2014.
River Basin Management Planning		

3.1	Information exchange on 2nd RBMP templates for draft and final plans; managing one-out, all-out effect when presenting progress and future targets; presenting objectives; infraction proofing.	To maximise consistency in reporting as UK. To improve the presentation of progress in achieving good ecological status. To reduce risk of infraction.
3.2	Scope potential national measures.	To develop a consistent approach across the UK in terms of developing national measures. e.g. phosphorus in livestock feed (learning from NIEA)
3.3	Catchment based integrated risk management framework for groundwater/surface water.	To develop an holistic catchment approach to managing pressures, developing measures and achieving improvements, with a structure for decision-making, so by maximising return on measures.
3.4	Linking WFD and Marine Strategy Framework Directive	To share monitoring and assessment methods to avoid duplication of effort and improve efficiencies. Includes alien species, marine environmental quality standards/assessment criteria (e.g. nutrients).
Common Implementation Strategy		
4.1	Complete specific work packages for intercalibration of estuary and coastal water biological methods.	To ensure good ecological status in all Member States is harmonised and that this understanding is consistent with the definitions of the Directive. The Commission is driving this forward and the UK are expected to contribute.
4.2	Input into intercalibration of GEP and coordinate with parallel work on environmental flows.	To influence work ensuring good ecological potential in all Member States is harmonised and that this understanding is consistent with the definitions of the Directive.
4.3	Coordinate UK input into key CIS workstreams and working groups	The current CIS work plan is from 2013-2015, and incorporates actions identified in the Water Blueprint (Nov 2012). Input includes review of Groundwater Directive, Reporting Group, wetlands and groundwater, Priority Substances review, Regulation on Invasive Alien Species, Biota Standards, nutrients/eutrophication.
Protected Areas		
5.1	Explore potential to employ same assessment methods in monitoring ecological status and Natura site condition.	Improve efficiency of resources in monitoring and assessment across environment and conservation agencies.
5.2	Identify where ecological quality for ecological status and ecological quality for favourable condition align.	Begin the process of understanding the differences in biological aspects between WFD and Natura.