



Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective (MESME)

Summary

As part of the 2010 Government Spending Review and in response to various monitoring reports, Defra Ministers undertook to make Environmental Stewardship (ES) more effective and better targeted. The MESME project was established in the autumn of 2010 to take this forward. A Project Board was established with members drawn from Defra, Natural England, the Rural Payments Agency, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency. Stakeholders were actively engaged and were responsible for developing many of the proposals. The Project was formally closed at the end of February 2013.

MESME was initially made up of 5 strands of work:

- Water Quality;
- Collaboration and Localism;
- Climate Change;
- Making HLS more effective;
- Making ELS more effective

The Project adapted to include trialling and testing a range of improvements to both HLS and ELS, aimed at more effective delivery of options on the ground. The trials specifically covered:

- The scope for Directed Option Choice in agreements
- The scope for self monitoring of agreements by agreement holders and/or third parties
- The scope for a more outcome-focused approach to agreements rather than a prescriptive one

As a result of the MESME work over sixty individual proposals have been developed and these are all listed at appendix 1 to this report. Each proposal has either been introduced from 1 January 2013 or will inform/be further developed as part of the new Rural Development Programme, due to start in 2015. In a few cases the proposal was deemed no longer appropriate or possible and has been dropped. The following is a brief summary of the main outcomes:

Additions and changes to ELS options from 1 January 2013

- Four new ELS/OELS options:
 - Supplement to add wildflowers to buffer strips and field corners on cultivated land;
 - Ryegrass seed-set as winter/spring food for birds;
 - Legume- and herb-rich swards; and
 - Small scale hedgerow restoration (inside and outside the SDA);
- Changes to four current ELS/OELS/HLS options:
 - increase in points/payments for in-field grass areas to prevent erosion and run-off;
 - reduction in points for ELS Farm Environmental Record (FER);

- reduction in points for ELS hedgerow management on both sides of hedge/one side of a hedge; and
 - reduction in points for ELS 2/4/6m buffer strips on cultivated land and on intensive grassland (but no reduction for buffers next to watercourses).
- i.
- ii. New supplementary bird feeding options (for use only with EF2 - wild bird seed mix - and EF22 - extended overwinter stubble)

MESME work informing the next RD Programme

HLS Outcomes:

The next programme will draw on the evidence from the trialling/testing and other MESME work to improve and enhance scheme design, in particular improving the environmental delivery of agreements including improved targeting and greater focus on outcomes, through measures such as:

- Clearer agreement documentation and improved Indicators of Success (IoS) - to provide greater clarity for agreement holders on what their agreements are supposed to achieve over the ten year duration, and what to expect at the different stages;
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- enhanced agreement aftercare visits – to help farmers keep their agreements on track with the objectives;
 - the scope for enhancing engagement by agreement holders with the desired outcomes, including the potential role of farmer self assessment (monitoring).

ELS Outcomes:

- ELS Directed Option Choice - surveying farmer attitudes to limiting option choice to certain option bundles or to “split lists”.

Landscape-scale and Collaborative Working: Evidence from the CCRI economic study exploring the costs and benefits of different mechanisms for delivering co-ordinated agri-environment schemes at a landscape-scale. In addition, an assessment of the scope within the draft Rural Development regulation to promote further landscape-scale working and possible options. Both to feed into new programme design.

Water Quality: Establishing the extent to which ELS contributes – through option selection, location and management of options on the ground - to meeting environmental objectives such as reducing diffuse water pollution from agriculture and meeting Water Framework Directive priorities.

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Appendix 1. Final Outcome of all Proposals Arising from MESME

The list of proposals was agreed with Defra at a meeting in July 2011 when MESME work passed from development to delivery. The status of each proposal is rated as:

	Completed
	Being considered under work on the new Programme
	Work in progress during the remainder of the RDPE and to be further developed as part of the next RDP
	MESME Project Board agreed to be abandoned

