



Coquet River Action Group

**CRAG: Happy
Coincidence or
the Time is Right?**



Coquet River Action Group - Signatory groups:

- Rothbury, Warkworth & Amble Women's Institutes
- Felton, Thirston and Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Councils
- Rothbury, Felton, Swarland and Warkworth environmental groups
- Northumberland Rivers Trust



CRAG – where our groups are testing



Many Happy Coincidences

- Bumping into Peter Kerr, NRT director at the 'Deep dive into water' in May 2023
- WI national campaign 'Clean Rivers for People and Wildlife' May 2023
- 2021 Environment Act required Parish Councils must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. January 2024
- Coquet has communities with a strong connection to the river and environment – three climate & nature groups in the catchment



More Happy coincidences

- The high political and media profile of Water quality – just the right time?
- Umbrella group to 10 organisations. There is immediately access to engage with a large number of (hopefully) interested volunteers.
- So many volunteers with scientific skills in the catchment?
- The EA Citizen Science officer appointed 2023/24 – help & free kits
- The gift of the wonderful map for our publicity





Timeline

September 2023 – Coming together

- First testing kit purchased (Rothbury WI)
- First meeting of all groups

October 2023 - First testing commences (Rothbury WI)

January 2024 - Environment Agency provide test kits

March 2024 - Culture of organisation and scientific approach

April 2024 - First coordinated tests at 20 test sites

June 2024 - Constitution signed

September 2024 - CRAG official launch

February 2025 - First detailed feedback of results to volunteers

What's made the group work...

- a good committee with complementary skills
- Right time – plenty of funding interest
- A scientific approach – attracted major stakeholder's support
- A Hands-off approach which is good for active groups..allow local input
- Pacing ourselves – moving forward without overreaching
- Agreed culture - maintain good relationship with stakeholders
- Not too many meetings!



...And what keeps the committee awake at night!

- Avoiding burn out of the committee and volunteers
- Maintaining the group
 - Increase in individuals joining CRAG may change the dynamic and may require changes to the constitution
 - maintaining good relationships with stakeholders
- Funding applications
- Difficulties getting insurance
- Not letting anyone down!



Looking toward the future

- E. coli testing and bathing water status
- Riverfly surveying
- Survey and removal of invasive weeds
- Expansion of water quality testing sites
- Focus on influencing stakeholders

