

Integrating policy goals for water management: Ideas and recommendations



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This 4-page briefing summarises initial ideas for promoting policy integration for water management.

It is based on a study of the experiences and ideas of those involved with trying to implement the EU Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive integration in selected cases across Europe, using both a document analysis and interviews with key stakeholders. Although it is based on a study of those implementing European policies, the implications are more widely relevant.

The next page summarises the rationale, methods and main findings of this study; the following two pages focus on the implications and recommendations.



<https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/exploring-international-experiences-integration>

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Why study integration of water policies?

The need for more integration in water management is often stated, including the need for more integration or coherence in the policies and structures that shape water governance. Integration is often associated with more efficient, effective and even equitable outcomes for water management. However, exactly how to improve integration of policies for water management is not well understood.

How did we study this subject?

We focused on initiatives to integrate the implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive. We first carried out a document analysis of plans made under each of these policies, to spot links and initiatives for integration, in six different cases across Europe (the Czech Republic, Flanders, the Rhine, Spain Sweden and the UK). We also carried out a simple survey of those charged with implementing policies for water management in different European member states. Lastly, we carried out interviews on integration with those responsible for implementing water policies in Flanders, Sweden and the four devolved regions of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) at both at central and regional levels.

What did we find?

Our document analysis^a suggested that shared consultation processes and Strategic Environmental Assessments were the main venues for integrating the two policies. In general, the plans indicated that linkages between flooding and water quality policies were at a relatively superficial and early stage: however, the interviews on integration revealed much more activity ‘behind the scenes’ to coordinate the implementation of the policies^b. Some places were at a more advanced stage of considering and delivering integration, but every interviewee had relevant ideas and experiences to offer. A common theme was the importance of partnership working and coordination of departments and working groups, often linked with initiatives to improve data sharing. There were also many expectations that working at the catchment scale would prove key to organising and delivering integration.

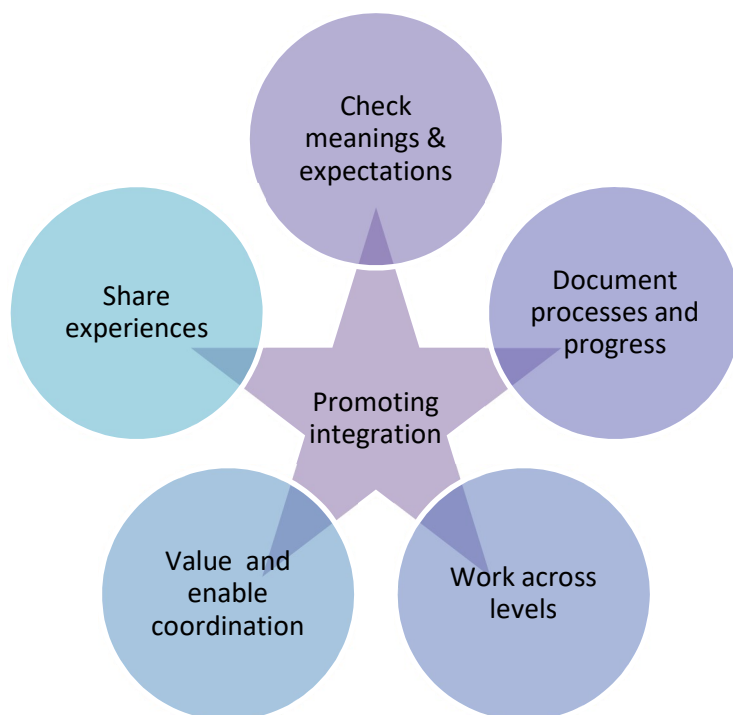
What are the implications of our research?

These are based on the direct recommendations of our interviewees, as well as our own analysis of themes in the data. Applying these ideas will always depend on a careful appraisal of the current situation in each particular country or region, including existing initiatives for integration and upcoming opportunities to adjust practices.

^a Waylen, K.A., Juárez Bourke, A., Blackstock, K.L. 2017. Insights from international experiences of integration: Findings from a content analysis of selected European plans for water management. A report by the James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen https://www.hutton.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/projects/17_07_25_1_2_4_D1_2_Hutton_ContentAnalysisReport.pdf

^b Waylen, K.A., Tindale, S., Juárez Bourke, A., Blackstock, K.L. 2018. Insights from international experiences of integration for water management: Final report. A report by the James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen https://www.hutton.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/18_09_1_2_4_D1_3_Final_Report_On_Integration.pdf

The star diagram below shows our main recommendations for achieving integration.



- **Check meanings and expectations** Different individuals, even working within one organisation, can have different understandings of what integration is, why it is worthwhile, and expectations of what it can deliver. To avoid miscommunication and ensure a clear rationale for actions, it is important to allow time to discuss integration, and connections with related terms like coordination and alignment.
- **Work across levels** The experiences of our cases suggest that making progress with integration requires effort across national, regional and local levels: relying solely on national-level visions is unlikely to achieve much change for integration; yet conversely it is unreasonable to expect regional or catchment management to make significant progress without national-level support.
- **Value and enable coordination** Although our data collection aimed to focus on integration, much of the discussions about how it was achieved were about the principles and practices of facilitating coordination and partnership working. This seems to be an essential precursor to integration.
- **Document processes and progress** Many examples and ideas relevant to achieving integration – for example, steps to coordinate of different teams and working groups – were discussed in interviews but not apparent in plans. These activities require effort, and are precursors to more tangible outputs related to integration, so are useful to explicitly plan and document, to enable learning.
- **Share experiences.** As we acquire more experience in trying to achieve integration, new challenges - and new enablers – will become apparent. This reiterates the need to share experiences – good and bad – over time.

Challenges that need more attention

Many of our interviewees' ideas for enabling integration matched their views about the challenges facing integration. However, some challenges did not have any corresponding strategy or action by which they could be tackled:

- How to respond to the uncertainty in the effectiveness and delivery that tends to be associated with Natural Water Retention Measures.
- How to enable integration when there are no specific 'metrics for integration'. Without these, and management and assessment may tend to focus on goals that are more measurable.
- How to be proactive and plan work over the long-term, rather than reactive and focused on actions that must deliver in the short-term. This is especially challenging in the face of resource constraints and if public or political expectations are for quick responses to flooding problems.

Conclusion

All initiatives need to balance attention to both process and outcomes: it is useful to specify not only specific outcomes, but also the pathways by which those outcomes are achieved. For example, specific administrative structures may help to enable integration; but whether they do so will probably depend on how teams understand their role and their working relationships with other groups. Related to this, there is a need to balance initiatives at different geographical levels, to avoid the expectation that one specific group will be able to deliver integration by themselves.

Although context clearly affects what is seen as relevant – particularly the legacy of prior approaches to water management – a strong shared theme for all interviewees was the importance of coordination, communication and partnership working. This suggests that others who wish to improve integration should also focus on this. However, it is interesting to reflect to what extent achieving integration depends on fostering good coordination and communication – will this alone be sufficient to achieve integration? It will be valuable to revisit experiences with promoting integration in future: not only to find out how best to tackle this challenge, but also to understand what can really be achieved by integration.

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