



The Tees CSF Steering Group

A Steering Group is a tool used to bring together a cross-section of community partners and advisory bodies that know the catchment well and can help:

- Provide advocacy & guidance.
- Discuss the catchment approach
- Prioritise Conservation 21 - 'Putting people at the heart of the environment'
- Deliver a more effective project.

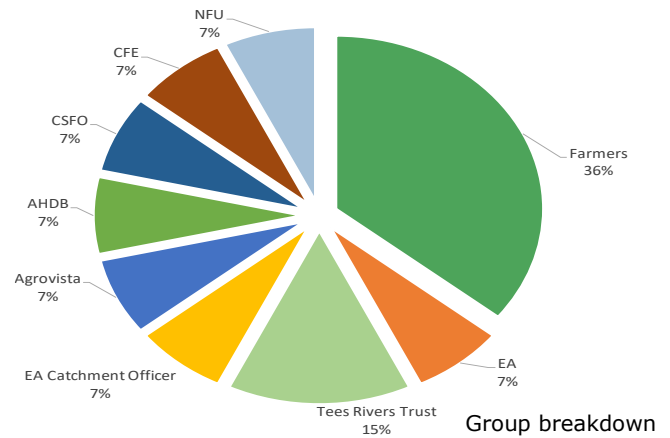
With such large areas to cover and diverse catchments to work with in terms of farming systems and social demographics; a Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer (CSFO) is encouraged to have their own local catchment steering group. This case study looks at the Steering Group in the Tees Catchment, led by Bunty Wright (CSFO).

The Tees Catchment

In 2015 the Tees Catchment was prioritised for water quality due to the high levels of phosphate and sediment in the catchment and the subsequent negative impact on the water courses. The steering group was created to support farmers and CSF in reducing phosphate and sediment levels in the area.

Meet the Tees CSF Group

Originally established in March 2016 with 8 members, the Tees Steering Group has developed into a diverse committee consisting of 13 members:

