

Standardised SEA Scoping Feasibility Study Technical Note

February 2026

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Executive summary

This technical note assesses the feasibility of adopting a standardised Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping process for the next cycle of regional water resource planning in England and Wales. The study was commissioned to address inconsistencies observed in SEA frameworks across water companies and regional groups during the previous planning cycle (WRMP24), which complicated the assessment of regional plans, Water Resource Management Plans (WRMPs) and regulatory review.

Project Aim and Methodology

Regulations in England and Wales require a SEA for plans or programmes which (a) are prepared for water management and which set the framework for development consents of specific water related projects, (b) in view of the likely effect on sites, has been determined to require an assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, or (c) which set the framework for future development consents or projects and have been determined under the regulations likely to have significant environmental effects. In practice, this means that a SEA is undertaken for most WRMPs and regional plans.

The primary aim is to determine whether a collaborative, standardised SEA scoping approach is both possible and practical for the regional groups: Water Resources East (WRE), Water Resources North (WREn), Water Resources West (WRW), Water Resources South East (WRSE), and West Country Water and Environment (WCWE), as well as their constituent water companies. The assessment involved:

- Reviewing existing SEA frameworks used by water companies and regional groups in the previous planning cycle and regulatory requirements,
- Conducting a water sector-wide workshop to gather feedback,
- Comparing SEA objectives, questions, and scoring criteria used by water companies and regional groups in the previous planning cycle,
- Analysing stakeholder comments and lessons learned from the AMP7 cycle,
- Consulting academic experts for best practice insights, and legal review to challenge the projects findings.
- Completing regulator feedback meetings to gather feedback.

Key Findings

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Feedback from the AMP7 SEA Process Feedback Workshop highlighted the need for greater standardisation, transparency, and reduced duplication, but also emphasised the importance of flexibility to address local issues and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- **Consistency and Flexibility:** The assessment concludes that a consistent SEA framework and set of objectives can be adopted across all regional groups to support their SEA scoping process for their regional plan, and that this process could provide a standard framework for each regional groups individual water companies to use while producing their WRMPs. However, while the scoping methodology can be standardised, each water company must develop its own baseline to reflect local environmental characteristics and ensure relevance.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** The proposed approach aligns with the SEA Directive and relevant England and Wales regulations, using the proposed scoping report template and framework should support compliance with the 2004 SEA Regulations, while allowing companies the flexibility to include in each step of the scoping report case specific information and detail, including additional SEA objectives if necessary.

- **Streamlined Reporting:** A standardised approach is expected to reduce reporting burdens due to the same approach and consistent framework being used by all water companies, improving the effectiveness of SEA's by enhancing efficiencies in the SEA scoping process and clarifying the influence of SEA on decision-making.

Recommendations

- 1. Develop a Standardised Framework:** Create a compliant, standardised SEA framework for use by all regional groups and water companies, to ensure alignment with the works ongoing for the upcoming AMP8 cycle this would need to be completed early in 2026 to prevent abortive work.
- 2. Extend to Related Assessments:** If possible, apply a standardised approach to related assessments, such as the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) assessments, for consistency. Further work is required in each case to ascertain compliance with the respective regulations.
- 3. Ongoing Alignment:** Continue reviewing the standardised SEA framework against stakeholder needs and regulatory requirements, ensuring outputs remain robust and adaptable.
- 4. Legal Review:** In each case, water companies and regional groups should seek legal advice early on the proposed approach to an SEA to help ensure legal compliance and robustness of all environmental assessments associated with the SEA.

1 Introduction

Background

Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) are a way of assessing the environmental impacts of certain public plans and programmes at a strategic level. Their purpose, as defined by the European Union (EU) SEA Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC) is *'to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development...'*. The SEA Directive was implemented in England¹ through The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended) (the 2004 SEA Regulations) and in Wales by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Wales) Regulations 2004 (as amended) (the 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations).

SEA Regulatory Context

A SEA was required for all water companies' WRMP24 under the 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations. The 2004 SEA Regulations and the 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations require an assessment of the effects of in scope plans and programmes on the environment. The 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations are 'assimilated law' under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act (EUWA 2018) as amended by the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023. This means that, although the UK has left the EU and the 2004 SEA Regulations/2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations derive from EU law, they continue to form part of domestic law and have full effect.

The 2004 SEA Regulations/2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations implemented the SEA Directive without adding further requirements, but did adapt the SEA Directive to England, for example, by defining which authorities are responsible for producing SEAs. The 2004 SEA Regulations/2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations refer to and incorporate elements of the SEA Directive as it had effect immediately before EU 'exit day' being 30 January 2020.

Regulation 5 (Article 3 in the SEA Directive) of the 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulation, requires that SEA shall be carried out for plans and programmes which:

- Are prepared for water management, which set the framework for development consents of projects listed in Annex I or II of the Directive 2011/92/EU (the EIA Directive) (this includes, e.g. groundwater abstraction, works for the transfer of water resources between river basins, and dams and other installations designed for holding back water or permanent storage of water, subject to certain thresholds); or
- In view of the likely effect on sites, has been determined to require an assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (i.e. a 'Habitats Regulation Assessment'); or
- Which set the framework for future development consent or projects and have been determined (under regulation 9(1) or 10(3) of the 2004 SEA Regulations), likely to have significant environmental effects.

When deciding the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in a SEA, the 'consultation bodies' must be consulted (regulation 12(5) of the 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations). The consultation bodies in England are Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency (regulation 4 of the 2004 SEA Regulations).

¹ The 2004 SEA Regulations also apply to plans and programmes that relate to England *and* any other part of the UK, in other words to projects that straddle the England and Welsh, Scottish or Northern Ireland borders.

In Wales they are Natural Resources Wales and Cadw (regulation 4 of the 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations).

In addition to the above statutory requirements, the Environment Agency's Water Resources Planning Guideline (WRPG) which outlines guidance for the preparation of WRMPs to help demonstrate compliance with all relevant statutory requirements and government policy, states that water undertakers must consider whether they need to carry out a SEA of their Water Resource Management Plans (WRMPs).

The SEA process works to inform the plan-making process through the identification, description and evaluation of the likely significant effects a plan or programme on the environment, including cumulative effects. The SEA process is conducted at a strategic level and requires consultation of the plan or programme subject to the SEA, accompanied by the SEA environmental report, with a wide range of stakeholders (both the public and designated authorities) prior to the adoption or submission to a legislative procedure of the plan or programme.

Project Rationale

In the water sector, companies in England and Wales must comply with relevant legislation. They are also subject to non-statutory requirements and expectations, driven by broader government policy. The Environment Agency/Ofwat's WRPG is designed to help companies comply with relevant statutory requirements and government policy when preparing their WRMPs. The WRPG is also relevant to those producing regional plans. Section 2 of the WRPG explains how the National Framework for Water Resources, Regional Plans and WRMPs fit together and should reflect one another.

SEAs are normally required for WRMPs, Drought Plans, and Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans. They have often been voluntarily applied to Regional Plans. However, the last planning cycle revealed inconsistencies in SEA frameworks used by water companies within the same regional group, complicating the environmental assessment of Regional Plans as a whole.

