

Farmer bulletin

Summer 2022

Introduction

We're excited to be introducing Louise Stratton as our new Development Manager for the Poole Harbour Nutrient Management Scheme (PHNMS):

"It is a real pleasure to have recently joined the team as Development Manager. I've been working in Dorset for many years, most recently with the NFU as Dorset County Advisor. This role included being involved with PHNMS since its inception, so I'm grateful to have the knowledge of the scheme's journey so far, whilst now being committed to being part of the team to help drive the scheme forward for the farmer's benefit."



I will know many of you from my past work, but I look forward to meeting and hearing from any farmer in the catchment; this scheme has farming at its heart and the more feedback and thoughts we can have from you as we progress its development will only make the scheme stronger. My contact details are below, please don't hesitate to get in touch with your thoughts, views or just to get an update!

These newsletters are for all Poole Harbour catchment farmers' benefit, the team have been achieving great steps forward, but we know we need to keep you all better updated on its progress and next steps. Please help us to keep everyone updated by forwarding this to your neighbours; and I urge anyone who hasn't received this directly from me, to either drop me an email or register your contact through our website so I can add you to our communication database – which is purely for PHNMS, no spam will be present!

I look forward to working with you all on PHNMS."

Mobile: 07392 262793

Email: louise.stratton@pooleharbournitrates.org.uk



The next 12 months

Following the Judicial Review in 2015 over the poor ecological state of Poole Harbour, Defra and the Environment Agency (EA) have a legal obligation to put in place actions to tackle diffuse water pollution entering the Harbour from the catchment. Fearing the threat of more legislation and the possible risk to farming in the catchment, Poole Harbour Agricultural Group was born. With farmer support we developed a voluntary farmer-run scheme, working alongside Natural England (NE) and the EA to reduce the perceived leaching of nutrients from agriculture into the Harbour.

We're incredibly proud to announce that NE and the EA have signed off PHNMS as a pilot Approved Scheme for the next two years. Farmers participating in PHNMS will be permitted by the EA to work to a gentler glidepath nitrate target until 2030, rather than achieving the end target straight away in 2023.

Farmers participating in PHNMS will not register their data directly with the EA. PHNMS farmers' data will be anonymised and only shared with the EA at a scale that protects the anonymity of each farm holding. The EA will not have access to the data held by PHNMS.

The names of farmer businesses participating in PHNMS will be shared with the EA and will be a lower priority for direct farm inspections than farms outside of PHNMS. If the two-year pilot is successful, the scheme and its rules will continue.

So, we have a busy year ahead of us:

- Preparing the pilot phase for launch by the end of the year, signing up farmers and ensuring that the EA provides adequate support for the use of the Nitrate Leaching Tool (NLT).
- Finalising legal documentation for scheme processes for members to join Poole Harbour Agricultural Group and to develop trading contracts.
- Developing a system to verify the results from the NLT and potentially getting contracts in place for verification work by early 2023.
- Defining the operations for the full scheme by early 2023, using the lessons learnt, data gathered and farmer experiences from the pilot.

Later in the year, there will be various opportunities for farmers across the catchment to have an input and learn about the scheme's operational phase.

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The Scheme Pilot 2022

At our last round of farmer meetings in March, we introduced the pilot that will begin this year and run from 2022–2024, a scaled-up version of last year's trial. The aim of the pilot is to gather further data on nitrate losses to Poole Harbour and allow time to prepare for the proposed start of the scheme in 2024.

Thank you to everyone who has registered their interest in participating in the pilot. It's not too late if you haven't already, please get in touch via louise.stratton@pooleharbournitrates.org.uk if you'd like to find out more. Louise will be in contact with all interested farmers soon to confirm and discuss the next steps.

Nutrient Accounting Tool development

We know that the Nutrient Accounting Tool, called the Nitrate Leaching Tool (NLT), is fundamental to the success of our scheme and that farmers need confidence in the results. In 2021, the farmers that trialled the Tool seriously questioned its useability and practicality. Since then a working group of farmers and advisers have been meeting regularly with the EA to advise on the necessary improvements to make the Tool more farmer-friendly and fit for purpose. The EA have been working with their contractors to make these amendments and there has been a lot of back and forth as we are continually pushing for improvements. As the pilot and the scheme is dependent upon a Nutrient Accounting Tool, we are keen to get it as right as possible. The release of the updated NLT has been delayed but is expected to be released this autumn. The EA will be informing ALL farmers in the Poole Harbour catchment of its release date and we will keep you posted as we learn more.

Poole Harbour Agricultural Group hosts James Bevan visit

PHNMS continues to attract national attention from within Defra and the EA. For the Poole Harbour Agricultural Group (PHAG) it is important whilst creating this innovative new scheme for our catchment, that we work with the regulators so that we have their approval and confidence that farmers can deliver. This means conversations with the top levels of Defra and the EA.

Over the last few months, Poole Harbour Agricultural Group have hosted visits from Sir James Bevan (EA Chief Executive) and Kevin Austin (EA Deputy Director Agriculture, Fisheries and the Natural Environment). On these visits, we have explained the barriers to the scheme's success and how the EA can support the scheme to overcome them.

We will maintain good relationships with these contacts, keeping them updated on our progress and continuing to push for funding and investment into our scheme to support farming's commitment to nutrient reduction in the catchment.