

PE2118/D: Review and restructure Scotland's flood risk management approach and operations

SEPA written submission, 10 January 2025

Thank you for your correspondence dated 3rd December 2024 regarding Petition PE2118. We appreciate the opportunity to provide information on the makeup of Local Advisory Groups. These are groups that contribute to the development of our Flood Risk Management Plans (referred to as Flood Risk Management Strategies from 2015 – 2021), as well as the actions SEPA is taking to ensure local community input is reflected in these plans.

1. Composition of Local Advisory Groups

The development of Flood Risk Management Plans under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 involves collaboration with Local Advisory Groups (LAGs). These groups include representatives from a wide range of disciplines and organisations to gain key advice on the regional priorities and local characteristics that influence flood risk management efforts.

The membership of these groups varies across the country to reflect the different land uses across our catchments and coast. A list of the active organisations is provided in the table below.

Table 1 – Active LAG organisations

Organisation or organisation type	Additional information
Local Authorities (Planning, Flooding, Marine & Coastal and Roads departments)	Attendees from: land use planning, emergency planning, flooding, marine and coastal, harbours and roads departments
Scottish Water	
Airports	Edinburgh Airport, Highland and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) airports, Prestwick Airport
River and fisheries trusts/boards	Rivers trusts, fisheries trusts and boards across the country
Forestry	Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry
National parks	Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority, Cairngorm National Park
Port authorities	Forth ports, Peel ports
Scottish Canals	

National Farmers Union, Scotland	
NatureScot	
Scottish Government	Rural payments inspectorate and Agriculture departments
SEPA	Attendees from: flooding, River Basin Management Planning, local regulatory teams, land use planning
RSPB Scotland	
SNIFFER	
Harbour management organisations	
Green Networks	
Scottish Crofting Federation	
James Hutton Institute	
Utilities	Scottish Power, SSE
Regional partnership groups	Forth Estuary Forum, Tweed Forum, Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Solway Firth Partnership, Clyde Marine forum, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere
Specialist groups	Gallant Project, Drax

While the LAGs themselves do not routinely include engineers, economists, or geomorphologists as standalone members, member organisations will contribute a variety of skills and knowledge in these areas. SEPA also consults with a broad range of technical experts throughout the flood risk management planning process. For instance:

- **Engineers:** We work closely with local authorities and consultant engineering specialists during the feasibility, appraisal and design phases of flood risk management actions contained in the plans.
- **Economists:** Cost-benefit analyses are a standard part of the identification and implementation of flood management actions. Input from economists is sought to ensure that proposed actions are economically viable and deliver maximum benefit. The national approach to determining the potential economic impacts of flooding has been peer reviewed by economists at the Flood Hazard Research Centre.

- **Geomorphologists:** Geomorphologists are involved throughout the process. Geomorphological assessments are included in determining the appropriate actions for an area, particularly in areas where natural flood management techniques are considered. SEPA geomorphologists are involved in the CAR licensing of schemes (and other informal flood management actions), both at the application stage but also extensively at pre-application where requested, and where there is a proposal put forward to base advice upon. Additional specialist advice is also commissioned from external experts or academic partners.

The inclusion of independent expertise is critical to ensuring that plans are evidence-based, robust, and effective. We recognise the value of broadening the formal involvement of such experts in the early stages of the advisory process.

Engagement with local communities

SEPA is committed to embedding local knowledge and perspectives into flood risk management plans. To achieve this, we use:

- **Public consultations:** We conduct formal public consultations during the identification of Potentially Vulnerable Areas and preparation of Flood Risk Management Plans. These consultations are widely promoted, and feedback is reviewed to identify community priorities and concerns. Over 75% of 410 responses to the 2024 consultation on Potentially Vulnerable Areas came from members of the public, with additional input from community councils and other stakeholders. A two-stage consultation is planned for the next Flood Risk Management Plans to give communities greater chance to feed in their local knowledge.
- **Support Local Authorities:** Local Authorities are integral partners in developing Flood Risk Management Plans, acting as a conduit for community concerns and ensuring alignment with local priorities. SEPA frequently support Local Authorities at elected member or Scottish Flood Forum organised events or meetings.
- **Flood warning events:** We organise events in communities that have a flood warning service to raise awareness of the service and understand how the service can be improved. Specific community engagement also takes place where significant flooding has happened or where new flood warning services have been planned, to hear from users about their experience of flooding, and of using our services.
- **Community resilience events:** We work with community flood and resilience groups, where requested, to understand their concerns and what could be done to improve community resilience.
- **Awareness raising campaigns:** We run several campaigns to improve awareness of climate risks, including school visits.

While not all of these events are specifically established to feed into the development of the Flood Risk Management Plans, we gain important information from each event that enhances our understanding of local needs and desires.

We continuously strive to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of our engagement processes. Following each flood risk management planning cycle, we review its consultation and community engagement practices to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.

We value the Committee's interest in strengthening Scotland's approach to flood risk management and remain committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to protect communities and enhance resilience to flooding.

I trust the above information is helpful, but should you wish to discuss the above matter further, please do not hesitate to contact us.