

WRSE Regional Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report – Non-Technical Summary

Issue and Revision Record

Revision	Date	Originator	Checker	Approver	Description
A	04/09/20	S Robinson B O’Hickey T Starling	N Levy J Fookes S Allen	S Watson	Draft for Client Comment
B	18/09/20	S Robinson B O’Hickey N Levy	J Fookes	S Watson	For Consultation

Document reference: 412624-ENV-306

Information class: Standard

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1 SEA Scoping Report Non-Technical Summary

1.1 Introduction

Water Resources South East (WRSE) is made up of an alliance of the six water companies that cover the South East region of England, these are:

- Affinity Water
- Portsmouth Water
- SES Water (Sutton & East Surrey)
- Southern Water
- South East Water
- Thames Water

WRSE is producing a multi-sector, regional resilience plan in order to secure reliable and resilient water supplies for the south east. The WRSE regional plan will take a long-term view to 2100 and will also provide a consistent framework for the development of the member water companies Water Resources Management Plans (WRMP) 2024.

To support the development of the regional plan an environmental assessment process is being undertaken that includes:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
- Water Framework Directive (WFD) Assessment
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment
- Natural Capital Assessment
- Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) risk assessment

The regional plan is not a statutory plan and there is currently no legal requirement for the preparation of the SEA. However, WRSE wishes to follow the SEA approach to help develop a sustainable regional plan and inform the SEAs of the water company WRMPs. Although not a legal requirement, the SEA for the regional plan will be legally compliant with the SEA Directive and Regulations so it can be used in the WRMP24 process.

This document is the Non-Technical Summary for the SEA Scoping Report and therefore, focusses primarily on the context, baseline, and scope for the SEA process.

We are keen to hear your views on the SEA Scoping Report and have included a set of questions at the back of this document. You can respond online at (<https://wrse.uk.engagementhq.com/strategic-environmental-assessment-scoping-report>) or email contact@wrse.org.uk

1.2 WRSE regional plan

The WRSE region makes up the most populated region in the UK and the six water companies within WRSE produce over a third of the water provided on average by water companies across the whole of England. The region is designated by the Government as water stressed and anticipated population growth alongside economic growth and climate change will likely place further pressure on the region's water resources.

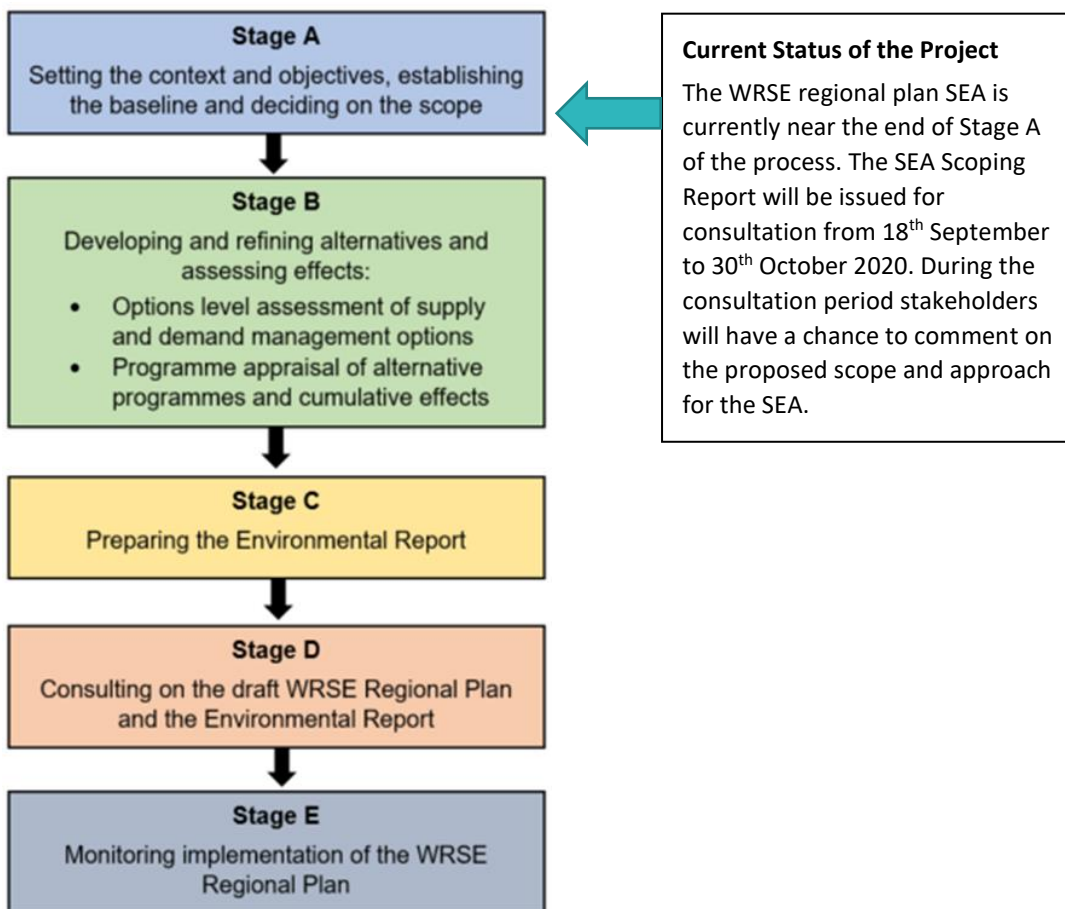
WRSE is producing the regional plan to take a long-term view of water management across the region and aims to secure resilient and sustainable water supplies for future generations through a collaborative, regional approach. The WRSE regional plan will seek to:

