Appendix C
Relevant Projects and Initiatives in the Avon Catchment

Asset Management Planning (AMP)

Every five years, the Director General of the Office of Water Services (OFWAT) sets the limit on the amount the water companies in England and Wales can charge their customers. This process is known as the Periodic Review. The Periodic Review for 2000–2005 achieved price cuts for customers and also set a programme for environmental improvements.

This programme for environmental improvements is known as the Asset Management Planning (AMP) process and will tackle water company sewage discharges and abstraction problems. Included in the current programme (AMP3) are schemes and investigations on 72 SSSIs. This constitutes a capital investment of £100 million.

The challenge now is for water companies to complete these schemes and investigations according to the timetable set. In addition, where investigations indicate that a public sewage discharge is causing a problem, remedial action must be taken without delay.

Biodiversity Action Plans

Action to conserve our nationally important habitats and species is largely taken at the local level through Local Biodiversity Action Plans (Local BAPs). The BAPs provide the specific objectives and targets against which progress is measured. These local plans are developed through cross-sectoral partnerships identifying who should do what, and where. In this way the plans are just as much a process as a product; the coming together of local groups committed to long-term action for biodiversity is a key outcome. As well as ensuring that national BAP targets are translated into effective action locally, BAPs have the following functions: to identify targets for locally significant and characteristic species and habitats, to reflect the values of local people and to raise local awareness of biodiversity.

The Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset BAPs have been published and should stimulate a more focused approach to biodiversity with opportunities for new projects.

Catch and Release

In addition to legislative measures, voluntary catch and release is promoted on the Avon as a tool to conserve salmon stocks. In the mid-1990s, Wessex Salmon and Rivers Trust negotiated a scheme sponsored by Tesco in which anglers who returned salmon received vouchers. The Trust also negotiated and sponsored a catch-and-release scheme with the Mudeford nets. In 2002, the net-catch-and-release scheme was sponsored by the Avon and Stour Rivers Association.

Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS)

In March 1999, the government published a document detailing changes to the abstraction licensing system. Some of the changes required are achievable within the existing powers of the Environment Agency, and one of the proposals was the development of Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS). CAMS aim to make more information on water resources allocation more publicly available

and allow the balance of needs between abstractors and the aquatic environment to be determined in consultation with interested parties (*Managing Water Abstraction: The catchment abstraction management strategy process*, Environment Agency 2001).

When considering a new application, or variation to an existing abstraction licence, the Environment Agency must ensure that river flows, groundwater levels and water levels in wetlands do not fall below the minimum ecologically acceptable level required to conserve the aquatic environment. However, the needs of existing protected rights and lawful uses of water must be met. CAMS aim to balance these needs in an open way, setting out a strategy for sustainable management of water resources at a catchment scale. CAMS should provide a consistent approach to the management of water resources (Environment Agency 2001). South Wessex CAMS will be based on four LEAP catchments. However, the process will not be applied to the River Avon until 2004.

Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMP)

Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMP) will be developed to consider the adequacy of existing infrastructure and options for managing flood flows on a catchment basis. A 50-year perspective will be considered including climate change and changes in land use. It is intended that CFMPs will influence local plans, particularly with regard to the assessment of flood risk.

CFMPs are programmed for completion by September 2004, although national guidance is still being developed. The Inception Phase started in early June 2002 and is due to be completed in 2003. Halcrow have been commissioned to prepare all 11 Inception documents for South West Region. It is planned to complete 13 CFMPs in the South West. One is under way as a pilot and another has already been started in-house. The consultation process is being developed, although the main aim is to assemble data and influence and begin to understand catchment interactions.

Countryside Stewardship

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme is the government's main scheme for the wider countryside, which aims, through the payment of grants, to improve the natural beauty and diversity of the countryside, maintain, enhance, and restore targeted landscapes, their wildlife habitats and archaeological/historic features, and to improve opportunities for public access where appropriate. It operates outside Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

Farmers and land managers enter 10-year agreements to manage land in an environmentally beneficial way in return for annual payments. Grants are also available towards capital works such as hedge laying and planting, repairing dry stone walls, etc.

Eutrophication Control Action Plans (ECAPS)

ECAPS form part of the Environment Agency's Eutrophication Management Strategy, which is an initiative aimed at establishing a more co-ordinated approach to the control of nutrient enrichment in England and Wales. The strategy identifies a range of actions relating to policy, science and operational activity. At a local level, ECAPs will provide a structured approach to addressing complex eutrophication issues.

Crucially, the Environment Agency's eutrophication strategy recognises the concept of ecological risk as a basis for action, in addition to observed impacts. The relevant Environment Agency National Centres recognise that an intrinsic part of ecological risk is the vulnerability of the receiving ecosystem, and therefore designated sites feature prominently in the pilot ECAPS.

