



# Exploring Catchment Partnerships

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# Introducing this slide show

These slides summarise insights from our recent research which explored the operations and achievements of four UK catchment partnerships. We asked:

- How does catchment partnership working align with or help to deliver multiple benefits, including policy objectives.
  - What are the partnership's goals, to what extent are these being achieved, and do they align with Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Flood Directive (FD) objectives?
  - What characteristics of catchment partnerships (including the sectors involved), explain these experiences and achievements?
  - How are partnership achievements constrained or enabled by multi-level or polycentric dimensions of WFD and FD related governance?

Our slides are presented in the form of questions and answers to provide further information about catchment partnerships, details of the study, and insights and implications arising from our work. The next slide presents links for each question so you can easily navigate the set.



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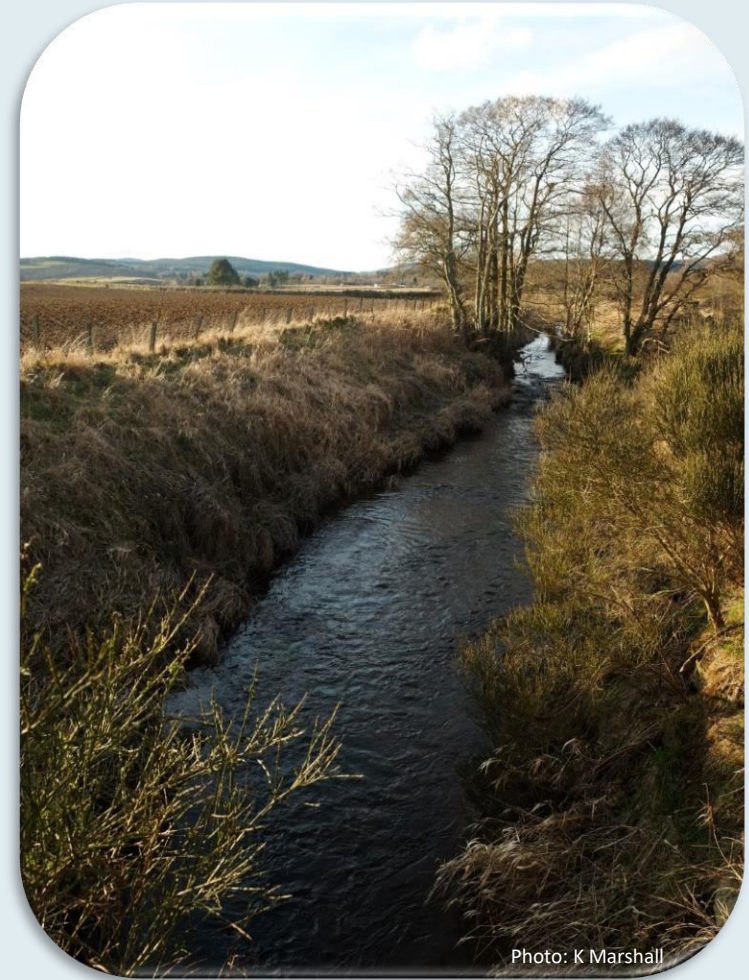


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# Questions addressed by these slides

3. [What is a catchment partnership?](#)
4. [Why are catchment partnerships interesting?](#)
5. [Who might be interested in such partnerships?](#)
6. [How did we study catchment partnerships?](#)
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Numbers on the left are the slide page numbers. Clicking on a question of interest takes you directly to the relevant slide.



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# What is a catchment partnership?

- Catchment partnerships are initiatives that involve multiple organisational partners, located within a biophysical freshwater (sub)catchment.
- Partners come together voluntarily for mutual advantage to agree and implement shared objectives, particularly in relation to improvements to water quality & quantity.
- A partnership can be constituted as a single legal entity but, more commonly, as a formal agreement between organisations to work together.
- Catchment partnerships – which might also be called watershed partnerships and water basin partnerships – can be found across the world.



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# Why are catchment partnerships interesting?

- Academics, practitioners, and policy makers from across multiple policy domains have voiced hopes for catchment partnerships, including:
  - To help deliver multiple benefits
  - Help to deliver policy goals, particularly in relation to Water Framework Directive and Flood Directive
  - To help connect top-down and bottom-up governance processes.
  - To bring together multiple sectors (and their resources), including appropriate private sector partners.
- Some commentators hope that partnerships may be better able to achieve these goals than single organisations, or than alternative approaches to catchment governance.
- To what extent are these aspirations and assumptions reflected by what happens in practice?

