

**Collaborative learning about  
the opportunities and barriers  
for engaging with the water  
environment**

**Civil society research findings**

**SUMMARY**



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# Summary of findings

**People love rivers...**

One of the key motivations for people to get involved in caring for their local water environment is that they love rivers, the wildlife on them and the way they can help them to relax and unwind.

**...mostly!**

These feelings were almost universal in the groups contacted, however there was recognition this connection can be weaker in urban areas and possibly among younger people. People in urban areas were also likely to be motivated by the culture and heritage of rivers.

**People are busy so they need to be inspired**

Most members of civil society groups are either retired and busy with multiple groups and commitments or younger and busy with working lives and additional hobbies. Creating discrete, short and exciting tasks for them to take part in is important, if this can be tied into their interests it will be much more successful.

**The CaBA is a great idea... will it create change?**

The Catchment Based Approach was known by groups already involved in looking after or linked to the water environment and both they and people new to it thought it was a great idea. Experiences of interacting with CaBA were a little more mixed and some felt a bit disconnected from it, with the risk it could be perceived as 'all talk and no action'.

# We asked people which of these five different statements resonated most with them / their members

Because rivers are an important part of our culture and heritage, we enjoyed them as children and should celebrate them.

Because we rely on rivers for drinking water, cooking, growing food and running businesses.

Because they support wildlife and are in a poor state, which means the wildlife that lives there is under threat.

Because there is an urgent need to work to save rivers, we rely on them along with wildlife.

Because they help us lead happier and healthier lives, providing places to enjoy, be active and unwind.

# Overall the most powerful motivator was wildlife seen on rivers; followed by rivers being places to relax and unwind

Chart illustrating the responses to the motivation statements by catchment and type of civil society (Conservation or Leisure focus)

Prompt	CAMLAD						Soar						Likely	Less Likely	Unlikely
	Conserv	Conserv	Conserv	Conserv	Leisure	Leisure	Conserv	Conserv	Conserv	Leisure	Leisure	Leisure			
Wildlife	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	7	5	0
Well-being	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	6	5	1
Heritage / culture	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	3	5	4
Urgent	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	0	7	5
Rely on	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	0	6	6

The top reason most likely to motivate people to help with their local rivers was wildlife relying on the rivers. Thriving wildlife was closely linked in people’s minds with what makes rivers beautiful and restful environments. This view of rivers as relaxing was the second most powerful motivator.

In response to the other three statements there were some notable differences between people in the more urban environment with those living in urban areas more likely to also respond to the culture and heritage of rivers.

# People feel strongly that the wildlife on rivers are part of what makes them precious places

Because they support wildlife and are in a poor state, which means the wildlife that lives there is under threat.

I've had a kingfisher perch on the rod as I was fishing, I've had otters swim in the pool as I'm fishing, these are tremendous things, the real attractions, that closeness to nature is the real attraction

*Leisure group- CAMLAD*

The statement about wildlife had the most support across all groups as a strong motivator for helping to look after rivers. It was also frequently given as an unprompted reason people would want to volunteer. This occurred across both conservation specific groups and more leisure based groups.

People found the story behind this statement easier to relate to, they could see that unhealthy rivers would have direct consequences for wildlife.

I think that would be a big, because lots of people walk down by the river...are very interested in birdlife and wildlife...people would be very exercised by any vandalism or pollution or anything like that..it's where it hits home isn't it

*Leisure group- Soar*

# People cared about wildlife and viewed it as one of the elements that makes rivers attractive places



When people were asked to pick one of these six images (on the right) everyone chose the kingfisher (three participants picked this as one of two images).

Participant 1: Well I must admit I went Kingfisher as well because I think it is the jewel of the paddler's life. That's the thing, that when they see one that is...

Participant 2:...like wow.



For participants the kingfisher represented the beauty and elusiveness of river wildlife at it's best.

# Almost as popular a motivator was that rivers are places to relax and unwind

Because they help us lead happier and healthier lives, providing places to enjoy, be active and unwind.

This statement was popular among all the groups except one, and spoke very strongly to the groups whose primary purpose was to enjoy the river through fishing, walking or canoeing.

I mean it's just perfect to have a sit looking at the river. ...we'd had a half day's walking, we got to a caravan club park and there was a seat right on the side of the river and it was just such a delight to sit and eat our sandwiches and see the water flowing past

*Leisure group- CAMLAD*

That is why we go fishing! That's why we go, that's it!

*Leisure group- CAMLAD*

The group who were less responsive to this didn't feel strongly that any of the statements fitted with what drove them to volunteer: the importance of the environment and concerns over climate change.