Recent Regulatory Developments

In addition to the learning from the previous challenges with SEA framework inconsistencies, recent regulatory proposals published in the Cunliffe Review (July 2025), may influence the existing water planning model and therefore established SEA practices within that model. The Cunliffe Review recommends major regulatory changes for the water sector, including the future abolishment of Ofwat (with a transition period), the creation of a mandatory Water Ombudsman, and introducing Open Monitoring (ending self-monitoring by water companies) for greater transparency.

A White Paper containing details pertaining to the Cunliffe Review was published in January 2026. This contained more information on the Water Reform Bill (expected early 2026), including that it is intended to progress a 'reset' of the legislative framework for water. While there is no direct mention of the 2004 SEA Regulations, the White Paper sets out an intention to deliver an improved water planning model, consolidating existing water industry plans and processes into two core planning frameworks – one for water environment and one for water supply, and a "enhanced, better joined-up regional water planning function". The application of SEA to any new water planning and regional planning model will need to be considered and of course it would be possible for there now (post Brexit) to be a departure from the existing SEA Directive-based rules. A Transition Plan is expected to be published later in 2026 which will set out a roadmap to guide the sector through the reforms.

A power was introduced in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) to introduce a new process to replace the UK EIA and SEAs for assessing the potential environmental effects

of plans and projects with an 'environmental outcomes report' (EOR) process. No secondary legislation has been published under LURA to implement a new EOR regime, but is mentioned in the Planning and Infrastructure Act, this should be kept under review as it is likely to have substantial changes to the assessment of water industry plans.

Project Aim and Approach

This project aims to determine whether a standardised SEA scoping process is feasible for WRE, WReN, WRW, WRSE, and WCWE for their next regional plan. The technical note details the assessment, which involved:

- Reviewing SEA frameworks used by water companies and regional groups for WRMP24, Regional Plan, Drought Plan 2027, and Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMP);
- Conducting a workshop with water sector representatives to gather feedback;
- Identifying and analysing differences in water company and regional group SEA frameworks, including objectives, questions, and scoring criteria; and
- Using external expert academic judgement and legal challenge to assess whether a standardised SEA framework is appropriate.

Based on these findings, the note outlines a methodology for implementing a standardised approach.

Project Outcome

The recommendations reached through the project are expected to be provided to WRE, WReN, WRW, WRSE, WCWE, and their constituent water companies, and are subsequently expected to influence the development of the SEAs associated with the regional plans and by extension individual water companies WRMP29.

Regional WRMPs do not currently require a Statutory SEA, however because the company WRMPs are linked to the Regional Plans the SEAs should align as closely as possible to the statutory process. Therefore the outputs have been structured to accommodate this.

2 Project Objectives

This section sets out the project objectives for assessing the feasibility of a standardised SEA Scoping approach between WRE, WReN, WRW, WRSE, WCWE and their constituent water companies.

The primary aim is to determine whether a standardised approach to SEA scoping, for regional plan SEAs and by extension water company WRMP SEAs, is both possible and practical, as opposed to maintaining separate, region or water company-specific methodologies. A key element of this assessment is the alignment of existing WRMP24 and Regional Plan SEA frameworks and criteria and consider whether a standardised consultation at the scoping stage underpinned by a standardised SEA framework could satisfy regulatory and stakeholder obligations or if distinct processes remain necessary.

Impact of the AMP7 Feedback Workshop

The AMP7 SEA Process Feedback Workshop provided valuable insights that shaped the direction of the project.

Participants highlighted the need for greater consistency and standardisation, noting that varying frameworks, metrics, and processes across regions and companies created challenges.

It was discussed that a standardised approach could help standardise assessments, making regulatory review and stakeholder engagement more effective and consistent. However, it was also acknowledged that while a common framework offers benefits, it would need to remain flexible enough to address local issues, constraints, and stakeholder perspectives.

The workshop held on 17 November 2025 highlighted that SEAs often appeared to lack a demonstration of influence on decision-making, therefore, the project aims to enhance the transparency and impact of SEAs in future planning cycles.

Participants also pointed out the burden of lengthy, repetitive reports and assessments, suggesting that streamlining and reducing duplication should be a priority.

Based on the feedback from the AMP7 Feedback Workshop and based on the overarching objective of the project, the targeted aims and subsequent approaches are outlined below:

- **Assessing Feasibility of a Standardised SEA Framework: To determine whether it is possible and practical for the regional water resource groups WRE, WReN, WRW, WRSE and WCWE and their constituent water companies to use a standard SEA framework to support their regional plan SEA assessments, rather than separate, region-specific approaches.**
 - **Approach:** The assessment evaluated the alignment of SEA frameworks and criteria and how these align with regulations, to consider whether a single, unified consultation and framework could meet legal and regulatory requirements, or if separate processes would be necessary.
- **Evaluating a Common SEA Framework: To explore whether water companies can adopt and use the same SEA Framework that is agreed and consulted upon at the regional level, allowing consistency in objectives, questions, and scoring criteria.**
 - **Approach:** The project reviewed existing frameworks, identify differences and similarities, and assessed whether these can be resolved to enable a standardised approach for future planning cycles.
- **Regulatory Compliance and Effective Consultation: To clarify the process for SEA scoping consultation—whether it can be conducted in a standardised way or must be**

done separately by each regional group or water company, and how feedback can be shared and amalgamated.

- **Approach:** The project developed clear guidance on how to abide by SEA Regulations during the scoping stage, such that any standardised approach remains compliant and robust.

3 Methodology and Outcomes

To determine the feasibility of a standardised approach to SEA scoping and use of a joint or mostly consistent SEA framework, a review was conducted on the previous SEA process undertaken during AMP7. This considered the previous processes, feedback from regulators and lessons learnt by those involved. The review considered all potential regional similarities and differences between companies and regional groups; to do this, a comprehensive review of the SEA process undertaken during AMP7 was completed. The approach to the review is outlined below:

1. AMP7 SEA Feedback Workshop

- **Purpose** - The purpose of the workshop was to gather feedback from water company and regional group representatives on the AMP7 SEA process, including the framework, stakeholder comments, and the assessment itself.
- **Approach and methodology** - A one day event where representatives from Anglian Water, Affinity Water, Water Resources South East, Welsh Water, Wessex Water, Southwest Water, Southern Water, Severn Trent, United Utilities, and Yorkshire Water alongside academic experts in SEA from University of East Anglia and University of Liverpool discussed SEA within AMP7 WRMP cycle. Key discussions focused on lessons learned, what worked well, areas for improvement, key drivers and influences for AMP8 alongside key concerns, risks, and opportunities for RP29 and WRMP29.
- **Result** - The feedback from the workshop fed into the structure of the SEA Framework review and AMP7 comment analysis. Themes and common experiences shared within the workshop were used to define additional themes to be taken through the analysis process. The AMP7 SEA Process Feedback Workshop highlighted that while the SEA process aimed to support strategic decision making, its actual influence on final plans was felt to be limited in the driving of environmental outcomes. Participants discussed the complexity of the process, challenges in communication and consistency across regions, regulator feedback and frequent changes in regulatory guidance. When considering the next AMP cycle, there was broad support for a standardised methodological approach to standardise assessments and improve regulatory review, but concerns remain about balancing standardisation with local flexibility, ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement, and avoiding excessive reporting burdens. Achieving a more effective SEA process for future AMP cycles will require careful design, early engagement, and strong buy-in from regulators and water companies.