MESME Workstream: Water Quality

No.	Recommendation	Status	Comment
1	Develop proposals for future scheme uptake reporting on the delivery of DWPA solutions for WFD. (Assess current scheme uptake in WFD priority areas). To enable reporting on the catchment scale. To include proposals for sharing information between EA and NE.		Tested reporting ES uptake at WFD management catchment scale (100 catchments within England). Feedback is that it is not that meaningful at this scale and needs to be linked to clear spatially targeted performance indicators for RP uptake. To be revisited in the development of the new RDP scheme. Links also to Defra /ALB project on evidence/data sharing.
2	Develop proposals for monitoring (and reporting) ES scheme uptake with the 10 pilot catchments for the EA catchment approach.		Needs to be taken forward as part of development of the new programme. This work also links to the ALB joint working programme (which this work is also reporting to) and Evidence/data sharing project /work stream.
3	Develop proposals for further monitoring and evaluation work to examine option selection, location and management to determine the extent of the likely contribution towards DWPA solutions and WFD priorities.		2 contracted pieces of work in progress:- Analysis of ES uptake for resource protection –Final report expected January 2013 Securing and maximising the environmental gain from arable reversion –To report end May 2013
4	Continue to monitor projects that provide training, advice and promotion such ECSFDI and ETIP to assess their influence on scheme and option uptake.		Keep in view as part of NELMS evidence gathering. Also linkage to the wider Defra AIVA Project.
5	Continue to utilise data from the EA to inform the targeting delivered through ETIP.		EA resource availability is an issue. Missed opportunity for revision to ETIP targeting map for Handbookv4. Will be important to consider when NELMS moves onto thinking about targeting and prioritisation and any option bundle development. EA data will be important for the Synergies project too.

No.	Recommendation	Status	Comment
6	Work with ECSFDI to review how ES (including ETIP) should work alongside the CSF programme, and what the relative roles of the 2 schemes should be to tackling DWPA and WFD objectives.		Completed training for new entrant CSF & LM staff. Guidance & webinar produced. Future of CSF now wrapped up in the future of NELMS.
7	Consider proposals for pre-condition requirements for entrance into ES such as on farm planning. Include review of current precondition requirements.		Possibly dependent on the outcomes from CAP P1 Greening developments. MESME Directed Option Choice testing may also be relevant.
8	Examine the possibility of removing the 70% land coverage target for agri-environment schemes and replace with single objective targets		Separate target set so superseded. Target however achieved.
9	Further R & D is needed to quantify the relationship between the uptake of beneficial measures and the delivery of DWPA objectives at a catchment scale. This should seek to determine the agri-environment contribution to WFD objectives for 'no deterioration' across England, as well as objectives for 'at risk' and 'failing' water bodies and the timescale required for action.		3 contracted pieces of work in progress:- Analysis of ES uptake for resource protection –Final report expected January 2013. Commissioned by NE. Securing and maximising the environmental gain from arable reversion –To report end May 2013, commissioned by NE. Identifying basic measures to assess agricultures impact on water –to report end March 2013. Commissioned by EA. Other project commissioned such as Defra DTC project and also the Defra Synergies project.

MESME Workstream: Collaboration and Big society work areas

10	Provide decision support tools to support delivery teams in planning and delivery of landscape scale co-ordinated delivery. This includes the situations (geographical, thematic) where collaboration/co-ordination is desirable (e.g. connectivity/buffering) and the forms that this might take		A key element for NELM to consider when developing the Implementation Phase. Decisions should be based on the full range of public goods (ecosystem service) potential. Future form of delivery as yet uncertain, pending Triennial Review amongst other issues.
11	To identify the rationale and criteria for the deployment of the group supplement HR8. Addressing priority co-ordination issues in the HLS targeting framework.		Covered by NELM Options Review Groups. Also the FERA report on AES delivery and design, ecosystem approach and much academic research ^{1,2} .
12	Explore the potential to use 3 rd party groups to deliver co-ordinated management on small fragmented sites		Already possible in theory and there are some examples e.g. Durham magnificent Grassland.
13	Establish a range of payment rates for HR8 for a range of different circumstance/scales		To be covered by NELMS Payment Review work stream in conjunction with Options Review work and NELM scheme architecture developments.
14	Explore the scope to develop a group supplement option within ELS, identifying what the requirements of such an option would be.		As above
15	Ensure that sufficient flexibility exists to allow groups to form/expand during the life of agreements, agreements to be adjusted/start dates reset as required.		General issue for NELMS architecture, delivery and targeting work areas.
16	To develop ELS targeting guidance to better identify opportunities for landscape scale co-ordination and encourage groups to form to address these issues [linked to group supplement recommendations].		To be considered as part of NELMS - how to coordinate and support delivery at a landscape scale, where that could enhance environmental outcomes.
17	To develop guidance and methodologies that enable more flexible targeting at a local scale within the national targeting framework. This could allow hierarchical prioritisation of issues within		To be considered as part of NELMS - how to coordinate and support delivery at a landscape scale, where that could enhance environmental outcomes.

