Main issues identified in planning for the future of the catchment include recognising that:

- Abstraction has lowered river flows so that some reaches dry up completely in years with below average rainfall
- Bankside vegetation and the river channel are not always managed in a way that promotes conservation
- Groundwater levels apparently rising in the Cray catchment may contribute to flooding problems
- Control of privately owned sluices must be coordinated to prevent flooding
- The chalk aquifer is vulnerable to pollution from spillages
- Some storm water overflows discharge to the Darent during heavy rain and may cause pollution
- Flood defence and fisheries management operations must be carried out in a sensitive way to avoid conflict
- The brown trout population should be permanently restored in the River Darent

This report is the first stage of the NRA Catchment Management Planning process for the River Darent. Your comments – particularly on issues identified in the draft report – are an essential element in the development of the final plan. To obtain a full consultation report or to make comments please write to:

Mr John Chandler
NRA Catchment Planning Co-ordinator
NRA Southern Region
Guildbourne House
Chatsworth Road
Worthing
West Sussex BN11 1LD

Comments are best made in writing and should be received by September 30 1994.

NRA

National Rivers Authority

Southern Region

Kent Area Office

Millbrook House Mill Street East Malling Kent ME19 6BU (0732) 875587

Regional Office

Guildbourne House Chatsworth Road Worthing West Sussex BN11 1LD (0903) 820692

As from 16th April 1995 area codes starting 0 will have a 1 added (ie 0903 becomes 01903)

July 1994

SO-7/94-1k-A-AKGZ

THE RIVER DARENT
THE WAY AHEAD



NRA

National Rivers Authority

Southern Region

Guardians of
The Water Environment

Our Water Heritage: Planning for the Future

As "Guardian of the Water Environment" the National Rivers Authority is committed to safeguarding our rivers and their associated wetlands for this generation and for those to come. In order to preserve our rivers in the face of the wide range of demands and pressures on them, the NRA believes it is vital to plan for the future. Using its expertise in all aspects of river basin management, the NRA has now prepared the draft river catchment management plan for the River Darent.

This leaflet explains the planning process and how you can contribute to this important project by letting the NRA know YOUR views.





The River Darent

The River Darent rises near Westerham, Kent, and flows eastwards towards Sevenoaks where it turns north in a wide valley through the North Downs before joining the Thames estuary at Dartford. As the greater part of the catchment is on permeable chalk, the River Darent has few tributaries, other than the Honeypot and Watercress Streams, which join it north of Sevenoaks, and the River Cray which flows into the estuary.

The Darent Valley has been a focus for human settlement for centuries. The Cray and Lower Darent catchments are highly urbanised and include the London suburbs of Dartford, Bexley, Sidcup and Orpington. The middle and upper reaches of the Darent are rural in character with several villages close to the river. Intensive use of the river as a power source in the past resulted in very little "natural" stream remaining between mill ponds. Dredging has been necessary to keep channels clear of silt which has built up because of reduced flows.

There were once extensive water meadows between Otford and Hawley – now much of this land has been developed for housing or gravel pits.

The problem of low flows in the Darent has been well documented in recent years but there has also been a history of flooding in the area. Extensive flood defence work has been done but low-lying water meadows are still permitted to flood regularly, which preserves their value as wetland habitats.

Public and industrial water supply

The groundwater resources of the Darent catchment have been heavily developed to supply water to London. All of the larger abstractions pre-date the legislation (1963) regulating the management of water resources and allow greater volumes of water to be taken than can be guaranteed in a dry year. Industrial abstractions are concentrated in the Lower Darent and River Cray catchment.

The Darent Action Plan

The NRA has given the highest priority for action to the Darent, identified as one of the top 40 low flow rivers in the country. An "Action Plan" to improve low flows and enhance the environment while safeguarding water supplies has been agreed by the NRA Southern Region and Thames Water Utilities, approved by the Government. The first phase of work is underway.

