

Finding Opportunities to Improve Monitoring Activities Final Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Organisations funding environmental observations are increasingly required to make efficiency savings and deliver better science. UKEOF, which represents the main funders of environmental observations in the UK, undertook this project to determine if there are opportunities to improve monitoring activities through improved collaboration at a catchment scale.
- 1.2 The project was initiated following coincidence mapping of observation activities in England and Wales carried out by Natural England. This demonstrated that many environmental monitoring sites were closely located and it was suggested that a pilot study should be held in a defined area with a high number of closely located monitoring sites to determine whether any efficiencies in monitoring could be found through collaborative working. The Hampshire Avon catchment was chosen for this project.
- 1.3 The aim of the project was to investigate the potential of integrating and aligning monitoring activity in a specific area by facilitating better coordination between relevant organisations, and to develop best practice guidelines that could be applied in other areas.
- 1.4 This report forms the final stage of the project. It sets out the key messages from the project findings, and demonstrates the value of repeating such a project.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 *Objective 1: establish what monitoring activity is occurring in the Hampshire Avon catchment.*
Work was carried out over summer 2013 to research which organisations are monitoring in the catchment and to request information regarding these activities.
- 2.2 *Objective 2: host a workshop to provide the opportunity for collaborative working.*
A workshop was carried out in October 2013, attended by 15 organisations which carry out environmental monitoring in the Hampshire Avon catchment, to discuss potential collaborations over their monitoring activity.
- 2.3 *Objective 3: produce a report and best practice guide to ensure impact of the work.*
Participants of the workshop were contacted six months after the workshop to determine whether any collaborative activities had been put into place. An impact report has been published, along with best-practice guidance for running similar projects.

3. Key Messages

- 3.1 The project has shown that **environmental monitoring can be improved** through collaboration at a local scale. During the impact follow-up, over 25 individual benefits of collaborative working were identified by organisations that attended the workshop.
- 3.2 The main benefits from this type of project are at a **local, not national** scale. This was shown throughout the project with participants of local organisations and schemes clearly benefiting more from collaboration over environmental monitoring at local sites, than the national schemes and organisations that took part.

- 3.3 The greatest value was found in **knowledge exchange** (sharing contacts, information, news, expertise and good practice). This is likely to be because this type of collaboration is more immediate, whereas the benefits from resource sharing and data synthesis may take longer to realise than the six month impact period of this project.
- 3.4 The scale of benefits derived from this type of project may depend on how **well connected an area already** is. However, although the Hampshire Avon was already considered to be well-connected clear benefits were demonstrated.
- 3.5 **Financial savings cannot easily be made** through greater collaboration in monitoring at a local scale, without significant input of time and effort, but greater collaboration can make monitoring more effective and so provide better value for money.
- 3.6 Realising the benefits of collaborative working in monitoring is a **long-term exercise**. A lot of potential for collaboration was demonstrated in this project, which could lead to financial savings, but to maximise the value of this, facilitation over a longer time period (greater than a year) will likely be required.
- 3.7 The amount of **time and energy** needed to run a project like this should not be underestimated. However, the start-up time is likely to be disproportionately greater than the amount of time needed to maintain project momentum.
- 3.8 An **external facilitator** is important to enable collaboration between organisations, keep work unbiased and harness the enthusiasm from organisations taking part to maintain drive throughout the project. This would need to be balanced against the advantages of one of the participating organisations taking a lead, whereby their interest in improving monitoring activities would lead to an increased likelihood of maintaining activity over the long-term.

4. Project Outputs

- 4.1 These reports detail the project process and give guidance on running similar projects:
 - 4.1.1 **Interim Report** – this provides an overview of the process of carrying out research prior to the workshop and the immediate outputs of the workshop. The annexes to the report include the questionnaire that was initially sent to organisations, as well as analysis of the results, and a document detailing the types of collaboration that were expected to take place. The coincidence map of monitoring sites is also provided in an annex.
 - 4.1.2 **Impact Report** – this details the results of the follow-up, six months after the workshop. It outlines the types of collaborations that had started to be realised by organisations, as well as setting out barriers that had been identified.
 - 4.1.3 **Guidance Document** –this provides guidance for organisations undertaking similar projects to improve collaboration in monitoring activities at a local scale.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This project was a worthwhile exercise in that it demonstrated the value of collaborating over environmental monitoring at a local scale.
- 5.2 It was clear that with time, efficiencies through collaboration would be realised which would lead to value for money as opposed to specific financial savings.
- 5.3 It would be valuable to repeat this project in other areas at a local level and the guidance that this project has provided can be used as a basis for this.