

**Case ID: IESS.21.015**

**Description: Second review of SEPA's progress in implementing its barrier removal programme**

### **Background**

During Environmental Standards Scotland's (ESS') pre-investigation work on the licencing of barriers in Scottish rivers, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) provided an implementation plan, staged across five years, indicating how barrier removal or easement of river structures would take place. The plan was developed in early 2022 by SEPA in accordance with Scotland's Third River Basin Management Plan, which the Scottish Government laid in the Scottish Parliament in December 2021.

Given that SEPA's plan, at that point, was relatively new, ESS decided to monitor and engage with SEPA on its implementation of the various stages of the plan. ESS' first review of progress found that SEPA's implementation programme was, by March 2023, largely back on track. This update sets out SEPA's progress against the plan between March 2023 and April 2024.

This update should be read in conjunction with previous briefings which can be found at: [Licencing and Removal of Weirs Summary Report - Environmental Standards Scotland](#) and [Licencing and Removal of Weirs - May 2023 Progress Update - Environmental Standards Scotland](#).

## Assessment outcome

The following table sets out SEPA's planned activity for year 2023/2024 and what was delivered.

Stage	Planned activity	Delivered activity
Stage 0 no action	42	91
Stage 1 screening	117	104
Stage 2 licensing and design	115	98
Stage 3 build	11	4
Stage 4 completed	3	6

SEPA advised that a further 104 barriers had been identified following fish ecology fieldwork and from the rebuild of databases lost during a cyber-attack suffered in 2020. As these additional barriers represent a significant increase to the 244 barriers originally identified within the implementation plan, ESS made enquiries with SEPA to understand how it planned to manage the additional barriers, and how this would impact on compliance. ESS also enquired whether any further significant increases in the number of barriers to be included in the plan was anticipated.

SEPA advised that it expects the numbers of barriers identified to have stabilised, and that it does not anticipate any further significant additions. SEPA also provided the following revised progress update profile, which sets out its assessment of current and future progress on the barrier removal project (see Table below).

	April 2024	April 2025	April 2026	Apr 2027	December 2027
Stage 0 – no action required	82	137	137	137	137
Stage 1 – screening	139	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 – licensing and design	101	146	71	34	5
Stage 3 - build	4	34	80	51	21
Stage 4 - works complete	22	31	64	126	185

## Conclusion

From the information supplied by SEPA it appears that, other than the barriers at the build stage, it has largely completed the work scheduled for 2023/24.

SEPA has also incorporated the recently discovered barriers into its implementation plan. ESS notes that the forthcoming year involves a transition from the screening to the licencing and design stage and a significant increase in the number of barriers at the build stage.

ESS will assess SEPA's progress against the programme again in April 2025.

September 2024