



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Nutrient pollution of Protected Sites

## An introduction from Defra

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Environment  
Agency

# Overview

- 1. Background and scale of issue**
  - 2. Tackling nutrient pollution of Protected Sites**
  - 3. Protected site strategies overview**
  - 4. Case study - Solent Nutrient Trading Pilot**
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# Background & Scale of the issue

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# What do we mean when we refer to Protected Sites?

Protected Sites largely fall into one of the four following definitions:

- **Internationally or European protected sites:**
    - Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
    - Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
    - Ramsar Wetland
  - **Nationally Protected Sites**
    - Site of Special Scientific Interest
    - Marine Conservation Zone
  - **Locally protected sites** (e.g. nature reserves)
  - **Landscape scale designations** (e.g. National Parks/AONBs)
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# What are our commitments?

- 25 Year Environment Plan (75% of protected sites to good condition)
- Water Framework Directive - To achieve compliance with any protected area standards and objectives by 2027
- Commitment to 30x30 - UN Pledge to protect 30% of land by 2030
- Environment Bill Targets on Biodiversity/ Water/ Agriculture

## 25 Year Environment Plan Progress Report

January 2018 to March 2019



# OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

*Over many years, nutrient pollution (or nitrate and phosphate pollution in water) has caused the declining condition of our internationally important and protected sites across England:*



**The problem:** Water quality is a serious issue across England: less than 15% of our rivers and streams SSSIs are in favourable condition. Pollution sources vary, but primarily come from wastewater treatment works, chicken farming and intensive agricultural practices



**The impact:** Some of the land affected by nutrient pollution includes areas allocated for development. New housing can create additional pollution, principally through increased wastewater. NE has proposed developers achieve 'nutrient neutrality' – where they must demonstrate that a development will add no additional pollution – as a means of allowing development to proceed. Nutrient neutrality can be achieved through various onsite and offsite measures, including by taking land out of intensive agricultural use. Offsite solutions can take time to identify and deliver, meaning development is delayed.



**Why now?** A EU court ruling (the 2019 Dutch nitrogen case and subsequent Fareham Judicial Review) has focused more attention on the need to prevent additional pressure on sites that are already impacted by pollution, and provide mitigation measures that will help. New evidence of the poor condition of some protected sites has also reinforced the need for action.



# What are the opportunities?

- Strong Ministerial interest from Defra & MHCLG in enabling nutrient neutral development to proceed and improving the condition of Protected Sites
- Long term objective for this to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than that in which we inherited it
- The Environment Bill provisions on nature – including biodiversity net gain, local nature recovery strategies, protected site strategies
- The UK leaving the EU allows us to consider different and innovative legislation/incentives to improve the condition of Protected Sites, including tackling agricultural pollution
- Can put protecting nature at the forefront of housebuilding due to Nutrient Neutrality

# Tackling nutrient pollution of Protected Sites

- Nutrient pollution and its impact on development is becoming an issue across multiple parts of England
- A Nutrient Pollution Taskforce consisting of Defra, MHCLG, EA and NE is working on solutions
- Twin track approach:
  - Shorter term actions to enable nutrient neutral development to progress e.g.
    - Support to LPAs from NE and via PAS events
    - Solent nutrient trading pilot
  - Longer term actions to restore sites to favourable condition e.g.
    - Agricultural policy reform
    - Wastewater treatment works upgrades
    - Protected site strategies
- Joint Ministerial Engagement between Defra/MHCLG Ministers: including Roundtables with MPs/Council Heads

# What are Protected Site Strategies?

Much of our wildlife-rich habitat has been lost over the last century and many species are in long-term decline.

Addressing these continuing declines requires us to act more strategically in response to the variety of pressures and threats they face.

