

Complying with the WFD Regulations 2017: detailed assessment

Guidance note

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What is this document about?

This guidance note provides information on how to screen projects, plans and activities for compliance with the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 (henceforth WFD Regulations).

Separate guidance is available for screening and scoping and these should be read prior to this guidance document.

Who is this document for?

This guidance is for anyone designing projects and activities that may impact on the water environment.

You must provide WFD Regulations compliance information to support any application for activities that may cause deterioration to a WFD Regulations water body or prevent it (or protected areas) from achieving the objectives set out in the River Basin Management Plan.

Be aware that you are likely to need to employ a suitably experienced and qualified consultant to do a WFD Regulations compliance assessment. You may also need specialist technical input depending on the activity and potential impacts.

Contact for queries and feedback

Integrated Water Planning Team, Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate

WFDWales@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Version history

Document	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	26/06/24	Document published
2.0	05/06/2026	Minor text changes

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To report issues or problems with this guidance contact:

guidance.development@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Stage 3: Detailed assessment

You should carry out a detailed assessment where Stage 2: scoping has identified that a component of your proposal:

- may cause deterioration in status of any element
- could impact on a high-status water body or a water body with high status for morphology/hydromorphology
- prevent a water body or protected area from achieving the objective set out in the relevant RBMP
- compromises the mitigation measures of a heavily modified water body.

You should assess what the impact will be during construction, operation, maintenance or decommissioning, dependent on which have been taken through scoping to detailed assessment.

You will need to consider the potential impacts of your proposal and identify ways to avoid or minimise impacts. It is important that you consider mitigation at the **design options appraisal phase** of your proposal. Considering mitigation at an **early stage** means it can be built into the project design. This can help avoid the need to change the design to incorporate mitigation at a later stage.

The assessment should be tailored to the activity, location, and the potential risk to the receptors. Higher risk, more complex activities with multiple impacts will require a more in-depth assessment.

What you need to do:

- Describe any avoidance/mitigation measures, which could remove the risk of deterioration or prevent the achievement of water body objectives. Include details of how such measures would be applied.
- If you have identified measures that are not technically feasible or are disproportionately costly then include these in the assessment and the reason why you ruled them out.

If your proposal may cause deterioration or prevent a water body or protected area from achieving its environmental objectives then it can **only be allowed to proceed** if it meets the requirements of Regulation 19 of the [WFD Regs 2017](#).

Assessing for deterioration

Due to their scarce, pristine or near-pristine physical habitat, water bodies with high overall status or high status for morphology and hydromorphology element **are most at risk of deterioration**.

Deterioration is when the status of a quality element (receptor) falls by one class, even if that fall does not result in a fall in classification of the water body as a whole. For example, biological quality elements from good to moderate status. If a quality element is already at the lowest status then any reduction in its condition counts as deterioration.

You must provide evidence and justification where your proposal **may** cause deterioration, either of the receptor or indirectly via the supporting habitat e.g. release of sediment causing the smothering of fish spawning gravels. You need to consider if the impact is:

- direct and immediate – it will happen at the same time and place as the activity
- delayed and/or indirect – it will happen later or further away, including in other hydrologically connected water bodies e.g. potential changes to physical processes or potential impacts to migratory fish.

Record if your proposal is the sole cause of the deterioration, or whether it may act in combination with other activities to cause the deterioration as identified in scoping.

Mitigating for potential impacts

Your assessment should consider how any identified impacts will be mitigated. This includes avoiding and/or minimising impacts.

If the assessment shows that your proposal may cause deterioration, then the assessment must consider ways of reducing the impact as far as possible. This could include:

- the size or scale of the activity
- location and duration of activity
- ways of working
- the materials or substances used
- inbuilt mitigation, for example, a fish pass.

Preventing the achievement of good status/potential

Your assessment must consider if the activity will compromise the water body achieving its objectives as set out in the current RBMP. You can find information on water body objectives, mitigation measures for HMWBs and local measures (for example opportunity catchments) on: [Water Watch Wales](#).

The objective under the WFD Regulations 2017 is for all water bodies to achieve good status or potential, unless there is a published alternative objective of less than good. Where the objective is less than good (i.e. moderate, poor or bad), your assessment must consider if your proposal would compromise the water body from achieving good status (or potential) now or in the future.

Water body objectives can be compromised by activities that:

- prevent improvement activities taking place
- reduce the effectiveness of [local/national measures](#)
- compromise mitigation measures in HMWBs (see next section).

Compromising mitigation measures in an Artificial or Heavily Modified Water Body (A_HMWB)

If your proposal is in a heavily modified water body, you must assess whether there will be any impact on relevant mitigation measures associated with the designated use(s). You must show that your proposal will not jeopardise the mitigation measures in place now or planned for the future.

You can find all mitigation measures relevant to a heavily modified water body, and the current status of these measures on Water Watch Wales. You should use:

- the Heavily Modified Uses and Mitigation Measures spreadsheet (accessed via the menu button in the top right of [Water Watch Wales](#))
- the most recent published data in your assessment.

The potential impact of your proposal on mitigation measures will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis for each individual HMWB. [Contact us for further advice.](#)

Protected Area Objectives

You must consider the impact your proposal may have on each protected area identified during the scoping stage.

Your assessment must show how your proposal will not prevent the protected area from achieving its objectives. Information on each protected area objective can be found in the 'Complying with the WFD Regulations 2017: scoping' document in Appendix 1.

You can find more information on protected areas in the RBMP Overview Annex.

Conclusion

Provide a clear conclusion on whether the potential risks from your proposal will, or will not cause deterioration or prevent the water body and/or protected area from meeting its objectives. You may find it useful to complete a summary decision table.

You must clearly identify all avoidance or mitigation measures that are included in your proposal.

Any proposal that **may** cause deterioration in water body status and/or prevent the water body or protected areas from meeting their objectives **cannot be consented or licensed** unless certain conditions can be applied. **In this instance for an NRW permit or licence [contact us](#) at the earliest possible opportunity**, for any other type of permission or consent contact the relevant regulatory body.

Where licence conditions cannot be applied or do not completely avoid the risks from your proposal then the conditions of Regulation 19 of the WFD Regulations 2017 will need to be considered.

NRW contact details

Call us on [0300 065 3000](tel:03000653000) (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm). We welcome calls in Welsh or English.

Send us a message on enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

Or complete the [contact us form](#)