



Dredging: Myth-busters

Dredging stops flooding – No. Nothing stops flooding, but we can lower the risk of floods by managing the water in a catchment. In low-lying parts of the catchment with artificial (pumped) drainage, dredging plays an important part by keeping drainage channels clear so they can transmit the maximum amount of water as quickly as possible through to the pumps.

Dredging is important to reduce flooding – Yes, but only in the right circumstances. Dredging is essential in low-lying areas with artificial (pumped) drainage to keep drainage channels clear so that large volumes of water can be moved rapidly from areas where the water is accumulating to the pumps. However in parts of the catchment with natural flow, dredging is not generally effective in managing flood risk except at specific points such as weirs, overflow channels and culverts. On open rivers it may cause additional problems by speeding up flow in one part of the river so that the water arrives in a peak further down the catchment, causing more flooding there.

Dredging is the only way to lower the risk of flooding – No. Dredging is just one of a wide range of measures to reduce flood risk, and, as with the other measures, is only effective in the right circumstances. Dredging is essential to keep drainage channels clear when large volumes of water need to be moved rapidly across flat artificially drained areas. However effective flood risk management uses the appropriate measures for each part of the river catchment, for instance good agricultural and land-management practice in the upper parts of the catchment to retain water to control run-off and reduce peak flows and reduce siltation, flood storage areas to hold water at critical points in the catchment, and sustainable drainage systems to reduce run-off from urban areas.

Dredging damages the environment – No, not if appropriate modern dredging methods are used. Man-made drainage channels and modified rivers in areas with artificial (pumped) drainage need to be dredged so they continue to serve their primary purpose of moving water to the pumps. However careful dredging and bank maintenance can increase their biodiversity and nature conservation potential without reducing their effectiveness as drains (for instance, the water vole is in decline in the UK but continues to thrive in IDB areas).