

Minutes of the SWADA Meeting held at the Watchfield Inn – Wednesday 07 April 2010 at 10.30am

1. **Attendance and Apologies** - as per the appended Register. Henry Cator, Chairman of ADA sent his apologies.
2. **Chairman's Welcome and Introduction** – Tony Bradford welcomed members and guests, particularly Dr Jean Venables Chief Executive of ADA, and representatives of Sedgemoor District Council. The Chairman reported that amalgamation plans were well under way thanks to the expertise of the staff at the Highbridge office namely Nick Stevens and Brian Watkis. He said that in order for the amalgamation of the Boards to work, every IDB member must trust one another and work together. The Water Level Management Plans have been progressed to achieve Favourable Conditions with secured funding for several catchment areas in the Parrett Board. On a note of caution though, Mr Bradford said that the moors and levels must not be allowed to degenerate too far as that would not be any good for wildlife or farmers. The problem with creating Favourable Conditions in one area is that it can have a detrimental effect on another area outside the designated area. Dredging works have been carried out on the North Drain, South Drain and North Moor Main Drain. Costs for works and maintenance are escalating in a difficult climate, but the Drainage Board has only ever raised the levy through the rate setting in accordance with the money needed to cover its running costs and for specific projects. Maintenance and capital schemes must be maintained because of the expansion of building developments. However, the role of the IDB must not be forgotten and that is to manage water in both flood and drought conditions, while still maintaining a high level of maintenance which is essential to the drainage of the area. Above all, it is the people that matter – the catchment reps and Board members who do a good job for an organisation that is totally voluntary.
3. **Minutes of the last Meeting** – having been circulated were signed as a correct record.
4. **Matters Arising** – none.
5. **Correspondence and Secretary's Report** – the Secretary read his report – appended. The Secretary referred to the current House of Lords Committee which is considering the Floods and Water Management Bill. Providing the Bill goes through with the recommended amendments, there is a large section on County Councils being given responsibility for flood risk planning within their areas and their role of being an approving body for sustainable drainage. Drainage Boards are mentioned in a list of bodies which should be consulted in certain circumstances, but only if the approving body thinks that there may be a discharge into an ordinary water course directly or indirectly. The Secretary hoped that effective co-operation with the County Councils should ensure that planning applications receive better consideration in the future.
6. **John Taylor- SDC - Public funding of Drainage Boards/Local Authority Contributions** – Mr Taylor said that the District Council is an associate member of ADA and is very supportive of the work undertaken by the IDBs. He spoke about the Special Levy expenditure from the Council's perspective – the IDBs two main income streams are from the agricultural rate and the Special Levy, and the formula for calculating these income sources is complex and based upon rateable value. The criteria are set out in Sections 36 – 52 of the Land Drainage Act and this determines how the income split is defined. The levy is paid by SDC on demand from the Drainage Board with the agricultural rate being collected directly from landowners. Mr Taylor continued by saying that he had attended a recent meeting at the Boards' offices in Highbridge to discuss the proposed amalgamation between the Axe and Brue Boards. It would seem that the amalgamation will generate an increase in the Special Levy of about £60,000. The IDBs levy is included in the Councils overall capping levels. Consequently the greater the IDB levy, the less the Council has to spend on other essential services. There appear to be only two possible options available – that IDBs limit their expenditure so that the levy on the Council does not increase, and option two being that the Council disaggregate the Special Levy so that it is not included in the central Government grant to local authorities.
Peter Maltby (Chairman SDBC) - reported that at the meeting with SDC, the Drainage Board had modified the Special Levy as far as it could to help the Councils expenditure. The point he would like to make is that flooding has been a major priority throughout the country and that every political party agrees that flooding is an unacceptable hazard. Mr Maltby considers the best option is to pursue central Government to take the precept out of the capping limit. He said IDBs have commitments which they are expected to undertake and Drainage Boards have already made as many cutbacks as possible. This would give the Government the opportunity to say that they are undertaking their policy as far as drainage is concerned and it would give Drainage Boards the opportunity to look after rate payers within their area.
Mrs Anne Fraser (Councillor SDC) - endorsed the disaggregation of the Special Levy.
Brian Watkis (Secretary SWADA) - said that all of us must press to stop the erosion of the amount the local authority gets repaid. Despite the current economic times, one cannot do away with the essential requirement to prevent further very expensive flooding.

Tony Bradford (SWADA Chairman) – effective drainage and the prevention of flooding will become even more important in the future. Drainage Boards give a very cost effective service.

7. Dr Jean Venables – ADA Chief Executive Officer – thanked members for their invitation and warm welcome. She commenced with an update on the Floods and Water Management Bill which because of the dissolution of Parliament, may go through as an Act with some of the clauses taken out. Those remaining matters are being shaped into policy by Defra to be presented to the incoming Government as an early Bill. The value of IDBs and that of ADA have been mentioned in Hansard. Dr Venables emphasised that IDBs must ensure that they hold on to their levy raising powers and act as an independent statutory body.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) are now something that all developments must consider first as a matter of course. Dr Venables said that bodies must work closely together and when IDBs are consulting on the national guidance, Drainage Boards must ensure that they are included on the list of organisations that should be consulted.

