

Riparian buffer strips

A great environmental opportunity

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What are riparian buffer strips?

Any strip of land along a water course where there are farming restrictions with a view to protecting the water course.

Restrictions can include one of more of the following:

- no fertiliser applied
- no plant protection products applied
- no cultivation
- no livestock grazing allowed
- no farming at all is allowed
- particular plants or types of plant must be grown/allowed to grow
- etc.

Riparian buffer strips in livestock areas



Riparian buffer strips in livestock areas



Riparian buffer strips in arable areas





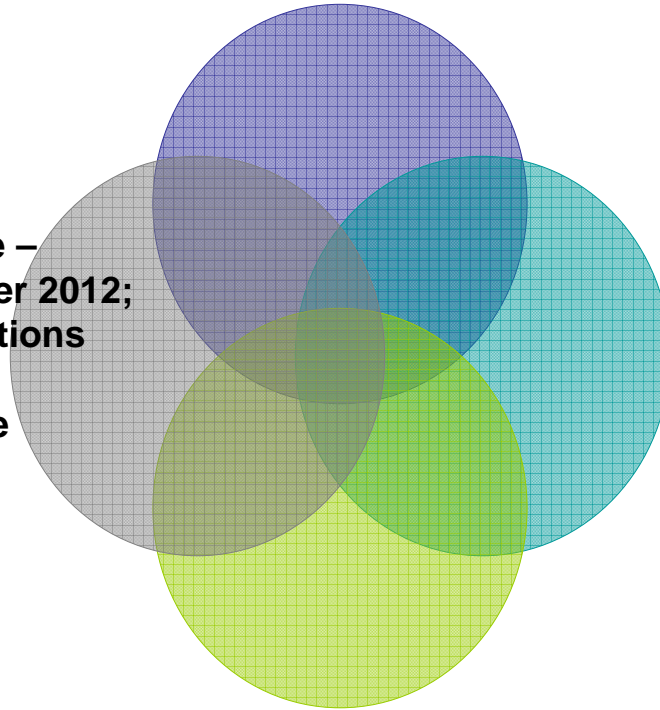
Existing riparian buffer strip rules in EU

**Nitrates directive – in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones.
No application of fertiliser near water courses.
Legislation already in place.**

**Water Framework Directive –
Measures operational by October 2012;
no explicit buffer strip obligations
but likely to be needed
in many cases to achieve
required water quality**

**Cross compliance GAEC –
Introduction by 1/1/2012.
See separate slide**

Pesticides Framework Directive



Cross compliance buffer strip requirement

- Introduced because of the **loss of compulsory set-aside**, with the aim to partly make up for losses to biodiversity and water protection.
- To be introduced between 1/1/2010 and 1/1/2012
- Cross compliance is in the “common rules” regulation 73/2009, Article 6 and Annex III
- Annex III: good agricultural and environmental condition. Issue: to protect water against pollution and run-off; compulsory standard: establishment of buffer strips along water courses.
- Footnote: “the GAEC buffer strips must respect, both within and outside vulnerable zones [designated under the Nitrates directive 91/676] at least the requirements relating to the conditions for land application of fertiliser near water courses”.
- In practice this means that the minimum requirement for these GAEC buffer strips will generally be not to apply any fertiliser on a specified width of strip along water courses.

Riparian buffer strips are useful for:

- Protecting **water from pollution** (by fertilisers, PPPs...)
- Providing a **refuge for wildlife** (biodiversity)
- **Enhancing existing biodiversity** features by protecting them from spray (e.g. riparian plants)
- Providing a connected network of natural areas – “**connectivity**” - (for biodiversity, and **climate change adaptation**)
- **Landscape** enhancement e.g. where unfarmed areas along water courses were traditional.

