

**Case ID: IESS.21.015**

**Description: First review of SEPA's progress in implementing their barrier removal programme**

### **Background**

During Environmental Standards Scotland's (ESS') pre-investigation work, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) provided plans staged across the next five years, indicating how barrier removal or easement of river structures would take place. These were developed in early 2022 by SEPA in accordance with Scotland's Third River Basin Management Plan, which the Scottish Government launched in the Parliament in December 2021. Given that SEPA's plans, at that point, were relatively new, ESS decided to monitor and engage with SEPA on their implementation progress through the various stages. This update sets out the outcome of ESS' first review of progress.

### **Assessment outcome**

It should be noted that ESS' first review began in December 2022. However, during this process SEPA confirmed that their plan would be taken forward in financial years rather than calendar years as indicated in the initial profile. Accordingly, ESS extended the review period to include progress made till the end of March 2023.

In response to ESS' enquiries, SEPA provided the following progress update profile, which sets out their current and anticipated future progress on the removal project up until the end of 2027:

	Dec-21	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25	Mar-26	Mar-27	Dec-27
Stage 0 - no action required	0	44	86	91	91	91	91
Stage 1 – screening	206	130	13	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 - licencing and design	28	50	115	97	63	24	0
Stage 3 – build	10	4	11	18	24	22	6
<b>Stage 4 - works complete</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>147</b>

Against their May 2022 implementation plan, SEPA confirmed the following:

“SEPA’s implementation plan (May 2022) aimed to screen out 46 barriers and complete works on 18 barriers in FY22/23. This financial year we have screened out 44 barriers and completed works on 16. Two WEF barriers scheduled for 22/23 have been re-scheduled for delivery in FYs 23/24 and 24/25. This represents a delivery of 60 out of 64 planned, or 94%, which keeps us on track to deliver the overall programme for RBMP3.”

In their response to ESS, SEPA confirmed that, for the programme to be completed, additional funding would be required and they were in discussion with the Scottish Government with regards to this.

SEPA were also able to provide information on governance and individual project plans. No further information was provided in connection with contingency planning, as SEPA were content that slippage was minor and that, as of March 2023, delivery against the plan was at 94%.

Based on the information provided, ESS considers that the implementation programme is, by March 2023, largely back on track. ESS notes that the programme has a significant ramp-up in activity for financial year 2023/2024, with the majority of activity focusing on licensing. ESS will assess progress against the programme again in March 2024.

18 May 2023