- Ensure there is enough water for a growing population and to support economic growth
- Improve the environment by leaving more water in the region's rivers, streams and underground sources
- Increase the region's resilience to severe drought and other extreme shocks and stresses
- Address the impacts of climate change on demand for water and how much is available

The regional plan is likely to consist of a range of supply and demand management options, catchment management options, third party options and multi-sector options. Supply options may include transfers, desalination, water reuse, conjunctive use, aquifer storage and recovery, reservoirs and trading. Demand management options may include leakage reduction, water metering, and water efficiency measures. Strategic Resource Options (SROs) that cover more than one water company are also being proposed, and any SRO that is wholly or partially within the WRSE region will be assessed as part of the SEA and wider environmental assessment process.

1.3 SEA process

SEA works to inform the decision-making process through the identification and assessment of significant and cumulative effects a plan or programme may have on the environment. The SEA process is conducted at a strategic level and enables consultation on the potential effects of a plan with a wide range of stakeholders. The figure below shows the different stages in the SEA process. The SEA for the WRSE regional plan is currently near the end of Stage A of the SEA process.



1.4 Scoping summary

As part of the scoping stage the following tasks have been undertaken:

- Review relevant International, European, National, and local policies, plans and programmes and their implications for the WRSE regional plan
- Establish the baseline environmental and socio-economic information and key sustainability issues and opportunities for the WRSE regional plan area

- Set the context and objectives of the SEA
- Decide on the scope for the SEA, ensuring that it covers all the likely significant environmental effects of the WRSE regional plan
- Provide an opportunity to engage and collaborate with the consultation bodies¹ and wider stakeholders

SEA objectives form the basis for predicting and assessing the effects arising from the implementation of the WRSE regional plan. They will be used to assess the individual options and alternative programmes for the regional plan. An overarching set of SEA objectives were developed based on the SEA Directive topics, the key priorities for WRSE and have been informed by a review of the SEA objectives used for WRMP19 by the six water companies' within WRSE. The SEA objectives are:

- Protect and enhance biodiversity, priority species, vulnerable habitats and habitat connectivity (no loss and improve connectivity where possible)
- Protect and enhance the functionality, quantity and quality of soils
- Increase resilience and reduce flood risk
- Protect and enhance the quality of the water environment and water resources
- Deliver reliable and resilient water supplies
- Reduce and minimise air emissions
- Reduce embodied and operational carbon emissions
- Reduce vulnerability to climate change risks and hazards
- Conserve, protect and enhance landscape, townscape and seascape character and visual amenity
- Conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment, including archaeology
- Maintain and enhance the health and wellbeing of the local community, including economic and social wellbeing
- Maintain and enhance tourism and recreation
- Minimise resource use and waste production
- Avoid negative effects on built assets and infrastructure

1.5 Proposed SEA scope and assessment methodology

To determine the environmental effects of the options and alternative programmes, the following staged assessment process is proposed:

¹ The Consultation Bodies are: Natural England, Historic England, and the Environment Agency.