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# Who should be interested in such partnerships?

- This subject is relevant to a wide mix of scholars, policy-makers and practitioners:
  - Stakeholders directly seeking to improve water environment, e.g., those involved in England's Catchment Based Approach (CaBA), those enabling or implementing River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), and Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs).
  - Those participating in seeking to enable other types of landscape scale partnership, e.g., Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENS) or Scotland's Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs).
  - Academics who seek to understand the role and potential of collaboration within complex multi-level governance arrangements, where pre-existing regulations and evolving funding priorities interact. Partnerships can be seen as an example of multi-level and polycentric governance processes in action.



# How did we study catchment partnerships?

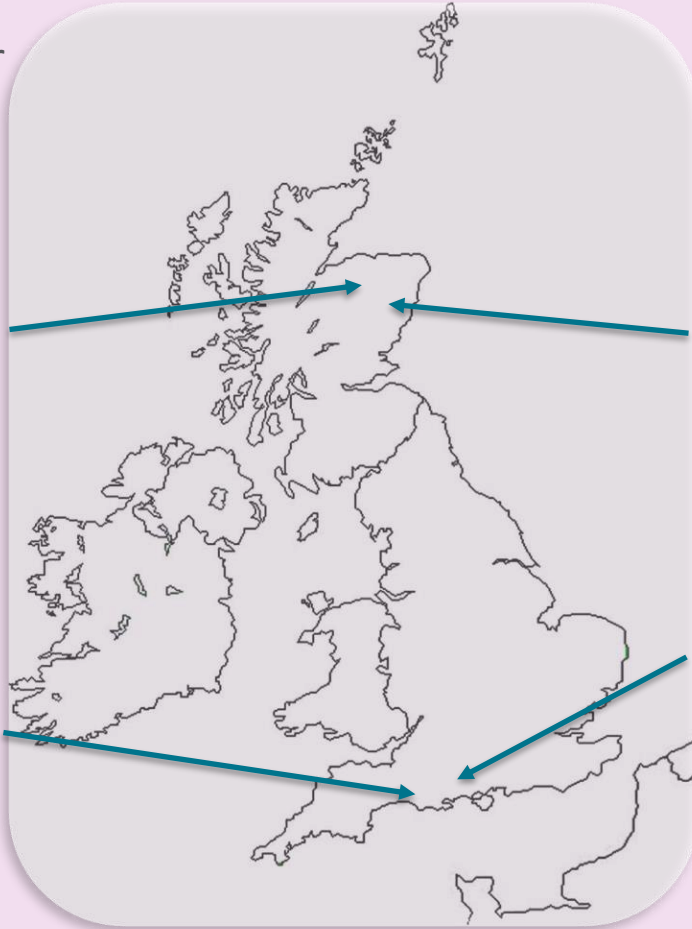
We studied four catchment partnerships:

Spey  
Catchment  
Initiative

Poole Harbour  
Catchment  
Initiative

Dee  
Catchment  
Partnership  
(N.E. Scotland)

Hampshire  
Avon  
Catchment  
Partnership



- We collated data from existing public catchment plans and other available documents prior to interviewing partnership coordinators and partner representatives.
- We carried out qualitative thematic analysis of this secondary and primary data, informed by the literature on environmental governance, collective action, and policy implementation.
- Our research received clearance from the James Hutton Institute ethics committee and was carried out in compliance with GDPR.



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## What were catchment partnerships good for?

- Partnership working helps to identify and achieve shared or overlapping goals and objectives, which may evolve over time. Interviewees thought they particularly valuable for:
  - Making progress with complex actions – particularly Natural Flood Management and diffuse pollution – whose delivery depends on several organisations or individuals.
  - Sharing information of all sorts across organisations – not only data but also knowledge about sites and problems, individuals, and processes within organisations.
  - Combining or integrating different goals – albeit related to the environment and flooding domains.
  - Connecting and potentially resolving bottom-up and top-down priorities and processes.



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# What allows catchment partnerships to make a difference?