*These diverse environmental needs often occur in the same place – which provides an **opportunity for well designed measures meeting multiple goals.***

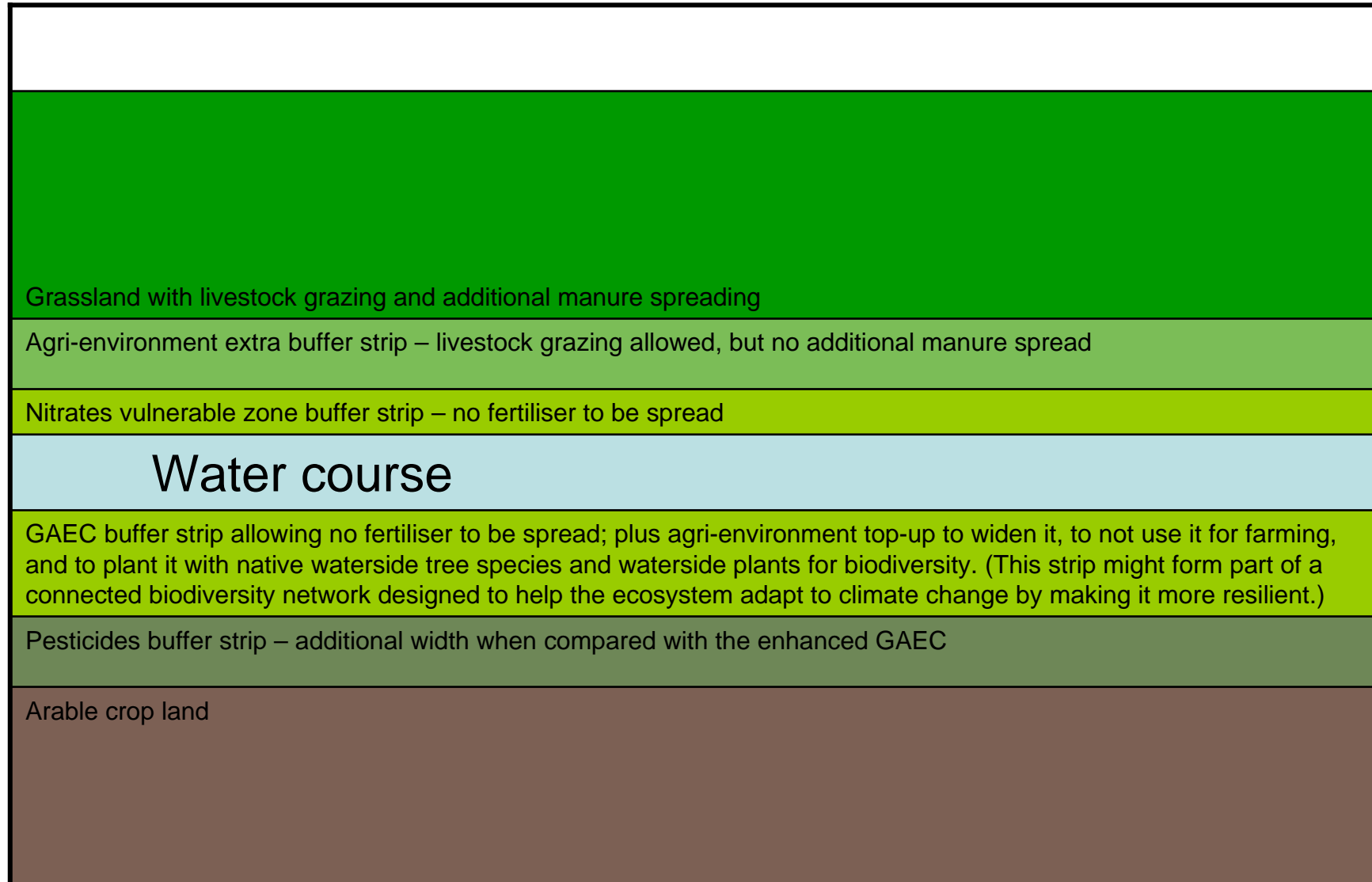
Why not take advantage of this overlap of environmental goals?

- As there will already be several constraints to farming along water courses, why not combine these so as to address a wider range of environmental issues?
- e.g. there is currently no specific **biodiversity** obligation relating to buffer strips. However, all MS made a commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010; achieving this (and follow up goals) has been made harder by loss of compulsory set-aside. So why not use buffer strips to help achieve this biodiversity commitment? This was specifically foreseen in the CAP Health Check.
- Similarly, there is no specific obligation under the **Water Framework Directive** to use buffer strips – but it could be a cost-effective way of achieving some of the water quality obligations of the Directive.

