



Abingdon Reservoir BBOWT position statement

Background

In June 2010 a Public Inquiry was held into Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan. The plan sets out what resources Thames Water feel they need in order to provide water for the population of their region for the next twenty years. They believe that a significant increase in their water storage capacity will be necessary, and their preferred option is for the creation of a new reservoir to the south-west of Abingdon.

The Secretary of State has provided information on the reasons for holding a public inquiry which include a lack of adequate justification for the preferred options and lack of information on the decision process in reaching the preferred programme of options.

BBOWT, along with many other organisations, have been consulted about the potential wildlife impacts that could result, and, if the reservoir went ahead, whether there are possibilities for wildlife gains. We have responded to these consultations, highlighting our concerns as set out below. Whilst we recognise that the process of reservoir construction can have short term impacts on wildlife, there is also the potential for reservoirs to create good wildlife habitat in the long term.

In the New Year it is expected that the Secretary of State will publish a decision on the plan, based on the evidence heard at the Inquiry.

Our concerns

BBOWT believes that the proposal for a new reservoir should be based on a thorough assessment of the need for increasing water supply. This must ensure that all possibilities of reducing any increase in demand for water, through using new technologies and changing the way people use water, are promoted. It also must be based on the achievement of targets to reduce the loss of water through leakage. BBOWT has not expressed a view on the assessment of water supply and demand as set out in the Water Resource Management Plan, as this is not within our area of expertise. We do, however, have considerable knowledge of the habitats and species of our three counties, and have therefore provided comments in relation to the potential wildlife impacts of construction and operation of a reservoir.

The site promoted as a possible site for the reservoir has very few direct wildlife constraints. However, there are indirect concerns which we have raised with Thames Water. These include the impacts on wildlife in the Thames downstream of the reservoir from the abstraction and input sites and the impact of associated infrastructure. We expect these concerns to be examined fully as part of the assessment of the environmental impact of a reservoir proposal. We believe that the proposal to re-circulate water within the reservoir by pumping to control algal levels is unsustainable and urge Thames Water to find an alternative solution.

The proposal to use the existing Farmoor water treatment facility to treat the water stored in the Abingdon reservoir means that a pipeline would have to be installed to link the two sites. The Cothill area lies between the two sites, and includes areas protected under European Law for their rare habitats, and a number of nature reserves. We would be opposed to any proposal that would have a significant impact on any designated nature conservation sites. Consultants working on behalf of Thames Water have had access to some of our reserves in the area to undertake surveys to inform an ecological impact assessment.

We will also continue to push Thames Water to provide maximum wildlife gains from any resource development proposals which go ahead. The nature of the proposed reservoir at Abingdon, which would have to be embanked, would limit the possibilities for habitat creation within the reservoir, but all possibilities for the creation of habitats that support valuable wildlife should be examined, both on the reservoir itself and in the immediate surroundings.

In addition to the proposed reservoir at Abingdon, the Water Resource Management Plan also identifies the need for groundwater abstraction at Goring. We have concerns over the potential impacts of this proposal on terrestrial ecology and believe that investigation of such impacts is needed.