- There is no single recipe for a successful partnership, but in our sample the following were key in enabling partnerships to be successful:
  - Coordinators – these must be perceived to be independent, i.e., not biased towards particular partners, and with expertise both in the landscape and topics of concern.
  - Funding – planning and implementing processes and activities requires financial resources. Thus, real change cannot be achieved without being able to access funds from partners or other sources (e.g., public sector funding for environmental policy goals).
  - Diversity of partners – this allows the strengths of different sectors to be combined. In our sample private sector organisations were not often involved but were valued when they were for the additional resources and expertise they could provide.
  - Allowing evolution and adaption – all partnerships need to reflect changes in policies, the catchment, and the partnership itself. Change may involve the composition, structure, focus, and processes of a partnership.



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# Why is partnership working a balancing act?

- Successful partnership working depends on a constant balancing act, not only between different objectives such as water quality and quantity, but also between many options and opportunities such as:
  - planning easy actions as well as ‘tricky’ ones;
  - the emphasis on steering the partnership versus delivery of actions;
  - how much to formally document planning, monitoring, and evaluation;
  - investment in current relationships and networks versus connecting with new partners or stakeholder groups.
- While partnerships involve organisations, in practice it is the representative individuals whose skills and interactions are critical to galvanising action and resolving these trade-offs.
- The coordinator's role is central to these interactions: while they often bring ecological expertise, their role requires the ability to organise, liaise, and communicate. Such dynamics are rarely evident in catchment management plans, but they underpin partnership achievements.



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# What challenges were experienced by catchment partnerships?

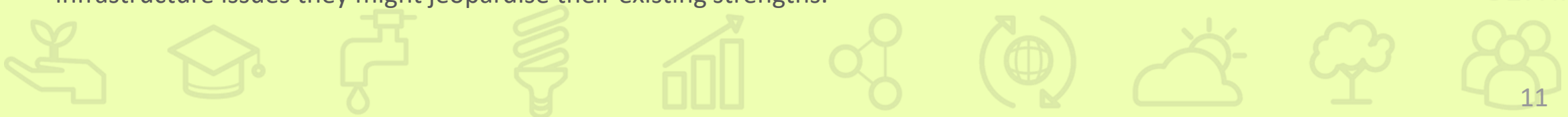


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- While partnerships are often seen as a means of going beyond what single organisations or existing policy processes can achieve, these same organisations and processes are critical to enabling partnerships to do this.
  - It takes time to identify and commit to plans that go beyond what individual organisations already have in place.
  - The funding used to implement plans is often provided in support of specific policy goals: such funding structures can make it hard to justify ambitious interventions able to deliver multiple benefits in support of shared goals.
  - Public sector austerity and short budget cycles can make it difficult to obtain reliable funding to employ coordinators.
  - It can be difficult to prove what a partnership has achieved beyond what would have happened via partners acting alone.
  - Unclear how best to communicate partnerships' lessons upwards to help inform national level policy processes.
- How far should partnerships adapt from their agreed remit and boundaries? For example, if partnerships in our sample expanded to engage with climate change, spatial planning, or infrastructure issues they might jeopardise their existing strengths.