2. Previous SEA Scoping Reports' Comment Review Process

- **Purpose** – The purpose of the Previous SEA Scoping Reports' Comment Review Process was to review and analyse the AMP7 SEA scoping consultation comments from the regional groups and water companies. This provided insights into stakeholder feedback and helped identify key themes and issues raised.
- **Approach and methodology** – Comments provided by regulators and statutory consultees from AMP7 SEA Scoping Reports were analysed using Mott MacDonald's in-house consultation analysis tool. To utilise this, an extensive glossary of key terms, acronyms and phrases was developed based on the AMP7 SEA Scoping Reports to maximise the accuracy of the tool when processing specific, technical comments. For the tool itself, the coding framework was developed to band stakeholder comments into appropriate themes, including ones not relevant to this investigation such as report structure. Each comment was tagged with positive, negative, or neutral markers against a theme or combination of themes. Initially, a test dataset of 10% of the available comments was processed and checked to validate tool accuracy before the full review. A quality assurance process was undertaken on

a 10% sample of the data output, where new themes were identified which had not previously included in the framework these were added and the tool was rerun. This process was repeated until no new themes were identified. This process highlighted differences in responses by respondent types and aided in capturing diverse perspectives within the SEA process.

- Result** - The tool's output identified several key themes that frequently emerged during stakeholder engagement with water companies and regional groups. Notably, 15% of responses discussed the importance of compliance with current laws, policies, and guidance. In addition, 11% of comments focused on the need to clarify the assessment process and improve transparency in how judgments were made. A further 11% of responses emphasised the importance of developing a thorough baseline that reflects local area details, while 7% specifically highlighted the significance of local considerations and the value of engaging with local experts, communities, and regulatory groups. A further breakdown of the themes which emerged and the percentage of the comments which mentioned them are provided in Figure 3-1 (overleaf), for readability the same data is represented in Table 3-2. These themes were subsequently incorporated into the SEA Framework Comparison Process, providing clarity on the critical role of regulatory compliance, clarity in the assessment approach and the importance of local context for any assessment, and therefore a joint approach. Additionally, the top three themes identified in the comment assessment approach are set out below alongside how they were incorporated into the feasibility study, and the proposed joint framework and scoping report template included in Appendix B and C respectively.

Table 3-1 Top three comment themes and their application

Theme	Application
Compliance with current laws, policies and guidance (15%)	<p>To indicate how compliance should be approached with current laws and guidelines a table has been included (Table 3-3) with the key aspects of the SEA Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ('the 2004 SEA Regulations') outlined.</p> <p>Additionally in the proposed scoping report template sections have been included covering the requirement to set out the legal basis for WRMP, SEA requirement for plans likely to have significant environmental effects (SEA Directive; UK SEA Regulations 2004), Relationship to either Regional Planning or Other Company Plans, the SEA process and compliance and links to other plans and programmes.</p>
Detailed, up-to-date baseline data and its application (11%)	<p>The baseline for each SEA assessment is the responsibility of the water company undertaking the assessment. To encourage consistency and reproducibility within the scoping report template a proposed structure has been includes to include key considerations, additionally the requirements under the SEA Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ('the 2004 SEA Regulations') are outlined in Table 3-3.</p>
Precision in assessment methods and language (11%)	<p>To promote precision in the assessment methods the wording of the criteria in the proposed joint framework was amended throughout such that the statement could equally apply to positive and negative impacts to provide clarity in the application and subsequent scoring of impacts.</p>

Figure 3-1 Summary of the themes identified through assessment of AMP7 SEA scoping consultation comments.

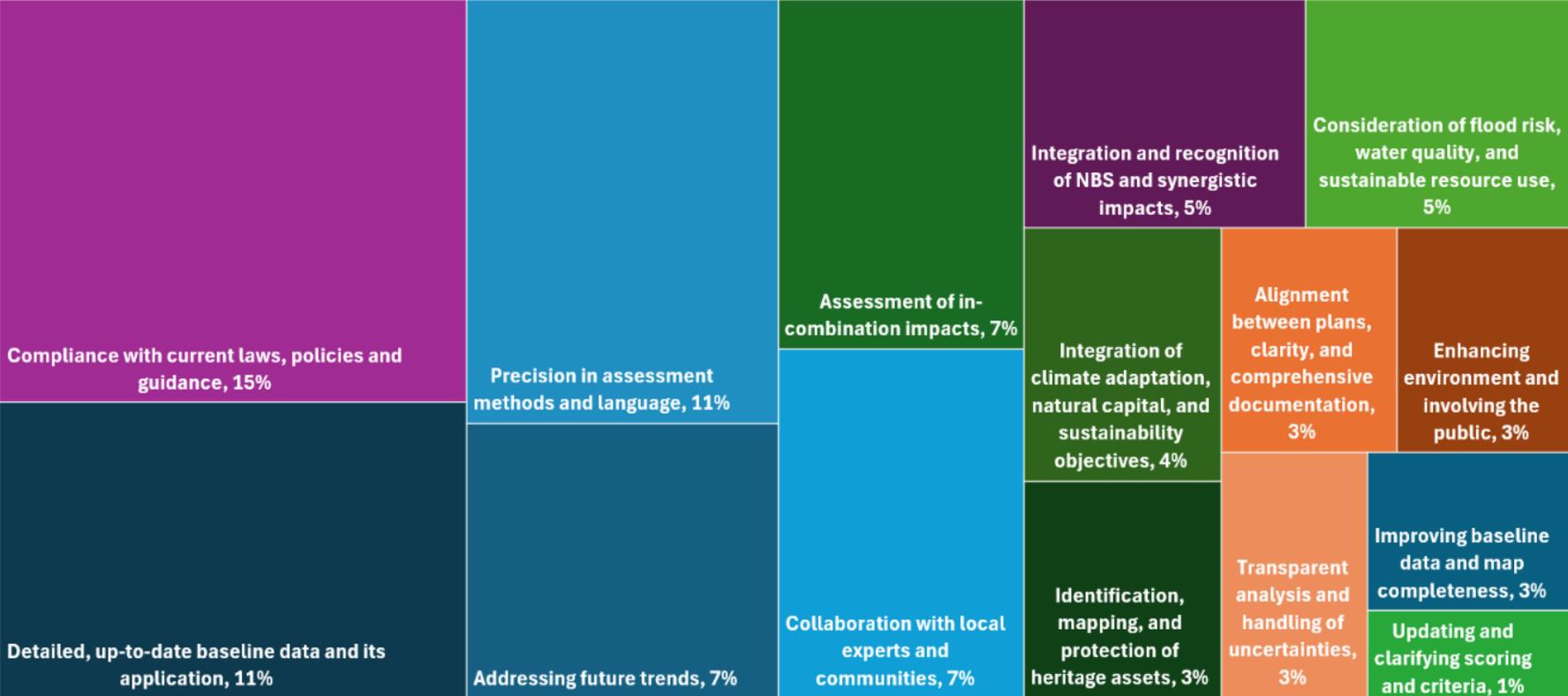


Table 3-2 Summary of the themes identified through assessment of AMP7 SEA scoping consultation comments.