For many sites, ECAPs will be a formalisation of work that is already being undertaken locally, with more of an emphasis on structured reporting against objectives. The initial draft guidance will be tested on 11 pilot sites, chosen to reflect ecological concerns in a range of water types where existing investigations can be built upon.

High nutrient levels have been highlighted as an issue for many years on the Hampshire Avon catchment. However, isolated initiatives and piecemeal approaches have not yet demonstrated any marked improvement in the situation. The Hampshire Avon has been chosen as the chalkstream ECAP pilot.

The ECAP will include:

- An objective review of the problem and evidence;
- Development of appropriate nutrient objectives/targets;
- Development of an integrated control action plan (including consideration of socio-economic as well as environmental factors in a cost–benefit analysis).
- Consideration of resource planning for future control actions.

It is envisaged that this plan will be a dynamic document, evolving as knowledge improves, through an iterative planning-review process. This approach parallels requirements stemming from implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The ECAP will draw together existing local initiatives into an overarching framework, which will allow identification of future work priorities in order to address the problem of eutrophication in the Hampshire Avon.

A South Wessex Area project team drawing from various Environment Agency functions has already been set up, and three national centres will support the work of this team. The first Hampshire Avon ECAP is currently being drafted and should be circulated for consultation in early 2003.

The Avon Valley ESA scheme

The Avon Valley ESA Scheme aims to maintain, and where possible, enhance, the pastoral landscape character of the valley, its watercourses, and associated wildlife and historic resources. The scheme encourages a range of traditional grazing systems and other sympathetic land management to meet these aims.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme was introduced by the MAFF in 1987 to encourage farmers to help safeguard areas of the countryside where the landscape, wildlife or historic interest is of national importance. There are now 22 ESAs in England, covering some 10% of agricultural land.

Fisheries Action Plan (FAPS)

This following description is contained within the National Trout and Grayling Strategy, Consultation document (July 2001). The National Trout and Grayling Strategy defines policies for the Environment Agency to fulfil its statutory duty to maintain, develop, and improve trout and grayling fisheries in England and Wales. Implementation of the strategy will be through Fisheries Action Plans (FAPs), which will be subject to local consultation. FAPS will cover all types of fishery (including salmon, trout and other freshwater fish and eels). Locally the FAP will:

- Classify fisheries as wild, supported or put and take.
- Define salmon and trout nursery areas and other habitats to be protected from impacts of stocking.
- Assess local angling opportunities to identify where improvements in trout and grayling fisheries will generate greatest socio-economic benefits.
- Assess potential for the Environment Agency and others to improve angling opportunities and enhance conservation of wild stocks through habitat improvement projects.
- Identify appropriate sources of finance.

Hampshire Avon LEAP

The Hampshire Avon Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) details the local agenda of integrated action for environmental improvement. The LEAP enables the Environment Agency to identify, assess and solve environmental issues related to its functions and integrate action on all aspects of catchment management. The LEAP takes into account the views of other organisations and the public (Environment Agency 2000). A review of the actions is undertaken annually in order to maintain progress or modify actions where appropriate. The LEAP process came to an end in 2002, making the current LEAP the last one to be produced for the Avon catchment.

Landcare

The Landcare project was set up by the Environment Agency in 1997 in response to evidence that the River Avon was suffering from nutrient enrichment. A Landcare consortium was also set up comprising farming, government, councils, water companies and fishery groups in order to help support farmers improve management practices.

Landcare aims to reduce non-point pollution from agricultural activities through awareness raising and promotion of best agricultural practice. Several demonstration sites have been put in place to show the benefits (both economic and environmental) of best-management techniques. Another aspect of the project is to monitor land-use practices and farmer attitudes.

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) Programme

The Environment Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstractions (RSA) programme covers a diversity of sites that are, or are suspected of being, affected by abstraction. The RSA programme brings together investigations of abstractions thought to be impacting on rivers and the Review of Consents process. Under this programme, in 1997 the Environment Agency produced a list of sites for which it wanted to see water quality or quantity improvement schemes. One hundred and eighteen schemes to improve water quantity were included in the 2000–2005 OFWAT review, including schemes proposed for the Chitterne and Upper Wylye abstractions. (*Managing Water*, Environment Agency 2001)

Salmon Action Plan (SAP)

The Hampshire Avon Salmon Action Plan (SAP) (Environment Agency 1997) is the local mechanism by which to implement the Environment Agency National Strategy for management of salmon fisheries. The historical and current status of salmon stocks were described and a spawning target for the Avon stock was calculated. The current stock status was then examined in relation to the target. Limiting factors were identified, ranked and feasibility of measures to remove these factors assessed (Environment Agency 1997).

The SAP addresses monitoring of stocks, control of mortality in the fishery, improving key habitats including spawning medium, obstructions to migration, reduced flows and channel morphology. Actions designed to enable the spawning target to be achieved within five years were proposed, and a cost and overall benefit analysis carried out. This enabled prioritisation of the proposed actions and the production of funding scenarios.