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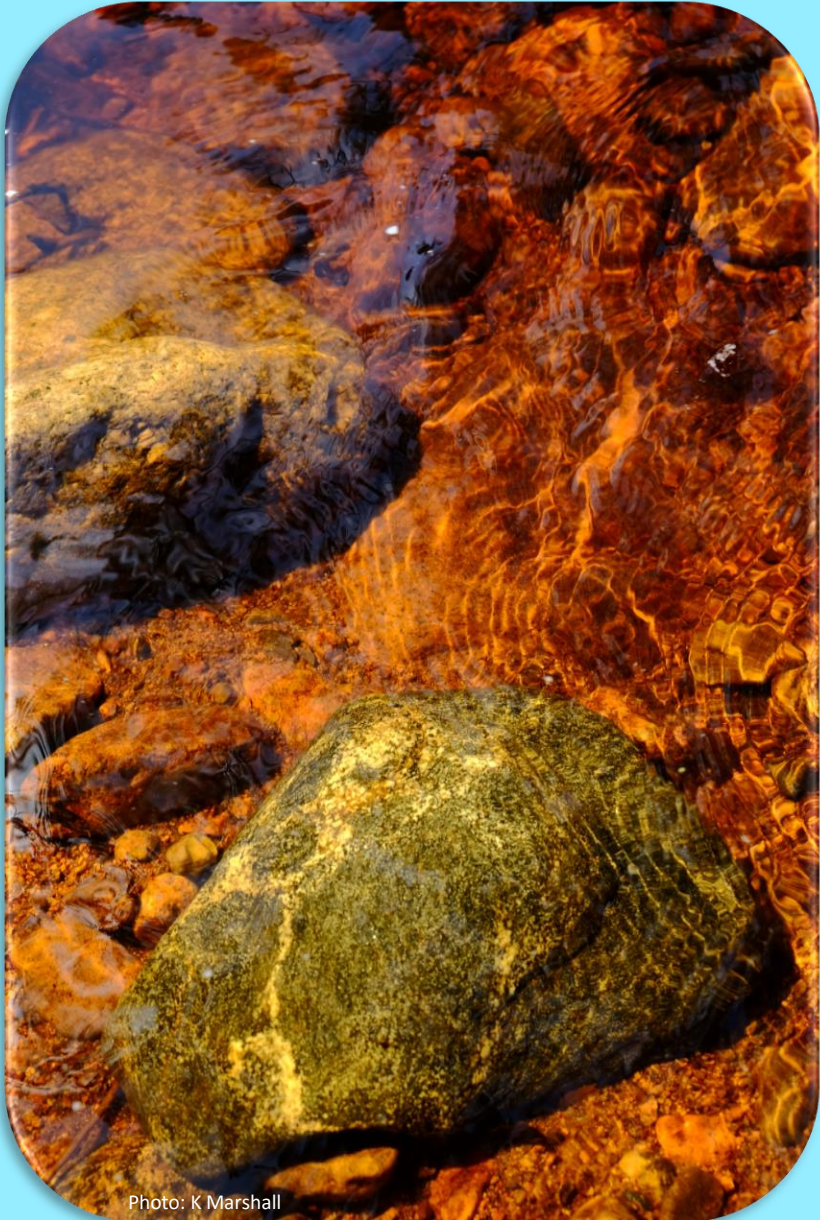


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## What are the implications for other environmental partnerships?

- Value and resource the coordinator's role including the important activities of supporting communication, fundraising, and networking between partner representatives.
- Recognise that adaptation is normally needed – and explicitly plan for this. Reflect on the processes and activities involved in achieving previously agreed goals and encourage consideration of how the partnership might adapt and improve in terms of organisation, partner mix, and the goals of the partnership.
- Decide if a partnership will focus solely on steering (setting new goals and coordinating activities), or more broadly on steering-and-delivery (taking responsibility for delivery of activities). Our case-study partnerships varied in the extent to which they directly managed delivery, and this was seen to vary over time.





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## What are the implications for policy, and those enabling partnerships?

- Provide resources for partnership coordinators, not only the partnership's 'on the ground' projects and activities.
- Continue and improve support for funding schemes that enable the delivery of activities that lead to multiple benefits.
- Provide resources that allow for learning and reflection by the partnership (in line with monitoring and evaluation for adaptive management).
- Establish effective channels for sharing partnership learning so that it may help inform implementation mechanisms (WFD, FD) and policy development processes (e.g., for adaptive governance).



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## What are the implications for researchers?

- Partnership working is a social and relational process carried out by individuals coping with trade-offs and constraints. Understanding individuals' experiences is central to understanding the potential of partnerships.
- Further work is needed to better understand and enable adaptive management and governance. Given limited resources, and multiple vested interests, acknowledging the need to change these processes can be difficult.
- Private sector involvement in partnerships is frequently discussed but not yet widespread. Why is this? We need to improve our understanding of the diversity of private sector actors (landowners to multi-nationals), their reasons for involvement, and how they might influence partnerships.
- It would be useful to test the extent to experiences from catchment partnerships are shared by other types of environmental partnerships, which have the additional challenge of setting their geographical boundary.



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## Acknowledgements, links, and contacts:

- We thank the partnerships and interviewees who kindly shared their time over the course of this work.
- This research is funded by the Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021, RD 1.2.4 & 1.4.2.
- We are preparing academic publications based on this work, and we will be organising virtual discussions around some of these issues during 2021.
- A full report on this work is available from our project website: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/waterintegration>
- Please email Dr [Kerry.Waylen@Hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Kerry.Waylen@Hutton.ac.uk) to find out more.