Theme	Percentage of comments
Compliance with current laws, policies and guidance	15%
Detailed, up-to-date baseline data and its application	11%
Precision in assessment methods and language	11%
Addressing future trends	7%
Assessment of in-combination impacts	7%
Collaboration with local experts and communities	7%
Consideration of flood risk, water quality, and sustainable resource use	5%
Integration and recognition of NBS and synergistic impacts	5%
Integration of climate adaptation, natural capital, and sustainability objectives	4%
Alignment between plans, clarity, and comprehensive documentation	3%
Enhancing environment and involving the public	3%
Identification, mapping, and protection of heritage assets	3%
Improving baseline data and map completeness	3%
Transparent analysis and handling of uncertainties	3%
Updating and clarifying scoring and criteria	1%

3. SEA Framework Comparison Process:

- **Purpose** - The purpose of the SEA Framework comparison was to develop a thorough understanding of SEA needs and requirements for water resources planning throughout the UK between different companies, regions, and cultures.
- **Approach and methodology** - Almost all water companies' AMP7 SEA topics, objectives, and criteria were collated and compared, see Appendix A. This meant there was maximum coverage of requirements, specifically geographical and culturally based criteria, were scoped into the comparison. Once all topics, objectives, and criteria were collated into three lists, the lists were analysed to determine similarities and differences. Each of the lists underwent three 'cuts' to condense the list items into a usable selection. Firstly, all repeat data were removed, such that only unique items remained for further analysis. Secondly, internal workshops with SEA experts identified common themes and clusters within the three lists, specifically the objective and criteria lists due to the volume of individual items. Where similar list items were found they were combined into a single objective or criteria ensuring all elements of the individual items were preserved. Organising objectives and criteria by theme helped simplify the selection process, making it clearer and more relevant. Finally, the condensed lists were evaluated based on the SEA Scoping Reports' stakeholder comments, such that relevant comments were addressed or acknowledged within the condensed lists. The final list was amended to be worded neutrally to allow for both positive and negative scoring, further enhancing transparency and comparability of the assessment.
- **Result** - The SEA Framework Comparison Process identified the differences and similarities between SEA approaches and frameworks used by the regional groups and water companies. The resulting condensed lists of topics, objectives, and criteria are considered to be representative of England and Wales, covering all geographical and cultural differences. A draft version of this table is available in Appendix B.

Through this assessment of the potential for a consistent framework, a proposed scoping report template which could be used by all regional groups and water companies has been developed as shown in Appendix C. This structure would require slight adjustments for Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy due to slight difference in national requirements but otherwise would support a combined SEA approach across regions.

Table 3-3 below outlines how a standardised approach would still support compliance with SEA regulations.

Table 3-3 Alignment of findings against SEA Regulations

SEA Guidance	Key Compliance Guidance	Alignment with recommendations
<p>The 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations</p>	<p>The Environmental Report Must (in line with Schedule 2 & Regulation 12(2) and (3)) identify the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan and reasonable alternatives, and include information on the following:²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the plan’s objectives, content, and implementation scope, and its relationship with other relevant plans and projects. • Relevant baseline environment, including likely future trends without the plan. • Environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be significantly affected. • Existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan, including in particular in relation to areas of particular environmental importance, such as European Protected Sites. • Environmental protection objectives, established at the international or national level, relevant to the plan and the way those objectives have been taken into account during its preparation. • Assessment of significant environmental effects (direct, indirect, cumulative, short-, medium-, long-term, permanent, reversible) for each reasonable alternative. • Difficulties e.g. data gaps or uncertainties, and an outline of the reason for selecting the alternatives dealt with. • Mitigation measures to prevent, reduce, or offset adverse effects. 	<p>The SEA scoping report template provided in Appendix C (to be used for the purpose of SEA scoping consultation with the consultation bodies under regulation 12(5)) has been produced to support alignment with Schedule 2 and regulation 12 (2) and (3) of the 2004 SEA Regulation and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations).</p> <p>The recommendations reached in this study support the production of a compliant SEA Scoping Report as the core process as specified would be followed, with onus on the individual water companies to develop their baseline and include, where needed, local or regional specific considerations to capture their local requirements. In each case, water companies must consider the extent of information, level of detail or nature and extent of the analysis that may reasonably be required in the circumstances, taking into account: (a) current knowledge and methods of assessment, (b) the contents and level of detail in the plan, (c) the state of the plan in the decision-making process, and (d) the extent which to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels of that plan (i.e. at the regional rather than WRMP level).</p> <p>Additionally, the application of a standardised, national approach would support more consistent and clear engagement with regulators and stakeholders, which has the potential to improve compliance with consulting obligations at regulation 12(5), 13 and 14 of the 2004 SEA Regulations / 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations.</p>

² Such information as may reasonably be required, taking account of (a) current knowledge and methods of assessment, (b) the contents and level of detail in the plan, (c) the state of the plan in the decision-making process, and (d) the extent which to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels of that plan (Regulation 12(3) of the 2004 SEA Regulations)

SEA Guidance	Key Compliance Guidance	Alignment with recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring proposals for significant environmental effects. • A non-technical summary. 	
<p>Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ('the 2004 SEA Regulations')</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening - Confirm whether the plan/programme requires SEA under the 2004 Regulations. • Scoping - Identify relevant environmental topics (biodiversity, population, health, soil, water, air, climate, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape). • Define SEA objectives and indicators - Consult statutory bodies on scope and level of detail. • Baseline Information - Gather data on current environmental conditions and likely evolution without the plan. • Alternatives - Develop and assess reasonable alternatives to the proposed plan. • Assessment of Effects - Predict and evaluate significant environmental effects, including cumulative and in-combination impacts. Consider short-, medium-, and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects. • Mitigation - Propose measures to prevent, reduce, or offset adverse effects. • Environmental Report - Prepare a report including Contents required by Schedule 2 of the Regulations, Non-technical summary. • Consultation - Public and statutory consultation on the Environmental Report and draft plan. Allow sufficient time for responses. • Decision-Making - Take the Environmental Report and consultation responses into account before adopting the plan. 	<p>The scoping report template provided in Appendix C has been produced to support alignment with 2004 SEA Regulations.</p> <p>The recommendations reached in this study support the production of a compliant SEA Scoping as the core process as specified would be followed, with onus on the individual water companies to develop their baseline and include, where needed, local or regional specific considerations to capture their local requirements. Particularly relevant to these recommendations where there is a requirement to define environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected which will differ based on location. A combined core approach with the opportunity for tailoring for local and regional specifics supports this requirement whilst providing rigour in a combined approach.</p>

SEA Guidance	Key Compliance Guidance	Alignment with recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="696 199 1317 304">• Post-Adoption Statement - Publish a statement summarising: How environmental considerations and consultation influenced the plan, reasons for choosing the adopted plan, and Monitoring measures.<li data-bbox="696 325 1317 378">• Monitoring - Implement measures to monitor significant environmental effects during plan implementation.	

4. Academic review and inputs:

- **Purpose** – A review from the academic perspective has been provided on this draft technical note by independent SEA expert academics from the University of East Anglia and the University of Liverpool. Their inputs on the technical note have integrated best practice learning from the UK and Europe across different sectors, as well as bringing new ideas and thinking to the process. This provides confidence in the proposed methodology and SEA Framework, while supporting the evidence base that the approach meets SEA Regulation requirements.

