# Farmer bulletin
February 2023

POOLE HARBOUR
Nutrient Management Scheme

## Update on Poole Harbour Nutrient Management Scheme

Thank you to everyone who attended the NLT training that we ran through January and February; we were pleased to see so many of you from across the Poole Harbour catchment, representing a mix of sizes and types of farms. During the sessions, a number of you had questions relating to the NLT, which we have fed back to the Environment Agency for definitive answers. Whilst we are still waiting on some responses, which will be circulated once we have them, we felt it would be helpful to summarise the first round of responses for you, which we hope will assist you with filling out your NLT.

We also want to continue to try and answer as many as possible of your questions on the background of Poole Harbour's nutrient issues, and questions on the Poole Harbour Agriculture Group (PHAG) and Poole Harbour Nutrient Management Scheme (PHNMS), so we have responded to some of those queries at the end of this bulletin. Please do keep feeding in your questions and we will endeavour to answer them as we go.

Finally, a reminder about membership. Farmers who join PHAG and therefore participate in PHNMS will be permitted by the EA to work to a series of gradually tightening nitrate targets (known as the 'glidepath') until 2030. Farmers participating in PHNMS will not submit their NLT data directly to the EA. PHAG members' data will be anonymised and only shared with the EA at a catchment scale that protects the anonymity of each farm holding. Farmers who participate in PHNMS will send their NLT results to PHAG to be verified. PHAG will only share with the EA a list of participating farms; the EA will not have access to members' ACT, NLT or any future trading data held by PHAG.

To join PHAG and participate in PHNMS, you need to fill out the farmer registration form on our website. It can be found at the bottom of the "Join here!" page, by clicking on the "Join here" button. This information is then sent to me for processing; I will get in touch to complete your application and confirm payment.

The link to the page is here:
Membership - Poole Harbour Nutrient Management Scheme (pooleharbournitrates.org.uk/membership)

Louise Stratton
Development Manager

## NLT Frequently Asked Questions - Environment Agency responses

**Q. How do you deal with a scenario where there are several SBI's under the same management?**

A. At present, the EA are dealing with all SBI's individually and so a separate NLT will be required to be completed for each individual SBI. Businesses with more than one holding can balance when in PHNMS.

The EA are considering in the future if it may be possible for landowners who have several land holdings under different SBI's in the Poole Harbour catchment to combine these and achieve 18.1kg/ha as a proportioned average across all land holdings. The process to deliver this has not yet been agreed and it is not possible for this year.

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**Q. Is there a reason why a farmer is only able to split one field on his whole NLT?**

A. No. It should be possible to split any number of fields. Remember that when you split the field, the tool does currently return you to the "ScenarioLandUse" sheet rather than the "ActualLandUse" sheet. Please check that you have clicked back on to the "ActualLandUse" sheet before inputting your land use data.

**Q. Have we a clarification on when FYM moves from fresh to old?**

Defined from RB209:
Old FYM = manure that has been stored for three months or more. Manure has an estimated ammonium-nitrate and nitrate-nitrate content of 10% (cattle and sheep FYM) or 15% (pig and duck FYM) of the total nitrogen.
Fresh FYM = manure that has not been stored prior to land application and has an estimated ammonium-nitrate content of 20% (cattle and sheep FYM) or 25% (pig and duck FYM) of total nitrogen.

Remember, if you have analysed your farm manure you can either choose the manure type that most closely reflects the average N content of the manure OR enter the value in the tool.

**Q. Fresh v Old FYM – when a farmer uses 'Fresh' it raises a red flag on the validation sheet even though they are not over applying FYM.**

A. The NLT at present does not ask for previous years unused FYM and so it will flag up simply because you may have used (input to the tool) more manure that is generated on the farm in the year. This is absolutely fine.

**Q. Why is there no ability to split N applications which reduces N losses - isn't this critical?**

A. The NLT works on an annual nutrient balance approach. The tool assumes that land managers are only applying fertiliser when required by the crops (this is stated in the terms and conditions). As such, it assumes you are applying only the amount of fertiliser at any time that will be taken up by the crop. It assumes you are NOT applying fertiliser at one time.

**Q. How do I, and why should I, split manure/slurry off from total N fertiliser?**

A. The total N content of in-organic fertiliser should be input into the tool using the manure options in the Land Use data sheet. The organic manure type and volume/weight applied to each field should be inserted into the tool.

If the farmer only has the total N applied to the field (combining organic and inorganic fertiliser), the farmer can input this to the inorganic application tab. But it is important to note the "validation" of organic fertiliser generated on the farm and amount applied to the fields will not correspond and an explanatory note should be provided to explain why.

**Q. Are we inputting for fresh weight or dried weight yields?**

A. The tool assumes you are putting in "fresh" yield.

**Q. How do I split a field that was whole in "Actual Land Use" but will be split in "Scenario Land Use"?**

A. At present, the tool does not provide the option to split a field in the Scenario Land Use tab. In these instances, you can decide to split the field in the actual (to the correct hectarage) so that it can be split ready for the Scenario or leave it as one and change it for next year.

## Land use queries

**Q. My crop isn't listed in the Land Use box.**

A. The EA are aware of several crops which are yet to be incorporated into the NLT. They hope to have these as options in the future.
In the meantime, if you know the N offtake value from your crop, you could identify a crop with a similar N offtake (kg N/tonnes yield) from the "ListOption" sheet and use this crop in your NLT. You should insert this assumption in your comments and in the covering email you submit with your completed NLT.

