

Eels over flood defence?

19th February 2015

Huge costs, possibly in excess of £150 million, are set to be incurred by the operators of land drainage pumps in order to safeguard eels, with most of that cost being met through, already tight, flood defence budgets.

The steps are being taken in order to meet obligations towards the European Commission's Eel Recovery Plan (Council Regulation 1100/2007). The Eel Regulations came into force in January 2010 following the drastic decline of the eel population by as much as 95%. Eels are migratory and whilst steps are being taken to remove or provide access around the 26,000 barriers in our rivers, the cost of doing so huge.

The pumping stations, that provide the low lying regions with protection against flooding, will need upgrading to allow safe passage and protection for the eels.

In a report carried out in 2012 it was confirmed that within the Anglian Region alone there are approximately 450 land drainage pumping stations which are operated in the main by the Internal Drainage Boards.

In Cambridgeshire, the Ely group of Internal Drainage Boards, which manages a total of 29 pumping stations across ten drainage board catchments, has been told that the cost for compliance with the regulations for just 2 of the 29 pumping stations would cost £3m. The IDB that operates the pumping stations does so on an annual income of £700,000, made up from drainage rates and levy's. The Middle Level Commissioners, manage 33 Internal Drainage Boards, one of which would incur a cost of £1.8 million for upgrading just one pumping station.

In Norfolk, the Downham Market group manages six IDB's, and calculated that the cost to upgrade pumps and provide safe eel passage around other barriers would cost in the region of £12 million.

On these few cases alone it stands to reason that the costs across the UK could well be in the hundreds of millions, which is a lot more than the initial Environment Agency assessment of £75 million.