5. Legal review and inputs:

Purpose – A review of the SEA Framework presented in this Technical Note has been undertaken to assess alignment with the documents and information outlined in a) → d) below. The intention of this review was to apply a robust challenge to the proposed SEA Framework and identify areas where better alignment with the regulations or case law could be achieved.

Please note that this review in itself does not guarantee that the final SEA approach taken by each water company and/or regional group achieves compliance. We encourage all groups or organisations intending to adopt this SEA Framework to obtain early legal advice or review regarding the proposed methodology to ensure both compliance and rigor.

Documents and Information against which the proposed Framework has been reviewed, include:

- a) The SEA legislation (the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, and to the extent necessary, the EU SEA Directive)
- b) SEA Caselaw
- c) The WRPG Guidance available on Gov.UK in relation to its comments on SEA
- d) Discussion of SEA in the National Planning Policy Framework.

6. Regulator Workshops:

Purpose – A slide deck containing the summarised methodology and key findings of the technical note was shared with three key regulators, Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England. A copy of the slides is provided in Appendix D. This presentation was used to collect feedback and comments from the regulators on the overall approach and findings of the technical study. A summary of the feedback is included alongside the actions taken within this report as a result in Table 3-4.

Table 3-4 Summary of feedback and associated actions following regulator engagement.

Summarised Feedback	Action
Future consideration of EOR and other relevant assessment reforms: The joint framework should be adaptable to support future changes in environmental assessment.	The joint framework has been developed to be adaptable to anticipated changes in the environmental assessment landscape, including the introduction of Environmental Outcomes Reports (EOR) and other regulatory reforms. While final EOR requirements remain pending, the proposed framework has been intentionally designed with flexibility in mind so that any future adaptations can be incorporated during the scoping phase without undermining regulatory compliance or assessment robustness.
Future review of the framework building on SEA monitoring feedback: The joint framework should be reviewed following each planning cycle to include any overarching feedback from stakeholders, and any feedback gained from ongoing SEA monitoring.	A recommendation has been included that the joint SEA framework undergo formal review at the end of each planning cycle. This review should incorporate: (a) feedback from statutory stakeholders and consultees, (b) insights derived from SEA monitoring data, and (c) lessons learned during plan preparation and assessment. The framework should evolve iteratively over successive cycles and respond to emerging sector-wide issues.

Summarised Feedback	Action
<p>Race to the top for quality: The joint framework should be instilling and ensuring the highest possible quality of assessment, rather than the lowest common denominator.</p>	By its nature, adopting a joint approach would support an increased quality in the assessments, at a regional level a more thorough collation can be produced as all of the subsidiary assessments will have been consistent, ensuring accurate assessments can be made.
<p>Stakeholder feedback: Include a recommendation for a stakeholder guidance note to go alongside the scoping report on providing proportional, actionable SEA feedback.</p>	This has already been captured in the recommendations of this study.
<p>Qualitative Scoring Rubric: Include an outline of how next steps could add a qualitative scoring rubric.</p>	A recommendation has been included to include the recommendation for a standardised qualitative scoring rubric.

3.1 Assumptions and Limitations

This section outlines the assumptions and limitations of the methodology and approach of this assessment, not of the implementation of a standardised SEA Framework.

Assumptions:

- Assumption was made that all SEA Scoping Report comments where reasonable and applicable were addressed by the individual water companies as part of their final SEA Frameworks in their Environmental Reports (as the final SEA frameworks were the versions used in the process highlighted above).
- It is assumed that water companies will maintain the 7-point scoring system, utilising neutral, major, moderate, and minor positive and negative scores, as seen in all AMP7 Environmental Reports.

Limitations:

- With the anticipated Water Reform Bill due in early 2026 the conclusions drawn in this technical note have not been validated against any changes or new recommendations which may be included.
- The proposed introduction of Environmental Outcomes Reports has the potential to change the SEA process. A detailed roadmap for EOR implementation, including how the new system will interact with existing planning and environmental framework was expected to be provided in 2025, this has not been published at the time of writing. Therefore, it is not currently possible to identify or assess any potential conflicts with a joint scoping approach.
- The assessment of SEA Scoping Report consultee comments, and the SEA Frameworks as part of the final Environmental Reports, was restricted to those documents which were available publicly on the respective water company websites. Though water companies provided stakeholder comments and Environmental Reports in a secure and confidential manner, the in-house consultation tool required all data to be publicly available due to its integrated learning model.
- Workshop feedback and available stakeholder comments may have reflected dominant or more present stakeholders, skewing the framework design.
- Drought Plan SEA Criteria and Objectives were considered as part of the initial review, however scoped-out during the latter consolidation process due to differences with the other SEAs. However, if determined that a standardised SEA Framework is possible then the current Drought Plan frameworks can be analysed as part of a second phase.
- The framework may need future updates following implementation of EOR and associated reforms. Its structure is intentionally flexible to allow for this.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

Feasibility of undertaking a standardised SEA Scoping process by the Regional Groups and the alignment of this with the requirements of the SEA Regulations

The assessment concludes that it is feasible for all regional groups and their constituent water companies to adopt a standardised SEA scoping approach. A consistent SEA scoring framework and set of objectives can be applied across the sector (at a national level), supporting greater consistency and streamlining the assessment process. This approach aligns with the requirements of the SEA Regulations and is further supported by best practice guidance, including UKWIR and Department of Climate Change, Land and Environment (DCLG) guidance on strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal, which encourage standardisation and transparency in environmental assessment methodologies. The DCLG guidance (supported by the wider PAS advice) explicitly aims to avoid duplication, speed up plan-making, and make plans more accessible and transparent with a focus on good quality evidence.

Incorporating these regulations and best practice guidelines supports the standardised approach in aligning with regulatory expectations but also reflecting sector-wide learning and continuous improvement. The adoption of a standardised method is expected to reduce inconsistencies in approach, facilitate more effective stakeholder engagement, and improve the clarity and influence of SEAs on decision-making. Additionally, the standardised approach could support the regional reconciliation process as by adopting a standardised assessment approach could streamline and ensure consistency across water companies and regional groups.

It is, however, important that Regional Groups consider the extent of information, level of detail or nature and extent of the analysis that may reasonably be required in each case against the sections set of the proposed SEA scoping report template.

These factors may vary in each case based on the current levels of knowledge, content and detail of the regional plan at hand.

Regional Groups should also consider whether any additional SEA objectives or criteria should be used to assess the environmental impacts of the specific plan, in light of, for example, local environmental conditions or specific elements of the plan.

Feasibility of water companies using the same SEA Framework, as that consulted and agreed upon, for the Regional Groups and the alignment with the requirements of the SEA Regulations.