¹ Incentivising Collaborative Conservation: Lessons from existing Environmental Stewardship Scheme Options. Franks and Emery, Newcastle University. Land Use Policy 30 (2013) 847-862

² The Economics of Collaboration: Report to Defra. CCRI (2012)

	different geographical areas, and can cater for local input to priority setting.		
19	To adjust the scale of HLS target areas to reflect the resource available and ensure effective co-ordination can be achieved, reflecting evidence on the thresholds of intervention required to achieve outcomes.		For NELMS to review. New targeting strategies will be required for the new programme, learning lessons from the current programme.
20	To develop decision support tools to support local groups to develop landscape scale initiatives.		Guidance is being prepared for teams within NIA. To be considered as part of NELMS - how to coordinate and support delivery at a landscape scale, where that could enhance environmental outcomes.
21	To develop training packages linked to groups/landscape scale initiatives.		NELMS to consider, should such approaches be adopted.
22	Develop a more strategically targeted approach to training delivery [linked to changes to targeting frameworks/guidance].		Training assimilated into national skills framework and associated training programme.
23	Develop a set of principles for landscape scale initiatives involving ES funding.		Natural England LM Strategy Team has developed a draft set of principles. Shared with Defra in a paper on Landscape May 2012. NELMS to cover. Guidance from Ecosystem Approach CoP to NELMS also in preparation.
24	Explore the potential to develop a funded facilitation/co-ordination/monitoring measure to support collaborative landscape scale agreements (both ELS and HLS), defining eligibility linked to the principles identified above and revised targeting.		Comment as at 23 NELMS to cover
25	Provide support and guidance for groups on co-funding and potential links to other funding sources.		Potential issue for NELMS implementation.

MESME Workstream: Climate change

26	A specific ES scheme objective for climate change mitigation will be introduced		Handbook 4 includes theme pages Issue for Defra on NELMS scheme objectives.
27	Review HLS targeting statements to take account of emerging mitigation and adaptation priorities		
28	Develop adviser guidance and training material (relating to habitat networks, tree planting, sustainable drainage systems, soil carbon management)		Technical information note produced & webinar held
29	Ensure that advice/training for farmers is sufficient to positively influence their decisions in ES option selection		Material made available to FATI leads
30	Introduce changes to ELS options to improve delivery for climate change mitigation and adaptation.		NELMS also to note

Workstream: Making HLS more effective – Targeting, quality, outcome focus.

	Component	Making HLS more effective	Status	Comment
31	Delivery Planning	complete an assessment of the potential delivery across the ES objectives from the 2011/12 pipeline		Submitted to Defra
32	Targeting / prioritisation	Continue to roll out improvements to the HAT		Improvements were made to the data supporting the HAT on climate change and diffuse water pollution in 2011. No further changes planned within current programme.
33	Targeting / prioritisation	Undertake an analysis of the current spend across the primary objectives of ES		Similar baseline info on the likely carry over into the next programme would be useful for NELMS planning.
34	Targeting / prioritisation	superimpose overarching ministerial priorities on the existing targeting framework		HLS refocusing guidance was issued by LMDU in early 2011. Significant changes to HLS targeting within the current programme was deemed to be not necessary. Changes to HLS targeting maps would require major stakeholder consultation. Defining the objectives and their relative priority will be a critical issue for the new Programme – part of NELMS architecture discussions with Defra and Ministers.
35	Targeting / prioritisation	Continue to utilise more data from the EA to improve knowledge of where HLS is most needed to support WFD outcomes (and reciprocate). Use this to update the HAT and better inform HLS pipeline development.		Timely data sharing will be an important issue for the next programme.
36		Examine current HLS target areas to ensure we are making the most of the potential to deliver DWPA solutions where there are key synergies between objectives. Include an examination of where key synergies are not co-located.		Rolled into next programme. A decision was taken not to make substantial changes to targeting as that would require major consultation, as in 2008. Major issue for NELMS. For Biodiversity and Water Quality outcomes the Synergies Project will hopefully provide valuable guidance.
37	Targeting / prioritisation	Use this knowledge to identify areas for a collaborative landscape scale approach to HLS (and ELS) in WFD priority areas		See work stream: Collaborative working and Big Society. To be covered by NELMS. See previous comments.
38	Targeting / prioritisation	Improve the information used in HLS targeting (HAT) relating to climate change and consider light touch revisions to targeting statements and advice.		HAT climate change datasets were updated in Spring 2011. Revision to targeting statements deferred to new programme. To be covered by NELMS. See previous comments on objective setting and