Missing Options:
- Spring beans: Use "Veg Beans"
- Winter beans Use "Veg Beans"
- Spring and winter peas: Use "Veg Beans"
- Salad crops (such as lettuce); Use "Veg: Lettuce (crisp)"

**Q. What do I classify heathland and scrub as in the NLT?**

A. At present, the EA are requesting that if there is no organic/manufactured or fertiliser applied that heathland and scrub is classified as "Rough Grazing" in the tool.

**Q. What would a set-aside/fallow cropping be put down as?**

A. The farmer should input the crop sown after the previous harvest. If no crops are sown, the year set aside is introduced the autumn winter management should be left blank, assuming there is no land cover.

**Q. You cannot graze after "hay (extensive)"**

A. If you choose extensive hay, the tool assumes the land is not grazed.

If you do cut hay but also graze, you could choose Grass: Dairy grazed and then choose 1/2/3 cut silage option or Grass: Beef and then select 1/2/3 cuts. This will assume you graze for 5 months (for 1 cut silage), or 4 months (if 2 cut silage).

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**Q. For any Land Use codes for grass where the total fertiliser applied is 0, e.g., GRASS: lowland sheep, why does it come up with a pop-up box saying it will be unrealistic?**

A. You can input 0 total Fertiliser N into the tool for any Grass land uses. The NLT suggests that this value may be unrealistic as it is assuming that the grass is a crop (and as such, RB209 recommends some fertiliser input). If you use no fertiliser, please ignore this message and select "No" so that you leave the input as 0 and do not return to the Field Data Entry Sheet.

**Q. For both wheat and barley there are multiple options under the Land Use codes, what is the difference?**

A. Different wheats have been included in the tool as they have different N content and so different N offtake values. The EA were advised by advisors and agronomists for the need to include the following barley options to accommodate different N loss levels:

Arable feed barley
Arable Winter Barley (assuming winter sowing)
Arable Spring Barley (assuming spring sowing)

This enables the farmer to choose the relevant crop they are sowing.

**Q. The management option 'maintain ditches' is an option in Higher Tier Stewardship but it increases N losses. How can this be dealt with/considered?**

A. The NLT considers the impacts of mitigation methods regardless of whether they reduce/increase N losses and/or are required as part of a Stewardship Scheme.

We recognise that some land managers may be involved in schemes which require actions which increase N losses and as a result recognise that this can appear to contradict the idea of 'good practice'.

When certain actions such as maintain ditches are undertaken, land managers must ensure to select this within the tool. Since emission limits must be achieved, land managers may decide when their agreement contractual period is over, to remove themselves from that scheme and sign up to one that may better suit the requirements of the Poole Harbour Catchment in regard to N losses.

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## Poole harbour background questions – PHAG responses

**Q. We hear that the farming practices of our forebears are a cause of the problem, and that agricultural leaching is improving all the time. Has any modelling been done allowing for the already improved farming practices and is this considered with our agricultural target?**

A. Modelling has been done by the EA to ascertain what farming's current leaching figure is. But with the last true data on leaching being 10+ years old, we need the baseline data to prove where we are now, compared to the modelling that has been done. The NLT is the only approved tool to currently produce this figure.

**Q. We are told that decomposing algal blooms also release nitrates in the harbour. Work to remove the algae was proposed but dismissed on the grounds of cost and displacement of more nitrates. Given food security and food cost issues is there any merit in these proposals being revisited?**

The problem with Poole Harbour algae is that compared with sites like beaches in northern France the algae in the harbour is more contaminated with plastics and other pollutants. PHAG members explored and researched a number of potential markets for collected algae for cosmetics, fertiliser, biofuel, animal feed etc. However, the material is inconsistent, contaminated and too expensive to collect, transport and store.

It would be expensive to harvest because it would have to be skimmed off the water at high tides only and brought ashore on the expensive shores of the harbour. So far as there is any market, it would then have to compete with material that can be harvested using loading shovels or tractors and trailers. There is a very good website at https://www.ceva-algues.com/en/document/harvesting-of-algae/

Currently therefore it is not commercially viable and would make very little return. It is also perfectly possible that it would not find a market at all and become a very expensive waste.

**Q. PHAG is tackling the practicality and useability of the leaching tool, but no mention is made of its accuracy. Is it fit for purpose?**

A. PHAG investigated multiple tools in the early days of developing PHNMS and commissioned a report from the University of Hertfordshire on the suitability of these tools. Currently, the NLT is the only approved tool by the EA, no other tool is scientifically approved.

**Q. A comment has been made that 300 ha's of land adjoining the harbour would be sufficient to capture the leached pollutants. Is this true and has it been looked in to?**

A. The Judicial Review states that for the agricultural sector, an element of each type of measure will be needed to reduce N leaching to the harbour. Reducing nutrient application rates; improving soil condition (holding capacity); improving farm infrastructure; improving farm storage; reducing stocking densities and use of alternative measures, such as c.380ha of wetland adjacent to the harbour. It is one tool in the box, not a sole solution.

**Q. Why has PHAG taken funds from Wessex Water when they are also a polluter into the harbour and potentially therefore have a clear incentive to increase obligations upon us?**

A. PHAG has only taken one payment from Wessex Water, which was an administrative commission on the trading that was completed as part of the 2021 scheme trial with c.20 farmers. This was an agreed commission to cover some of the scheme's development costs and we saw it as an opportunity to cover costs and fund the ongoing development of the scheme.