- A high-level environmental screening assessment
- Detailed options-level assessment (including SEA, HRA, WFD, Natural Capital, BNG, and INNS assessments)
- Programme Appraisal – including cumulative and in-combination effects for SEA, HRA, WFD, natural capital, BNG, and INNS.

The high-level screening will be undertaken using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) approach against the SEA topics to flag high environmental risk options. Set criteria will be used to provide an overview assessment for the SEA and validation exercise for the water companies unconstrained to constrained list screening. The criteria are based on those used for WRSE water company WRMP19s and updated as appropriate.

The detailed SEA assessment will be carried out using the SEA objectives outlined in the section above. Each SEA objective has a set of defined datasets and a defined scoring system using a qualitative scale of minor, moderate, major positive and minor, moderate, major negative, and neutral. The effects of each option will be assessed using this scale and a narrative justification.

Metrics will be developed from the results of the SEA, HRA and WFD assessment processes, and will also include non-monetised natural capital, to feed into the programme appraisal optimisation model. When running the model this will enable:

- Programmes (combinations of options) to be identified based on environmental parameters
- Identification of the environmental effects of alternative programmes selected

The alternative programmes generated will be fed back into the environmental assessment process and the cumulative effects of the alternative programmes assessed. Due to the nature of SEA, a SEA metric for each programme would not be generated. Instead the standard SEA process would be followed whereby the qualitative effects (using the major to minor effect scale) would be identified for each programme.

1.6 Relationship between the regional plan and WRMP24 assessments

It is anticipated that the WRSE regional plan environmental assessments including the SEA will be used as a framework for the WRSE member water companies when undertaking their WRMP24 statutory environmental assessments. A large amount of the supporting information required for WRMP24 will be produced as part of the regional plan environmental assessments which will be available for use by the individual water companies. The approach aims to reduce the amount of work

individual water companies need to undertake during WRMP24, streamline the environmental assessment process, and ensure consistency across water company environmental assessments.

1.7 Scoping consultation

The SEA Scoping Report will be issued for a formal five-week consultation period in September 2020 to the three statutory bodies: The Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, as well as being made available to wider stakeholders. Following the Scoping Report consultation period, all consultation responses will be carefully reviewed and tabulated, and taken into account as far as possible. Details of how the scoping stage consultation has been taken into account, along with the results of the SEA assessment, will be presented in the Environmental Report.

At this stage WRSE would welcome your views on the SEA Scoping Report including the following key questions:

1. Are there any additional plans or programmes at the international, national, regional or local level which have been excluded from the plans and programmes review, which your organisation thinks are relevant to the WRSE regional plan SEA?
2. Do you have any comments on the baseline information presented or any additional baseline information you think would be useful?
3. Do you have any comments on the key issues and opportunities identified?
4. Do you have any comments on the proposed SEA objectives and assessment questions/sub-themes?
5. Do you have any comments on the high-level screening RAG criteria and definitions and/or the SEA objectives scoring criteria?
6. Do you have any other comments on the scoping report?

You can respond to the questions online at:

(<https://wrse.uk.engagementhq.com/strategic-environmental-assessment-scoping-report>) where there is a dedicated survey set up or email contact@wrse.org.uk

1.8 Next steps

The next stage in the SEA process is SEA Stage B which involves the assessment of the options within the WRSE regional plan and the programme appraisal (including cumulative effects of alternative programmes) against the SEA objectives in line with the methodology. The results will be presented in the SEA Environmental Report (Stage C). The Environmental Report will then be issued for formal public consultation alongside the draft WRSE regional plan in January 2022 and the Environmental Report

will be updated as necessary following the consultation period (Stage D) to reflect stakeholder feedback and any amendments to the plan itself.