				targeting.
39	Targeting / prioritisation	Introduce methods to account for highly specific areas for habitat creation and recreation potential in HLS targeting, incorporating local datasets into the HAT to maximise the likelihood of success.		A decision was taken not to make substantial changes to targeting as that would require major consultation, as in 2008. To be covered by NELMS. See previous comments on objective setting and targeting.
40	Targeting / prioritisation	Improve targeting of educational access by identifying educational access priority areas and updating HLS targeting statements.		New dataset for educational access added to HAT in spring 2011.
44	Quality	There should be a single page statement at the front of the agreement that summarises the main purpose(s) of the agreement and puts it into context.		Explored through Q4 2011 but could not implement due to lack of resource and concerns about consistency Priority issue to consider in NELMS. Link also to CEH evaluation of HLS final report conclusions.
45	Quality	There should be an adviser report for each agreement, explaining choice of options, capital items, tailoring of prescriptions and Indicators of Success.		Explored through Q4 2011 but could not implement due to lack of resource and concerns about consistency. Priority issue to consider in NELMS. Link also to CEH evaluation of HLS final report conclusion.
46	Quality	All documents relevant to the decision-making process (e.g. soil analyses) and the management of the agreement (e.g. Implementation Plans or covering letters) must be held on the EDRM, properly numbered and indexed.		Standard operating procedure.
47	Targeting / prioritisation	Ensure full and consistent adoption of the HLS targeting framework, utilising the Holdings Assessment Toolkit (HAT) and Classics to Environmental Stewardship (C2ES) to produce the HLS pipeline.		HLS Re-focussing guidance was issued after the budget reallocation in early 2011 This was refreshed in January 2012 ES Information Note.
48	Quality	Agreement objectives, option choice, prescriptions and particularly Indicators of Success need to be more tailored to the site and what can realistically be achieved within the 10 year HLS agreement period.		Training being developed via Skillsport online training. 3 modules planned for – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IoS setting, • optimising adaptability/flexibility • scheme background and accreditation 3 modules being delivered as 2, all training material developed, one on Skillsport .
49	Quality	Agreement layout and wording should be clearer, more concise and user-friendly.		Changes could not be progressed due to IT constraints Priority issue to consider in NELMS.

				Link also to CEH evaluation of HLS final report conclusions.
50	Quality / Aftercare	a) There should be dialogue with the Agreement Holder on all site visits. b) Customer feedback should be sought via farmer champions and/or other means.	Closely linked to 58	An enhanced aftercare package was agreed with Defra and stakeholders in March 2012. The new commitment for 2012/13 comprises a phone call annually for all live agreements and 20% visited. This has proved challenging for delivery teams to accommodate but they are on schedule to deliver the 2012/13 profile of work. Agreement aftercare and embedding performance management and customer service into the next schemes are key issues for NELMS to resolve, with many lessons to learn from 2007-13 delivery and corporate planning.
51	Delivery Planning	There should be a framework of targets (at organisation, team and individual level) that define quality and also quantify environmental outcomes. These must have equal priority to targets relating to spend and commitment.		Targets supporting this were added to the corporate plan. They include reporting on the areas in agreement linked to specific outcomes. The new delivery framework has a greater emphasis on outcomes and possible linkage with the CHIP to allow data mining by outcome.
52	Quality	There should be a framework of continuous professional development for all advisers, enabling them to learn from others, to share knowledge and for R&D transfer. Technical networks are a good means of encouraging this; they will need to be co-ordinated by the Land Management directorate. Lead Interest advisers need to be identified and given time to contribute to them.		A Skills Framework has been developed to enable advisers to access training they need to reach and maintain competency for their role. The Land Management support Hub enables past decisions on scheme rules to be recorded and learned from. Important to carry over into NELMS.
53	Quality	There should be a process to ensure that appropriate 'specialist' advice is used to improve option choice and the use of prescriptions - the LMPP Blueprint laid out requirements. The integration of 'specialists' and 'lead interest advisers' with technical networks should be clarified.		The LM support Hub enables advisers to make a request for support from a specialist, utilising the national network of specialists affiliated to the Hub. Specialist networks are now formally set up for key areas such as grassland, arable, woodland etc. Important to carry over into NELMS.
54	Quality	There should be a comprehensive, accessible and authoritative 'one stop' framework of guidance, background information and support.		Creation of the LM support Hub has bolstered the emphasis on a single portal for advice (building on the existing ES queries database and broadening into SSSI issues).