# There are six barriers we need to overcome to increase people's support for their local water environment.

<b>Messaging</b>	People need to know that there is a problem to address and be clear on how to do that. This is made more complex by events like flooding.
<b>Demands on people</b>	Most people are very busy and need ways to get involved which suit their availability and busy lifestyles. They are put off by paperwork and excessive bureaucracy.
<b>Support</b>	It is demotivating to feel that there is no support at a wider level or from government. Activities are more successful when they are better supported and there is a leader.
<b>Type of task</b>	The type of tasks needs to match the abilities and interests of the audience.
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	It is important for people to feel included and to find ways to engage a wider group.
<b>Location impacted on challenges</b>	In rural areas it was harder to get groups together and to recruit large numbers where populations were low. In urban areas it could be harder to connect with the kinds of people who might be interested.

# Practical activities such as litter picks were most popular and citizen science can be very appealing if relevant

Chart illustrating the responses to the possible activities they might do to support local water environments by catchment and type of civil society group (Conservation or Leisure focus)

Activity	CAMLAD						Soar						Do it already	Likely to do	Might do	Wouldn't do
	Leisure	Leisure	Conserv	Leisure	Leisure	Leisure										
Volunteering (litter pick)	█		█		█	█	█	█	█			█	5	4	3	0
Citizen science (WQ)	█	█	█	█			█	█			█	4	4	3	1	
Consultations	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			█	█	1	6	5	0	
Local planning	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			█	█	1	6	5	0	
Sign up for email	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			█	1	3	8	0	

\*\*Combined with activity

++ would do more

When asked about the types of activities they and their group members would be interested in doing many groups were already involved in activities, especially in the more straight-forward practical tasks such as litter picks. The main 'maybes' in response to volunteering activity were for groups where they either felt another group did this already, so it wasn't their remit to run (although they would promote another group's organised activity to their members), or the group weren't physically able.

# Channel: the best ways to communicate are via their groups, with email and facebook being most used

<b>Connecting via their group means they will notice</b>	People are often members of multiple groups and signed up to hear about various interests via email. This means they may not be keen to sign up to or receive another email. It is much better to contact people via their existing group where they will already be interested and give the message more attention.
<b>A talk can be a good starting point</b>	For many of the more leisure based organisations a good first step can be going along to give a talk, which engages people's interest ready for them to do more
<b>Older groups use email, younger groups facebook</b>	The older the membership of the group the more likely that the main route for communications is via an email address, and often a website to find the main contact. Groups with younger members tend to use Facebook for more communication and this can be a great way to put up messages to reach people without adding to their email inboxes.
<b>Email updates can be popular with some</b>	For those people who do want to hear regular updates email is the best way to do this and people talked about some emails they find really interesting such as those from their local River Trust or Pollution Newsletter.

# Message: people are most likely to respond to messages that talk about their local river, the wildlife and tranquillity it offers and ask for small discrete chunks of active involvement

<b>Local makes people feel they can make a difference</b>	People feel they can make a real difference at a local level, and are likely to be most interested in environments they can relate to, even if they are not fully aware of them usually.
<b>Messages should be about the importance of habitats for wildlife &amp; for people to enjoy</b>	As covered in the motivation section, the messages about looking after rivers for wildlife and to protect places people enjoy and unwind in resonate most widely. They also make the most sense to people who don't typically make a connection between natural water environments and the domestic water they use.
<b>Messages need to be clear about what is being asked</b>	People were happy to be asked to take part in activities as long as this was done clearly, with the commitment needed explained up front. Activities should fit with their interests and abilities so tailoring this and asking what they would like to do is important.
<b>It needs to feel action focused</b>	People are very put-off by the idea of 'talking shops' or long meetings and need to feel that even when there are meetings involved there will be plenty of action

# Overall awareness of the Catchment Based Approach was good among conservation orgs and river users

catchment	Type_group	Water users	Heard of CaBA	Involved in CaBA
CAMLAD	Conservation	occasional	Yes	Yes
Soar	Conservation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Soar	Conservation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Soar	Leisure	Yes	Yes	Yes
CAMLAD	conservation	Yes	Yes	Yes
CAMLAD	conservation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Soar	Leisure	Yes	Yes	No
Soar	Conservation	occasional	Yes	Interested
CAMLAD	Leisure	Yes	Yes	Interested
CAMLAD	Leisure	occasional	No	Interested
Soar	Leisure	No	No	Interested
CAMLAD	Conservation	No	No	Interested

Most of the groups contacted had heard of the CaBA, although clearly since the contacts provided were often those known by the Rivers Trust operating in the catchment this will be skewed compared to a random sample.

Of the organisations who hadn't heard of it most were leisure based and not direct water users. They were all still interested in CaBA and keen to find out more, so it is worth looking for participants among the wider civil society groups.

Overall the CaBA was viewed as a very good idea, with the only risk being that they need to be active and inclusive to be successful.