Dr Venables continued that another issue of concern is that the EA will be writing the National Guide for Flood Risk Management. This states that the lead authority in the local authorities will be responsible for ensuring that local flood risk management plans are made and that they will be consistent with the National Guidance. IDBs must make sure that the National Strategy gives sufficient flexibility for local people to meet local needs – a fine balancing act about wording and interpretation of operational needs.

ADA has been successful in getting a clause included in the Floods and Water Management Bill to allow IDBs to carry out services for each other – this clarifies the Audit Commissions concerns about Consortia. There has been a debate in the House of Lords about IDBs being able to participate in Limited Companies – clarity has been recorded in Hansard and although it is not in legislation as such, it is an interpretation of the matter. In terms of ADA's activities, meetings with Government have been taking place. The Minister was particularly complimentary regarding the proposed competition on Biodiversity Action Plans to celebrate the year of Biodiversity – the plans will be submitted and judged with the prize awarded at the ADA Conference 22/23 September 2010.

Dr Venables spoke about ADAs moves to become incorporated – this will make it a model organisation which will enable further developments to take place.

Dredging trials – Henry Cator had a meeting with Lord Smith. A set of dredging trials are being evaluated with the EA which will help develop their policy with hopefully more flexibility for local needs.

Dr Venables answered questions from the floor including one from Andy Sherwood (SDBC) regarding whether the assessment of the dredging trials would be independent. Dr Venables said that Lord Smith would like the EA to assist in the delivery of the trial. Ray Adlam added his comments.

J Taylor (SDC) referred to critical ordinary water courses. Dr Venables replied that the cost of maintaining a channel by an IDB is generally cheaper than that undertaken by the EA.

Nick Stevens (CEO SDBC) asked if Dr Venables had noticed any desire by other Boards for increasing powers within the legislation relating to development and drainage. Dr Venables said that she had heard this concern expressed before and the short term answer was down to developing relationships with the planning department of the local authority, the long term answer is trying to get a strengthening of these powers in the next Bill. Mr Stevens would like to see the addition of words to the Land Drainage Act legislation about general supervision relating to all matters to do with “drainage of land and development within the Board area”. This would clarify the Boards position with developers. Dr Venables replied that it would be a useful item to include in the next ADA Finance and Admin Sub-Committee Meeting in order to gather views from other Boards.

The Chairman thanked Dr Venables for her presentation.

8. Alan Lovell – Regional Flood Defence Committee Chairman – Alan Lovell was not present. The Chairman invited Ray Adlam to update the meeting. Mr Adlam reported that the Floods and Water Bill and Favourable Conditions Projects were high priority on the discussion list. He considered that Favourable Conditions amounted to a milestone step but the trials need to be supported by science. Finance will be a major issue which affects all departments.

Dr Venables replied that the Boards proposed amalgamation is being presented to the RFDC in the near future. This represents much hard work over many years. Ray Adlam replied that he could see the RFDC being sympathetic to the amalgamation proposal. Dr Venables said she would be using this amalgamation process as an example for other regions to follow because of the good practice and progress adopted.

9. Reports from SWADA Representatives on ADA Executive and any other bodies – the Chairman, Tony Bradford reported from the ADA Executive meeting in March.

- IDBs supported the honorarium paid to Henry Cator, ADA Chairman
- All work supported by the EA must be cost benefited
- Clarification of flooding – when water is 600mm below the surface
- Audit Commission fees. Standardization of asset valuations

- MPs are more understanding of the role of IDBs
- ADA aims to educate Ministers using Vision of IDBs leaflet
- ADA Conference and Exhibition – 22/23 September in Peterborough

Nick Stevens reported on the last meeting of the Somerset Water Management Partnership (SWMP). He spoke about the Wetland Vision, a national project presented by Natural England setting out the potential for wetland areas across the country. It may be beneficial for one of the partner organizations to come and speak to the Boards about this approach across the Somerset Levels. Another presentation at that meeting was the Somerset Wildlife Trust initiative in the Brue Valley.

Philip Brewin, the Boards' Ecologist reported that he had attended the ADA Local Authority Conference where he had spoken on the Boards' work. The WLMP schemes are approved for funding.

10.Any Other Business – Mrs Wendy Welland (Vice Chairman Lower Axe) reported that the Somerset Wildlife Trust are carrying out an otter survey on 24/25 April 2010. Otters are nomadic and use the rhyme system to get around.

Dr Venables said that ADA will be communicating more with members and the public as well as Government Ministers to say what the organization is doing on their behalf. In order to do this, ADA is building up its email database and will issue email newsletters.

Tony Bradford thanked Dr Venables and John Taylor for their presentations and the members for their attendance.

11.Date of next meeting – Wednesday 24 November 2010 at 10.30am, Watchfield Inn, Watchfield.

Meeting closed at 12.15pm.

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CHAIRMAN