It is considered feasible for water companies to use the same SEA Framework that is consulted and agreed upon at the national level. The proposed framework has been developed to support alignment with the SEA Regulations, providing a robust structure that could be adopted by all regional groups and water companies. This approach is consistent with recommendations in UKWIR and DCLG guidance, which emphasise the benefits of a harmonised framework while allowing for necessary tailoring to accommodate regional and company-specific needs. While the core framework can be standardised, individual companies will need to develop their own baselines to reflect local environmental conditions. Water companies should also consider whether any additional SEA objectives or criteria are required to assess the environmental impacts of the specific plan, in light of, for example, local environmental conditions or specific

elements on the plan, as well as the extent of information, level of detail or nature and extent of the analysis that may reasonably be required in each case against the sections of the proposed SEA scoping report template.

This supports compliance with regulatory requirements, particularly the need to define environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected, as set out in the SEA Regulations, and ensures the framework remains responsive to both statutory and best practice expectations.

This supports compliance with regulatory requirements, particularly the need to define environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected, as set out in the SEA Regulations, and ensures the framework remains responsive to both statutory and best practice expectations.

The process to abide by the SEA Regulations for the SEA Scoping consultation.

A standardised template Scoping Report would allow a more streamlined consultation process and feedback. The recommendation set out in this report to adopt a common SEA framework and template Scoping Report, addresses concerns of priority stakeholder as identified during our analysis of the comments received during the previous AMP cycle:

- Each water company uses the national standard template provided for their individual scoping reports, but with the flexibility to include the information and detail required to align with their individual baselines. These are then consulted upon at a water company level before feeding up into the regional plan.

Recommendations

All recommendations outlined below need to be agreed with regulators and consultation bodies should they be considered for further action.

The following recommendations are intended to support the development of a compliant SEA Framework applicable to all regional groups and their respective water companies for SEA Scoping purposes within WRMPs and Regional Plans. This combined framework would need to be completed in early in 2026 to ensure alignment with the works ongoing for the upcoming AMP8 cycle.

It is advised that consideration also be given to and the integrated framework be expanded to encompass for other related assessments, specifically the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) level 1 and 2 assessments, to promote consistency across processes. However, further work would be required in each case to ascertain how this could be done ensure compliance with regard to with the respective regulations.

Additionally, it is recommended that the alignment of the proposed SEA framework with the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, the Environmental Improvement Plan, and the National Environmental Framework indicators be examined to ensure consistency with national policy objectives and statutory environmental targets. Environmental Protection Objectives should, in any event, be included in an SEA (paragraph 5 of schedule 2 of the 2004 SEA Regulations and 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations).

Further, coordinating stakeholder engagement with statutory bodies, including the Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Cadw is recommended to enhance efficiency within the SEA process before adopting an integrated approach. At the early stage it would be beneficial to develop a clear set of questions for

stakeholders and regulators to answer throughout the consultation process to standardise feedback and ensure consistency in approach at a national level.

Lastly, all regional groups are encouraged to obtain early legal advice or review regarding the proposed methodology when completing a SEA to help ensure both legal compliance and rigor.

Appendices

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A. Document List

Table A.1: Key to table A.2.

Green	Document publicly available and used within comparison.
Orange	Document not publicly available and not used within comparison.
Grey	WRMP24 (and comments): Document does not exist. DWMP24: Water company is water-only

Table A.2: Matrix showing the documents utilised within the analysis against each water company name.

Region	Water Company	WRMP24	WRMP24 Comments	Cycle 1 DWMP24
WRE	WRE			
	Anglian Water			
	Essex & Suffolk Water			
	Affinity Water			
	Cambridge Water			
WReN	WReN			
	Hartlepool Water <i>(part of Anglian Water)</i>			
	Northumbrian Water			
	Yorkshire Water			
WRW	WRW			
	Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water			
	Hafren Dyfrdwy			
	South Staffordshire Water			
	Severn Trent Water			
	United Utilities			
WRSE	WRSE			
	South East Water			
	SES Water			
	Southern Water			
	Thames Water			
	Portsmouth Water			
WCWE	WCWE			
	Bournemouth Water <i>(part of South West Water)</i>			
	Bristol Water			

Region	Water Company	WRMP24	WRMP24 Comments	Cycle 1 DWMP24
	South West Water			
	Wessex Water			

B. Framework Table

Table B.1 shows the condensed lists formed during the methodology as described in section 3 of this Technical Note. It is not anticipated that this will be the final framework if a standardised approach is agreed, the below framework is provided as a demonstration of the form and contents of a potential standardised approach. There will need to be further work to form a final iteration, including definition assessment indicators for each criterion to allow consistent scoring between companies, especially for those criteria which appear less relevant to some water companies and their regions.

Table B.1: Initial SEA Framework table

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments	
Air Quality	To maintain and improve air quality.	Is the option in an air quality management area (AQMA)?	Air pollution in relation to designated sites is covered as part of Biodiversity topic.	
		Will the option affect local air quality?		
Climatic Factors³	To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and operational and embodied carbon.	Will the option affect greenhouse gas emissions?		
		Amount of embodied and operational carbon, relative to DO.		The aim of this criterion is to justify the levels of embodied or operational carbon relative to the DO MI/d of the option or plan for it to be more meaningful within the assessment. Unlike most others this criterion is not posed as a question and is anticipated to be scored quantitatively.
		Is the option vulnerable to climate effects?		

³ Initially it was thought to add an objective and criteria on improvement of energy efficiency or the use of renewable energy sources. However, it has been removed from this draft proposal due to the lack of anticipated data for use within scoring justifications. In AMP7 Mott MacDonald, as SEA Assessors, did not receive such detail and thus could not have scored this accurately. If this is likely to change in AMP8+ then it could be incorporated into the final Framework.

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments
	To adapt and improve resilience to the threats of climate change through mitigation, where required, and reducing vulnerability of built assets.	Will the option create catchment resilience to drought?	
Cultural Heritage and Historic Environment	To conserve and enhance cultural and historic environment including the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings and archaeological important sites.	Will the option affect conservation areas or historic landscape/townscape areas?	
		Will the option affect public access to, or enjoyment of, features of cultural heritage (including language)?	
		Will the option conserve or enhance the historic environment, including heritage assets such as historic buildings, conservation areas, features, places and spaces, and their settings?	
		Will the hydrological setting of water-dependent assets be altered, such as important wetland areas with potential for paleo-environmental deposits?	
		Will the option affect archaeologically important sites?	
Landscape and Visual Amenity	To conserve, protect and enhance designated and undesignated landscape, seascape and townscape character and visual amenity.	Will the option influence the character of the seascape, landscape, or townscape including tranquillity and views?	
		Will the option affect visual amenity?	
		Will the option protect and enhance designated landscapes and features, and their setting?	
		Will the option affect access to existing landscape features?	

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments
Population and Human Health	To maintain and enhance the wellbeing of the local community, including social, physical, and mental wellbeing.	Will the option provide the opportunity to educate or inform the public about the natural environment, water resource, and water sustainability?	
		Will the option improve opportunities for social interaction and community cohesion?	
		Will the option affect local noise and light levels?	
	To maintain and enhance the water environment for other users including recreation, tourism and navigation.	Will the option affect opportunities for recreation and physical activity?	
		Will the option improve access to the natural environment for recreation, including those living within deprived areas?	
		Will the option maintain or enhance tourism?	
	To promote a sustainable economy.	Will the option impact fisheries for recreational purposes?	
		Will the option contribute to sustaining and growing the local and regional economy?	
		Will the option provide employment opportunities and economic diversity?	
	Will the option have an effect on fisheries for commercial purposes?		
Biodiversity	To protect all environmental sites (including designated sites and their qualifying features, habitats and species of principal importance, and non-designated sites)	Is the option likely to affect the conservation status of any National Site Network, Ramsar sites and MCZ, undermine or prevent restoration of SSSI condition or affect the condition of locally designated sites?	National Site Networks include SPA, SAC, pSPA, and pSAC.

