



WildFish response to Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project Consultation

WildFish is an environmental charity dedicated, *inter alia*, to preventing harm to the ecology of rivers from over-abstraction.

Here we respond to the Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project consultation which opened in May 2024.

Overall, WildFish is strongly supportive of the scheme, although we are extremely concerned at issues of timing. Southern Water has had since 2018 to prepare plans and investment to move forwards with this plan for longterm measures to meet water demand. We therefore propose to support the scheme on the condition that the full environmental assessments of impact are carried out as soon as possible and all steps are taken to prevent pollution or other damage to waterbodies crossed by the pipeline[s].

You will be aware of our input into the recent round of consultations on the Southern Water Water Resources Management Plan which has now been amended for a second time and is due for re-consultation in June this year. We would expect the new draft to provide details of the long term measures including the recycling scheme.

Background: binding agreement to put in place Long Term Water Resource Measures

At the Inquiry in 2018 into a number of abstractions on the Test and Itchen (ref. *APP/RSA/WR/00016, 00017, 00018 (Test & Itchen)*) WildFish (then, Salmon & Trout Conservation or S&TC) took part as Rule 6 Party in support of the EA's variation of abstractions on the rivers Test and Itchen. The inquiry was then compromised by way of the "*Agreement under section 20 of the Water Resources Act 1991 Between Southern Water Services Ltd and the Environment Agency*" ("the section 20



Agreement”) dated 29 March 2018, which provided the final agreed position for the parties at the end of the Inquiry.

The project for the recycling of water must be seen not only in the context of the WRMP but also the section 20 Agreement from 2018 as the project represents a long-term measure for reducing or eliminating the need for abstraction by way of drought permits or orders by 2027.

At the Inquiry, S&TC/WildFish and WWF put forward an amendment to the draft section 20 Agreement to prevent the avoidance or delay of “*urgent and necessary investment*” which is now found at the first section of clause 11 of the section 20 Agreement:

“[the company] agrees to use all best endeavours to implement the long-term scheme for alternative water resources (“the Long-term Water Resources Scheme”) set out in its Final Water Resources Management Plan (“WRMP”) 2019, as may be revised by future plans, and to implement the said Scheme as soon as possible, and in any event no later than by the start of [add date], unless it is actively prevented from so doing by the effect of any relevant statute. For the avoidance of doubt the long-term scheme will be based on Scenario A in the draft WRMP 2019, subject to any changes required by the consultation process in which SWS is statutorily required to engage.”

This suggested wording was included in the final section 20 Agreement, along with a timescale at the end of clause 11: “*. . .one of the objectives of Strategy A as currently proposed is for the Company not to require the Itchen and Candover Drought orders after 2027 and only to require the Test Surface Water Drought Order or Permit after 2027 in extreme drought events (1 in 500 year drought severity).*”

The section 20 Agreement, as agreed by the Parties and overseen by the Inspector, includes commitments to particular actions including the promotion and completion of long-term measures, such as the use of Havant Thicket and (“*as may be revised by future plans*”) the more recent proposal for the recycling of water to prevent the reliance on drought arrangements, which includes the Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project.



The Project

The Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project is complicated and layered with a number of implied requirements for planning consent, permitting, compulsory purchase procedures and so on. It includes at its most basic:

- the building of the Water Recycling Plant (WRP) and infrastructure;
- underground pipelines between Budds Farm WTW and the WRP;
- pipelines to transfer recycled water from the WRP to Havant Thicket reservoir and further links to Bedhampton Springs, and one from Bedhampton Springs to Havant Thicket reservoir (or a single continuous section between the proposed WRP and Havant Thicket reservoir);
- a pipeline to transfer water from Havant Thicket reservoir to Otterbourne WSW and associated plant where most of the river crossings will be made;
- the use of the Eastney Long Sea Outfall, Eastney Pumping Station, and associated Eastney Transfer Tunnel for the release of reject water from the proposed WRP.

Timing

Unfortunately, although Southern Water is under an obligation to put in place measures by 2027, the scheme for Havant WRP and the associated pipelines, are still at a pre-DCO stage.

We note, for instance that:

- the Environmental Impact Assessment process, whilst it has passed the “scoping” stage in August 2023, is still at a general, high level;



- the pre-development Preliminary Environmental Information Report and its numerous appendices are, again, still at a high level stage;
- the impact on protected and other rivers due to the construction of the pipeline(s) and, in particular, the river crossings, has not been assessed, both in terms of the EIA regime and HRA /appropriate assessment;
- a formal application for DCO, as far as we are aware, has not yet been submitted; and
- there is no evidence of any permit or licence applications relevant to the plan having been made.

Overall, it is difficult for WildFish to comment on the general, high-level description of the Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project.

However, we set out below our concerns which will need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency in the DCO permitting process.

River crossings

As the Water Environment Chr 19 Annex to the Preliminary Environmental Information Report makes clear, the proposed pipeline between Havant Thicket reservoir and Otterbourne WSW to the east must cross north-south flowing watercourses that rise on the South Downs and drain to the Solent in the east, and Southampton Water in the west, including:

Potwell Tributary
Wallington River
River Meon
River Hamble
Moors Stream
Horton Heath Stream
Bow Lake
Itchen Navigation
River Itchen SAC
Hermitage Stream



Pipelines between the WRP and Havant Thicket reservoir will also need to cross Hermitage Stream.

Although the river crossings are described in the non-technical Preliminary Environmental Information Report as “trenchless” – which involves tunnelling under the rivers and the laying of pipes - there are nevertheless risks identified which will need to be described in the full ES/HRA/AA assessments. Any assessment of impact will need to include the construction phase risks, given that large open sites will be required around the crossing points, to avoid sedimentation and pollution, both to the groundwater aquifer and the main rivers. Timing of the works will be crucial given that some of these rivers hold migratory fish. Due to the tight timetable for compliance with the section 20 Agreement, we presume that the next steps will be taken as a matter of urgency.

Eastney discharges

We note that Eastney Long Sea Outfall and associated Eastney Transfer Tunnel will be used for the release of “reject water” from the proposed WRP.

Whilst it is a step forwards to recycle water for domestic use, it is likely, as the preliminary environmental assessment documents indicate, that the reject water will be more concentrated in waste matter than at present. One would have thought that this could be dealt with by further processing before release. As you will be aware, the Solent holds a number of Marine Protected Areas: a maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC); four Special Protection Areas (SPAs), three Ramsar sites and three Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ). All of this will need to be fully explored as a matter of urgency before the DCO is considered by the Inspector.

Overall

WildFish’s overall view is that this project must be supported as long-term measures are required to meet the obligations to end reliance on drought permits and orders, to



increase the availability of water resources and resilience, but also to prevent impacts from over-abstraction on the chalk streams of Hampshire.

That being said, we are surprised that progress has been so very slow and that the 2027 deadline is approaching.

We expect that full impact assessments (both under the EIA regime and Habitats Directive / Regulations) should be prepared as a matter of urgency given the number of river crossings and other associated works that will be required.

We therefore support the scheme conditionally on the basis that detailed assessments are undertaken and steps taken to prevent pollution or other environmental damage during the construction phase and beyond.

Justin Neal,
Solicitor
For and on behalf of WildFish
10 June 2024