In addition, the SAP identified issues with no feasible resolution: impact of legal Irish fisheries, competition for habitat from trout, piscivorous predation of fry and parr, and poor pre-fishery survival of smolts. The proposed actions to address issues considered to be impacting on spawning targets were limited to those issues for which a feasible solution was identified. Implementation of the proposed actions has been partial, due to lack of funding. The SAP will be reviewed in 2003.

Water in Hampshire Project

There is increasing concern over the substantial and increasing pressures that are being placed on Hampshire's water environment. Such pressures include new development, climate change, and domestic consumption.

In response, the 'Water in Hampshire' project was established in 1999. By forming a partnership of organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, the project aims to raise the profile of water; gain a better understanding of the environmental, planning and management issues associated with the county's water environment; and to develop sustainable solutions. The project takes a holistic look at water issues, focuses predominantly on the county's freshwater resources, and appears to be the first of its kind in the UK.

The consultation draft of the Hampshire Water Strategy has been prepared by the project steering group, which is made up of representatives from nine diverse organisations. The strategy's overall aim is to ensure the long-term future of Hampshire's freshwater environment. Preparation of this document started with a stakeholder event, which formed the basis of a wider water partnership for Hampshire. Comments are now invited on the draft strategy. Further details can be found at www.hampshireswater.org.uk.

Water Framework Directive

The purpose of Directive 2000/60/EC, Establishing a Framework for Community Action in the Field of Water Policy (known as the Water Framework Directive), is "...to establish a framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal water and groundwater ...".

The directive requires significant changes to the way in which we currently manage our water. These include:

- A more integrated management of all natural waters, acknowledging the inter-dependency of different waterbodies.
- Assessment of water quality in terms of its ecological state as opposed to the traditional reliance on chemical monitoring.
- A more comprehensive suite of monitoring to include physico-chemical, biological, and hydromorphological parameters.
- The control of diffuse pollution.
- The production of plans outlining water quality objectives, and measures required to achieve these targets.
- Superseding relevant directives into one overall framework of legislation.

European member states are initially required to establish River Basin Districts (RBDs). These are areas made up of two or more neighbouring river basins making appropriate units of management. Within these RBDs, all significant water bodies will be defined (for example, rivers, transitional (estuarine), coastal, etc.). These waterbodies will be then be 'typed' according to certain physical characteristics. Once this typology has been assessed, ecological reference conditions will be established for the waterbody describing the ecological quality that would be expected in the absence of anthropogenic impacts. Pressures and impacts on the water bodies will then be reviewed and monitoring programmes will be established. Monitoring data will inform the classification of waterbodies as high, good, moderate, poor or bad ecological status. Finally, river basin management plans will be produced containing a programme measures aimed at ensuring that ecological targets are achieved.

WLMPs for the River Avon and Avon Valley

In order to produce an effective Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) for the Avon Valley SPA/SSSI and River Avon cSAC/SSSI, a two-stage approach is being taken. The floodplain has been divided up into 30 hydrological units, for each of which a plan is being prepared, clearly defining conservation aims and features of importance, constraints, land use and hydrological and management objectives. The plans determine the water-level needs for each site and set out how these needs can be met.

The Environment Agency, with advice from English Nature is currently drafting WLMPS for the hydrological units in the upper River Avon System cSAC/SSSI, having completed most of the plans south of Salisbury in the Avon Valley SPA/SSSI. Once the Environment Agency and English Nature have agreed all the plans, implementation plans will be developed in conjunction with landowners and stakeholders including fishing clubs.

In some cases the WLMPs will only represent existing practices – often where there is no practical way to control water levels or to alter the existing management regime, or there may be no environmental or agricultural reason for doing so. Elsewhere, there may be agreement that raised water levels at particular times are desirable and would benefit the interests of the SPA/cSAC/SSSI. In this case any changes to the drainage system or drainage control would only be carried out after further detailed consultation and by agreement with the landowner. These works could include the construction or refurbishment of control structures and/or modifications to the existing drainage system, including weed cutting.

The main mechanism for implementing WLMPS will be agri-environment schemes, such as the Avon Valley ESA scheme (the Avon up to Netheravon) and elements of the Countryside Stewardship scheme (Wylye, Till, Bourne, Nadder and Avon upstream of Netheravon). A project officer has recently been appointed by the Environment Agency to oversee the consultation and implementation work and will work closely with the ESA and Stewardship officers.

The implementation of the WLMPs will involve meetings between the Environment Agency, English Nature and stakeholders within each hydrological unit. This will be the first time these interest groups have been formally brought together across the cSAC/SPA/SSSIs to decide how to integrate management for agriculture, flood defence and conservation. The resulting structure should be a useful mechanism for addressing future management issues in the river and valley.