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments
		Does the option enable or reduce the potential of water dependent habitats to adapt to climate change?	
		Is the option likely to affect habitats or species of principal importance, including blanket bogs/peat, ancient woodland, and chalk streams.	Habitats/species of principal importance are the updated terms used for Priority Habitats/species.
		Is the option likely to have an impact on a current or future Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategies?	
	To provide opportunities for habitat creation or restoration and deliver a net benefit/gain for biodiversity.	Are there any opportunities for habitat creation or restoration?	
		Are there any opportunities to improve habitat connectivity?	
	To avoid and minimise the spread of, and, where required, manage invasive and non-native species (INNS).	Will the option prevent the spread / introduction of INNS?	
		Will the option create an opportunity to improve biodiversity value through removal of INNS?	
Soil	To protect and enhance the functionality and quality of soils, including the protection of high-grade agricultural land, and geodiversity.	Will the option prevent soil erosion and retain soil stocks as a natural resource?	
		Will it protect, maintain and enhance soil function and health, including minimising land contamination?	It is anticipated that this criterion will include indicators relating to the impacts of current and historic landfill sites. This could be a standalone criterion however in the interest of condensing to a usable volume it was combined into this as part of assessment indicators.
		Will the option promote the sustainable and efficient use of land, including the use of brownfield/greenfield land?	

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments
		Will the option prevent mineral sterilisation or nutrient loading?	
		Will the option affect high grade agricultural land?	
		Will the option protect and enhance protected sites designated for their geological interest and wider geodiversity?	
Water	To promote and enhance the sustainable and efficient use of resilient water resources.	Will the option affect the resilience of water resources, now and into the future?	
		Does the option provide a reliable and sustainable water supply which meets changing demand?	
		Will it lead to reduced leakage from the supply network?	
	To reduce and manage flood risk, taking climate change into account.	Will the option contribute to, or reduce the risk of flooding?	
		Is the option vulnerable to flood risk?	
	To protect and enhance the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources.	Will the option affect surface water quality or quantity (such as water levels and flow)?	
		Will the option affect ground water quality or quantity (such as water levels and flow)?	
Will the option affect Shellfish Waters?		WFD assessments are focused on chemical and ecological status, so although this criterion is directly linked to WFD, it is included as part of the Water topic and not Biodiversity so as to reduce double counting.	
Does the option affect the presence of containments in waterbodies?			

SEA Topic	SEA Objective	SEA Criteria	Additional Comments
		<p>Is the option likely to contribute to or conflict with the achievement of WFD objectives?</p> <p>Does the option support achievement of environmental objectives set out in River Basin Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans</p>	
<p>Material Assets</p>	<p>To avoid negative effects on built assets and infrastructure (including green infrastructure).</p>	<p>Will the option protect and enhance existing infrastructure?</p>	
		<p>Will the option protect and enhance existing green infrastructure?</p>	
		<p>Will the option affect the surrounding transport network?</p>	
	<p>To reduce, and make more efficient, the consumption of resources, and minimise the generation of waste.</p>	<p>Will it promote the re-use and recycling of waste materials and reduce the proportion of waste sent to landfill?</p>	
		<p>Will the option use existing water assets and infrastructure?</p>	
<p>Will the option encourage the use of sustainable design and materials, including the incorporation of circular economy principles in the design?</p>	<p>In AMP7 Mott MacDonald, as SEA Assessors, did not receive such detail and thus could not have scored this accurately. If this is likely to change in AMP8+ then it could be incorporated into the final Framework.</p>		

C. Suggested Scoping Report Template

Table C.1: Suggested Scoping Report template for water companies and water regions.

Non-Technical Summary		
1 Purpose of Scoping Report	General (apply to all Plans)	Regional Specific
1.1 Explain SEA purpose and scoping stage – why we are consulting on scope and methods.	Yes	
1.2 Summarise RP/ WRMP and how SEA informs a best value plan and adaptive pathways	Yes	
2. What will be Assessed		
2.1 SEA topics (biodiversity, water, soil, air, climate, population/health, cultural heritage, landscape, material assets).	Yes – as will unlikely descope topics	
2.2 Summary of reasonable alternatives concept for RP/ WRMP options/programmes.	Yes	
3. Key Environmental Issues Identified		
4. How you can Comment		Specific
4.1 Statutory Consultees: EA, NE HE, and others	Yes	Some Specific
4.2 Consultation Period	Yes	
Scoping Report		
1 Background and Purpose		
1.1 Set out legal basis for RP/WRMP	Yes	
1.2 Set out need to complete SEA for WRMP (SEA Directive; 2004SEA Regulations).	Yes	
1.3 How chapters map to SEA scoping tasks and subsequent Environmental Report	Yes	
2 RP/ WRMP and Planning Horizon		
2.1 Outline contents and main objectives of WRMP, including planning period (≥ 25 years), WRZs, demand/supply forecasts, drought resilience standard, adaptive pathways.	Yes	

3. Relationship to either Regional Planning or Other Company Plans		
3.1 Interface with regional plans (WRE, WReN, WRW, WRSE, and WCWE), Drought Plan, DWMP links (where relevant). Company Plans	Potentially Yes	May be some regional input but this could be a statement agreed by all
3.2 RP/ WRMP objectives (resilience, environmental destination, leakage, PCC, sustainability).	Potentially Yes (depending on outcome of review)	
3.3 Geographic scope (company area, WRZs), temporal scope (planning horizon, key milestone years).		Specific
3.4 RP/ WRMP option types, Supply, Demand, Catchment, ED, Drought, SROs	Yes	
4. SEA Process and Policy Context		
4.1 Overview of SEA Stages Screening (if applicable), scoping, assessment, environmental report, consultation, decision, monitoring.	Yes	
4.2 Legal and Policy framework - SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) Annexes I & II; UK SEA Regulations; WFD obligations; Habitats Regulations; BNG policy; Natural Capital; INNS. Environmental protection objectives at international or national level (requirement of sch. 2, 2004 SEA Regulations).	Yes	
4.3 Proportionality and Best Practice - Alignment with EA Water Resources Planning Guideline and recent UKWIR guidance etc.	Yes	
6. Links to other Plans and Programmes		
6.1 River Basin Management Plans, Local Plans, Regional WRMPs, Drought Plan alignment.	Yes	Some specific input
6.2 Review of relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes (PPP)	Yes – for International and National PPPs	Regional and Local PPPs
6.3 PPP summary and key themes - Summarise policy drivers (climate resilience, biodiversity protection,	Yes	