				Important to carry over into NELMS.
55	Quality	There needs to be a desk check, for every agreement, that all documents are present, including a single page summary, an adviser report, and all data relevant to the decision-making process. Current QA elements of GENESIS should be re-iterated i.e. peer review to raise standards and ensure consistency.		<p>A desk check proforma is now in place and should be in use.</p> <p>However, questions have been raised about the competence of some team leaders to undertake the checks as they lack delivery experience. Also that time pressures are leading to corners being cut in completing this process.</p>
56	Quality	There should also be technical peer review of choice of options, agreement and option objectives, tailoring of prescriptions and IoS. These should be carried out by experienced advisers and a proportion should be checked by colleagues from a different team so that best practice can be discussed and shared.	Overlaps with 60	<p>Some 56 random checks have been completed by the end of January. The majority found to be lacking and a few have major issues. All rule infringements have been acted upon.</p> <p>Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.</p>
57	Quality	There should be provision for a pre-agreement site visit with a specialist or Lead Interest adviser to complex or high-risk cases; at the request of the adviser or of the Team Leader.		The new 3 Tier process guidance outlines the protocol for adviser visits.
58	Outcome Focus	Regular account management visits by advisers are essential if outcomes from agreements are to be improved. It is important that during these visits advisers make their own assessment of progress towards achieving IoS and that they base their feedback to the agreement-holder on this. Also important that the results and outcomes from these visits are recorded and followed through. Scheme compliance must form part of these visits, plus appropriate follow-up with RPA, which requires QA support from experienced advisers.	Closely linked to 50	<p>An enhanced aftercare package was agreed with Defra and stakeholders in March 2012. The new commitment for 2012/13 comprises a phone call annually for all live agreements and 20% visited. A substantial increase on previous ISA and care and maintenance commitments.</p> <p>At the end of January, 1994 visits made against a target of 1817.</p> <p>Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.</p>
59	Quality	To help advisers make consistent assessments of the IoS, and help ensure that feedback is consistent and high quality, it is recommended that a small proportion (perhaps 5%) of such visits should be carried out by the adviser and an		<p>Not formally taken forward in current programme, although local arrangements might cover this where resources allow.</p> <p>Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of</p>

		experienced colleague, with a more formal assessment of feature condition to ground-truth the IoS assessment. These visits could form part of the Integrated Site Assessment programme. Data from these visits would be recorded using a standard format and a brief report written.		CEH final report too.
60	Quality	A sub-sample of agreements (c.100/year) should be subject to formal nationally co-ordinated monitoring of quality to ensure consistency and standards between teams. This would include relevant national specialists who would also have responsibility for collecting and reporting national summary data relevant to their specialism. This subsample might involve some site visits. Another aspect of post agreement QA that is required is the application of derogations. Again, the support of experienced advisers is important if agreements are not to be undermined by inappropriate derogations from the prescriptions	Overlap with 56	Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, depending on future scheme design and delivery decisions. Linkage with issues raised by CEH final report too.
61	Outcome Focus	Improved development and inspection of Indicators of Success	Overlaps with 48 and 58	Being taken forward through the online training and enhanced aftercare commitments outlined at recommendations 58 and 48. Vital to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.
62	Outcome Focus	Enable HLS agreements to be more adaptable,		Being taken forward through online training. Module live during January 2013. Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.
63	Outcome Focus	Improved guidance on delivering multiple outcomes from HLS agreements		Being taken forward through online training. Module live during January 2013 Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.
64	Outcome Focus	Develop a self-assessment tool for agreement holders		Work with stakeholders to develop this is well in-hand and field trials are underway. Final report to MESME IB February 25 th 2013.

65	Outcome Focus	Enhanced agreement aftercare		<p>Being taken forward through the online training and enhanced aftercare commitments outlined at recommendations 58 and 48.</p> <p>Important to carry over this recommendation into NELMS, in light of CEH final report too.</p>
66	Collaboration	Develop criteria to enable the local development, in conjunction with stakeholders, of HLS geographically specific option packages / bundles		<p>See work stream Collaborative working and Big society.</p> <p>Carry into NELMS development.</p>

Workstream: Making ELS more effective

41	Continue to focus advice programmes, such as ETIP, on the local environmental circumstances and target towards the most locally beneficial and appropriate measures.		
42	Make changes to individual ELS options that offer low additionality to improve their value.		Changes agreed with the European Commission and incorporated into revised handbooks.
43	Improve the ELS handbook through greater focus on option choice based on objectives (bundles approach)		Handbooks version 4 launched October 2012.