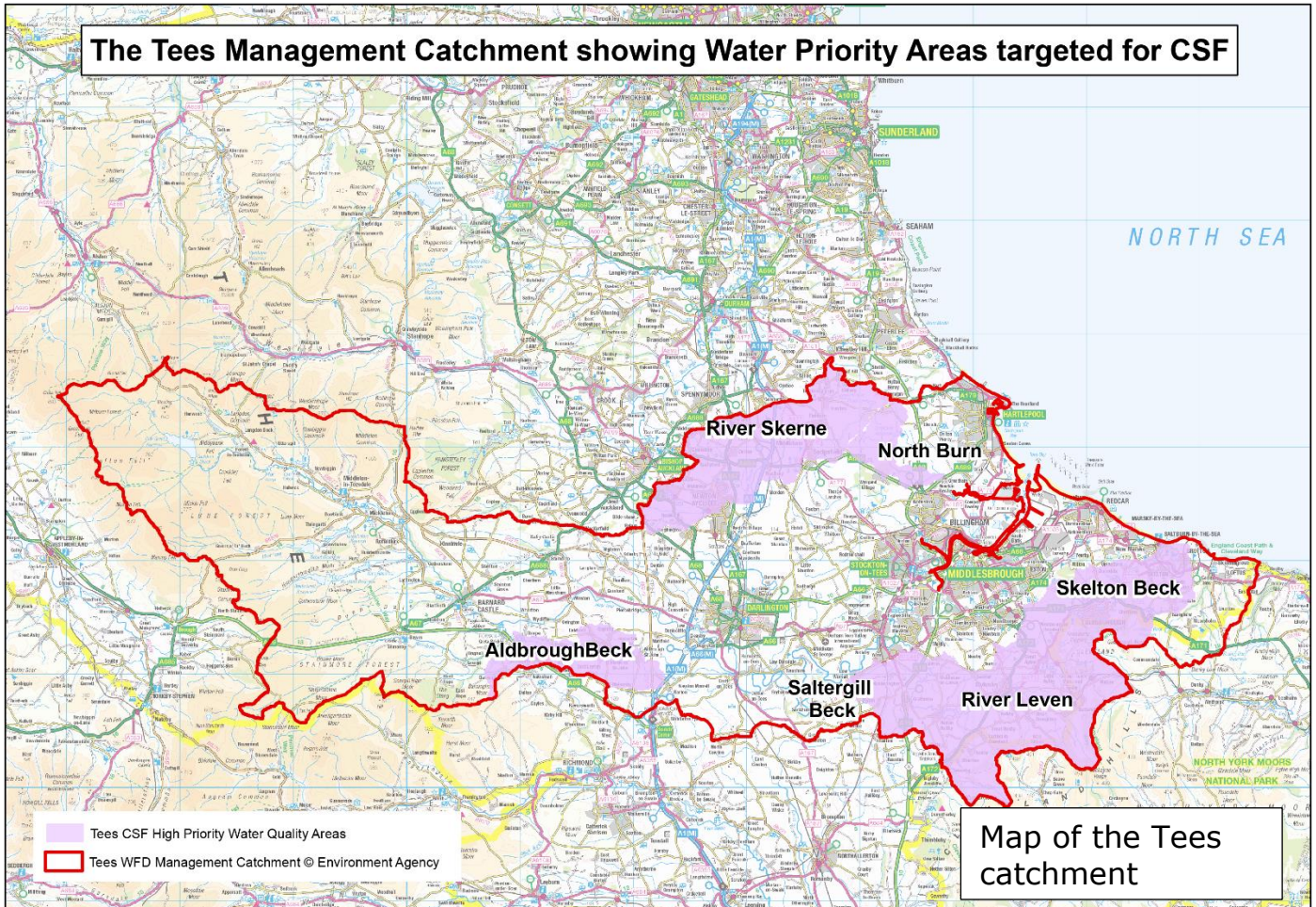


The group grew and people joined who had a genuine interest in improving water quality and the environment. The group grew through discussions with people who worked, lived and breathed farming and understood the needs of the area.

Running the group

The steering group now meet 3 times a year for half-a-day. During the session, members are shown CSF reports on the catchment. The members share experiences, current projects and achievements amongst the group. Speakers relevant to the catchment are sometimes invited to talk on different issues also, encouraging more varied discussion. The feedback is essentially two-way, with all parties communicating their latest issues and objectives and finding ways to overcome future challenges. Keeping members informed of CSF objectives and listening to feedback have been critical to all conversations.

The Tees Management Catchment showing Water Priority Areas targeted for CSF



As CSFO for the catchment, Bunty Wright is creator, organiser and leader of the group, using her experience and local knowledge to engage with members and to promote CSF's message.

Member contributions

Farmer contributions are varied and dynamic and help to greatly improve our understanding of their work in the catchment. They include:

- What's happening on their individual farms.
- Impact of the weather.
- Harvest results (depending on the time of year).
- Countryside Stewardship applications: if they have one, or if they want one!

- What they've heard from other farmers.
- Feedback – A useful insight into what's happening within the catchment.
- Sharing other industry meetings / events that others may not know about!
- Enthusiastic support and delivery of events including hosting and providing venues.



Steering Group photo taken for the CSF Conference called 'Fishing for Advice'

Group bonding

To increase communication and trust within the group, members are encouraged to chat informally at the end of sessions and to take part in group outings and events. These group activities and chats have been incredibly beneficial. Not only do they build group relations, but they show we greatly appreciate their contributions and time taken out of their schedules. These events also offer opportunities to farmers, to experience things from a different perspective, allowing for better overall communication and understanding.

Examples of days out include –

- Bran Sands on Teesside, where the group had a guided tour of the Waste Water Treatment Works and Biosolids Recycling Plant.
- An opportunity to experience the River Tees, from the river itself, courtesy of the local harbour master at Teesside docks.

Group member quotes

"The mix of farmers, advisors and NGOs on the steering group provides a really healthy forum for discussion, taking everyone out of their comfort zone and challenging our approaches and ideas." – Fraser Hugill (Farmer)

"As well as all the information I gained in meetings - they're also a good excuse for a pub lunch at The Bay Horse!" – Robbie Stephenson (Farmer)



Aims for the future

It is hoped that the steering group membership will continue to grow and develop whilst keeping the strong bonds and commitment within the group. Future catchment events are planned through collaborating with members.

With farming undergoing significant change in the UK, we are confident that continued engagement with farmers and partners in the Tees Steering Group will help prepare the wider catchment to tackle the oncoming challenges facing agriculture and the environment.

For further information e-mail the North East River Basin District team at csf.northeast@naturalengland.org.uk