WFD status, net zero, BNG) and implications for WRMP.		
7. Scoping Methodology		
7.1 Approach to Scoping	Yes	
7.2 Consultation process and statutory consultees	Yes	Some specific
7.3 Criteria for topic inclusion/exclusion	Yes	Some specific
7.4 Topics to be assessed	Yes	Some specific
7.5 Justification for exclusions	Yes	Some specific input
8. Baseline and Key issues (including environmental characteristics)		
8.1 Baseline data for SEA topics (e.g., biodiversity, water, soil, air, climate, human health, cultural heritage, landscape, material assets)		Specific
8.2 Future baseline assumptions		Specific
8.3 Key environmental issues and opportunities		Specific
9. SEA Objectives and assessment framework		
9.1 SEA Objective (and sub objectives if used)	Yes	
9.2 Assessment Criteria and Indicators	Yes	Some specific
9.3 Compatibility matrix	Yes	specific
10. Reasonable Alternatives		
10.1 Approach to identifying and assessing WRMP options	Yes	
10.2 Types of Alternatives considered.	Yes	
11. Assessment methodology		
11.1 Options and Plans	Yes	
11.2 Scoring Criteria	Yes	
11.3 Cumulative and Transboundary Effects	Yes	
12. Other Environmental Assessments		
12.1 HRA	Yes	

12.2 WFD	Yes	
12.3 BNG	Yes	
12.4 Natural capital	Yes	
12.5 INNS	Yes	
13. Consultation and next steps		Specific
13.1 How feedback will influence SEA framework	Yes	
13.2 Next stages in SEA and RP/WRMP process	Yes	
Annexes		
A Consultation logs	Yes	Yes
B Detailed PPP review	Some yes	Some specific
C Baseline data tables		Specific
D Objectives and scoring criteria	Yes	
<p>Key compliance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must reference 2004 SEA Regulations and / or 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations • Align with WRPG • UKWIR SEA and HRA guidance • Include statutory consultees: Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, Natural Resources Wales, Cadw. • Cover SEA topics per Annex 2 of the 2004 SEA Regulations / 2004 SEA (Wales) Regulations • Demonstrate integration with WRMP option appraisal and decision-making. 		

D. Slides from Regulator Engagement Meeting



JOINT SEA SCOPING FEASIBILITY

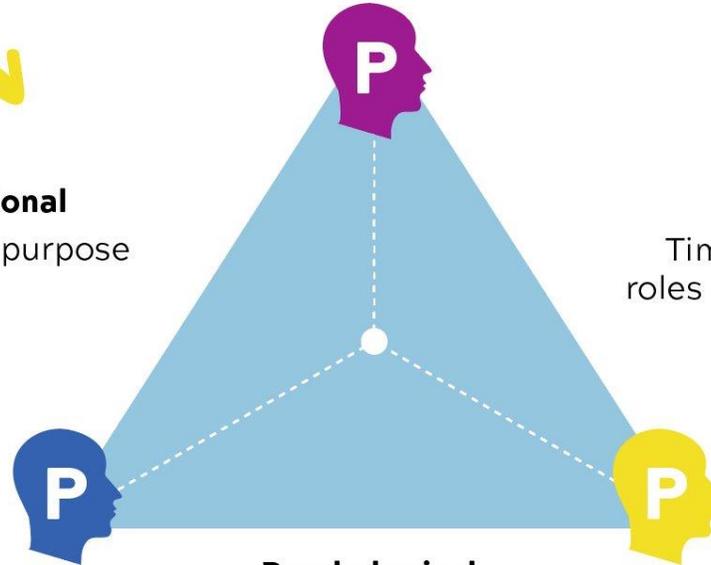


Contracting

Professional
Objectives / purpose

Practical
Timings / logistics /
roles and responsibilities

Psychological
Hope / concerns / anxieties / expectations of each other



PROJECT AIMS

Overarching Aim

Assess feasibility of a joint SEA Framework for water resource planning in England and Wales.

Secondary Aim 1: Regulatory Framework

Review compliance with SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, Water Resources Planning Guideline (WRPG) and UK Environmental Assessment Regulations 2004.

Secondary Aim 2: Consistency and Flexibility

Standardised methodology with flexibility for local adaptation to environmental and stakeholder needs.

Secondary Aim 3: Aim to improve transparency, reduce duplication, and enhance efficiency across water resource regions.

Project Background

- **There are five regional planning groups in England, responsible for delivering the National Framework for water resources.**
- **Each Regional Group has produced Regional Plans that promote long-term water resource management.**
- **Those Regional Plans either had a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), or an Integrated Environmental Assessments (IEA) which was led by the SEA.**
- **Each Regional Group has member water companies that must create a Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) every five years.**
- **Where significant environmental effects are likely, water companies are required to carry out a SEA for their WRMPs.**
- **The last planning round revealed inconsistencies in SEA frameworks within regional groups, making regional assessment challenging.**
- **Regulator feedback from last planning round could be addressed with a joint approach by, for example:**
 - **Aligning neighbouring regional plans, especially for in combination assessments; and/or**
 - **Ensuring region-wide feasibility of data, assessments and methods, and recognising any gaps in data or uncertainties in assessments.**
- **To address this, water companies are interested to explore:**
 - **A joint, unified, SEA Scoping exercise feasibility for the Regional Group's next Regional Plan.**
 - **The method for undertaking the scoping exercise and consultation.**
 - **The water companies legal standing.**

METHODOLOGY



Summary of Methodology

- 1. Comprehensive Water Company and Regional Group SEA Framework Review:** Detailed review of WRMP and DWMP and Drought Plan SEA frameworks identified inconsistencies, commonalities, and efficiency improvement areas across the sector
- 2. Sector Workshop:** Workshop gathered water company representatives and academics to discuss challenges, lessons learnt from the previous round of planning, and future opportunities for SEA processes
- 3. SEA Framework Comparative Analysis and Harmonisation:** Analysis of objectives and criteria from point 1 helped develop a harmonised set of SEA Objectives and Assessment Criteria, as well as Report Structure (the 'Framework')
- 4. On-going stakeholder and expert engagement:** Stakeholder feedback and expert challenge to our methodology and outputs allows that our approach is evidence-based and robust.

Staged Process:



CONCLUSIONS



Key Conclusions

Joint SEA Scoping Benefits

A joint SEA scoping approach, where regional specific considerations can be accounted for, improves regional water planning and could support the regional reconciliation by enhancing consistency and streamlining assessments.

Standardised Framework

A consistent SEA framework across regions supports regulatory alignment and increases transparency.

Local Baseline Development

Water companies must tailor baselines to local conditions to meet statutory environmental requirements.

Consultation Approach

Each water company uses the national standard template provided for their individual scoping reports, with specific alterations to align with their individual baselines, which are then consulted upon at a water company level before feeding up into the regional plan.



RECOMMENDATIONS





Next Steps

- Finalisation of Joint SEA Scoping Feasibility Study by February 2026.
- The Feasibility Study is intended to support the development of a compliant SEA Framework, this combined framework would need to be completed in early 2026 to feed into the SEA Scoping process for AMP8.
- It is advised that the integrated framework be expanded to encompass related assessments, specifically the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) level 1 and 2 assessments.
- Stakeholder engagement with statutory bodies is recommended to enhance efficiency within the SEA process before adopting an integrated approach.

Any Questions?

- Do you agree with a joint approach?
- What issues or risks do you foresee with a joint approach?
- Could this support the review process by regulators?
- Are there any other opportunities associated with a joint scoping approach?
- Any other questions or comments?

