



Nitrate from agriculture: moving from uncertain data to operational responses

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The Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) is designed to protect waters against nitrate pollution from agricultural sources. It requires Member States to identify waters which are, or could become, polluted by nitrates and to designate as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) all land draining to those waters and contributing to the pollution. To meet these requirements, Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) have commissioned reviews that designated NVZs in 1993, 1998, 2002, 2008 and 2013. The designation methods used have evolved over this time and have been developed with the close involvement of farming and water company representatives and with advice and guidance from a number of independent external technical experts. The monitoring network and methods change frequently and methods need to be developed which are robust enough to cope with gaps in data, both geographical and temporal. This project is aimed at investigating new approaches for identifying waters that are at risk of nitrate pollution and the land that drains to these and builds on a large body of evidence supporting understanding of nitrate in the environment. The work will demonstrate to Defra and to the wider community that the most cost efficient and appropriate methods to designate NVZ areas for groundwater and surface water are used.