What instruments could be used to do this?

- MS could use **cross compliance** (useful for MS with budgetary constraints).
 - e.g. MS could make the GAEC buffer strip requirement more demanding than the minimum required, for example by disallowing farming on part/all of the strip; or requiring the strip to be wider.
- MS could use incentive payments (**agri-environment** or related state aids).
 - e.g. MS/regions could introduce an agri-environmental measure to pay farmers not to farm their GAEC buffer strips at all, to protect water; and why not add an extra payment to plant the strips with wildlife enhancing plants, to protect biodiversity? Great opportunity to do this with modulation money from CAP Health Check.
- A good solution would be to use **both compulsory and voluntary** approaches **in combination**.

A schematic example of buffer strips in combination



Conclusions

- The increasing use of riparian buffer strips in environmental policy reflects the fact that there is an environmental cost to farming right next to a water course.
- The overlap of various instruments relating to buffer strips gives MS a **great opportunity** – by adding just a little to the restrictions on farmers, and/or paying incentive payments to “green” these compulsory buffer strips, MS could achieve even more of their environmental goals in a highly cost-effective way: good news for water quality, biodiversity, climate change adaptation, and all at a low budgetary cost.
- Making the most of these buffer strip obligations is a win-win opportunity. **So do encourage your Agriculture and Environment Ministry colleagues to grasp this opportunity...**

...and get back to their drawing boards...

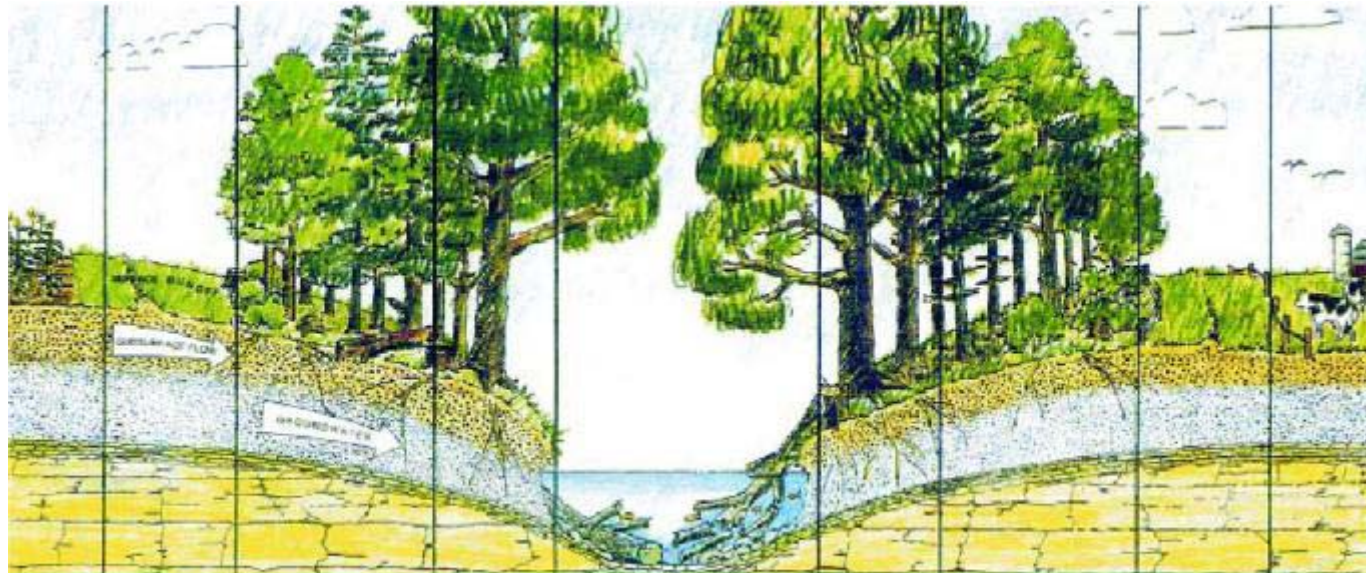


Figure 1. Picture by Prof. Jos Verhoeven (UU) This picture shows what buffer zones often look like in the rest of Europe.

Thank you for your attention!

