

## An Esk Forum?

With attention increasingly focussed on how we can better manage river catchments in the context of the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity, consideration is being given to the establishment of an Esk Forum embracing the whole catchment of the North and South Esks.

We are at a crossroads between the past and the future. Regional Land Use Strategies to engage all interests in the future planning and use of land and water are underway. The Principles of Land Rights and Responsibilities for everyone is now established and will become a fundamental element of land use in the future. In addition, the Scottish Government has set out new policy principles for more integrated use land and water resources. Later this year the Scottish Parliament will be asked to approve new environmental and agricultural support legislation. Work on the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme has put into perspective that downstream flood control cannot be divorced from upstream land and water us.

Looking after nature and looking forward to mimicking it are well established approaches used around Europe. Taking up that approach and preparing to implement the new policies, legislation and funding streams which will inevitably accompany them, provides an opportune moment to bring all of those with rights, responsibilities and interests within the Esk catchment to discuss the future. That is the essence of what an Esk Forum would do. The best exemplar of a forum approach in Scotland is Tweed Forum.

Cooperation in how a catchment is best cared for is a complex series of activities and must involve many interests, most especially those with rights such as owners of assets, especially land and water, and their managers, as well as resident communities, and other wider interests. What sort of things might be considered? How to balance food production, sporting management, tree planting, restoring habitats and species, improving fish stocks, carbon sequestration, recreation and access, making the area more natural are some of the issues that will need to be considered. Another way is looking at how water can be retained water in the catchment and therefore reduce downstream flooding risk and bring other benefits. For example, considering planting trees along stream courses to reduce water temperature and increase nutrient supply, creating ponds, blocking drains that are no longer needed and ensuring that new buildings do not increase the flooding.

We are considering the feasibility and desirability of establishing such a forum to discuss what shared interests there are and what could be achieved over time.

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