- The concept of Protected Site Strategies (PSS) is broad and includes any approach to mitigation or compensation that is wider than the individual project level
- Evidence based, locally-led and collaborative, with the intention of creating a shared strategy that public, private and voluntary sectors can help deliver
- Include and encourage the design of bespoke nature based solutions to address cumulative issues affecting the condition of a site, such as nutrient pollution
- Tailored to local issues, facilitate innovation and enhance cooperation between local actors to deliver results
- Support delivery of our international and domestic targets

# Background, aims and objectives of PSSs

- The concept of PSS have been built on successful ongoing initiatives such as the Solent Nitrate Trading Platform
- PSS are embedded in Project Speed, the governments' strategy to build back better, greener, faster

## Aims:

- Improve habitat conservation in England
- Provide a more strategic approach to the complex challenges of protecting and restoring habitats at risk

## Objectives:

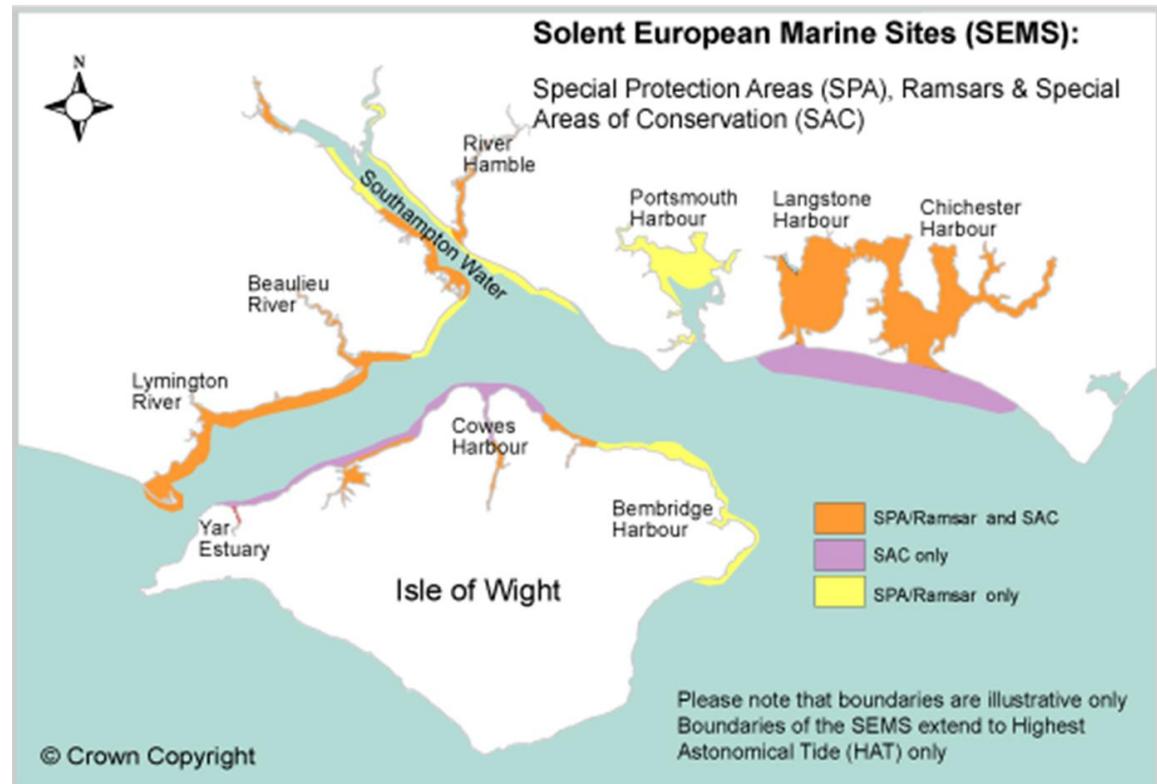
- Long-term objective: achieve favourable conservation status and government targets
- Short-term objectives: more practical e.g. putting in place actions which contributes towards resolving some of the critical challenges to reduce the pressure on protected habitats from pollution

# Case study: Solent Nutrient Trading Pilot

## The issues:

- The Solent is home to nationally and internationally important habitats and species
- These designated habitats are in 'unfavourable' condition due to excess nutrients - largely from wastewater and agriculture

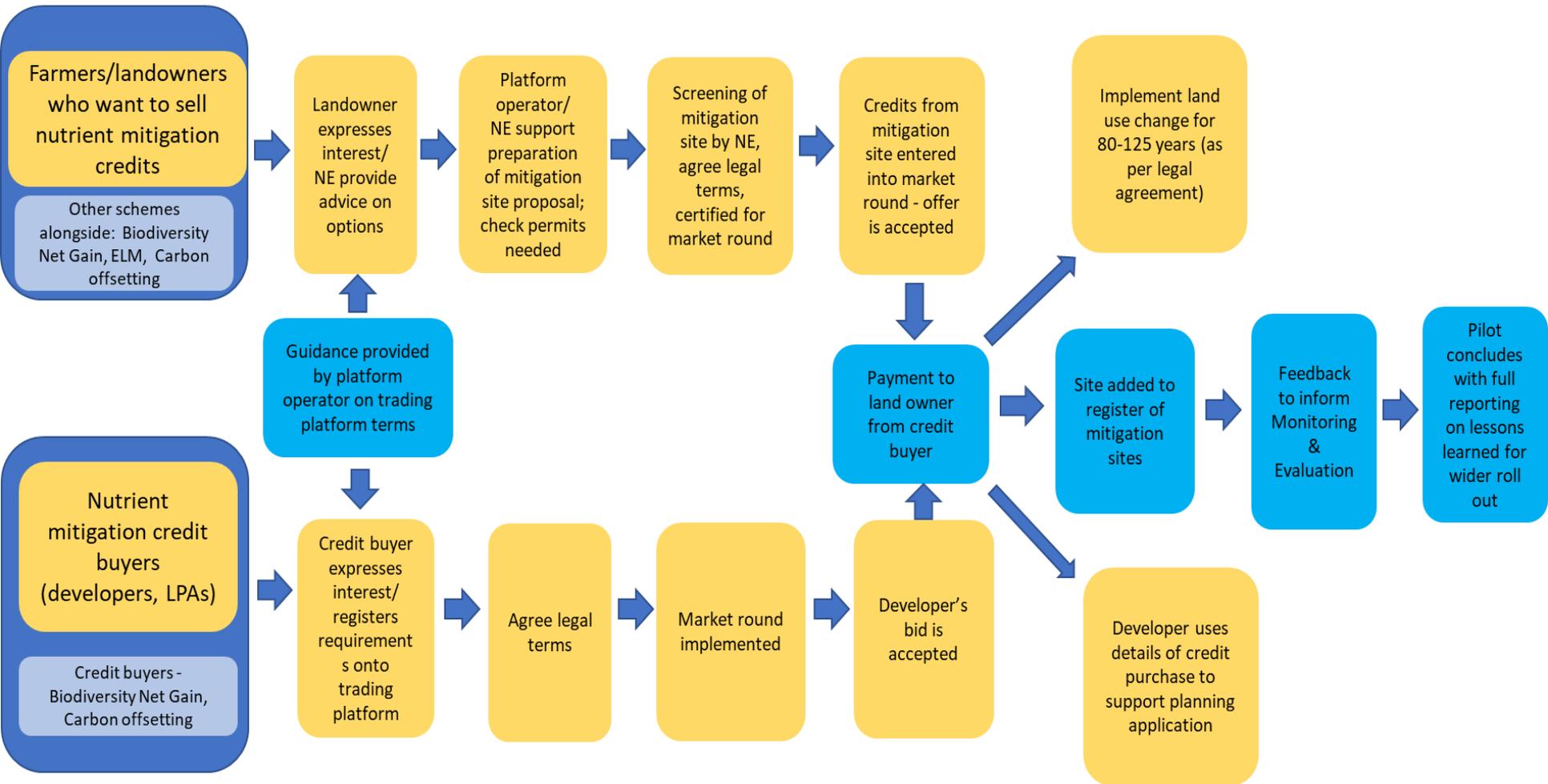
Protected sites  
in the Solent



# Solent Nutrient Trading Pilot – aims/overview

- This is a two-year multi-stakeholder project - Defra, MHCLG, NE, EA and FC, PfSH, local stakeholders
  - Aims to test an innovative market-based nutrient trading process for securing cost effective, long-term nature-based nutrient pollution mitigation solutions
  - A web-based process will enable land owners to put forward offers of credits for sale delivered by identified mitigation sites; and developers to make bids for these credits
  - A typical mitigation site will involve changing land use from agriculture to woodland or wetland or for at least 80 years
  - If successful, will look to implement the approach in the Solent and roll it out to other parts of England facing similar challenges
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# Proposed Solent nutrients trading platform pilot process



Thank you for listening

