

## SAGTA / CL:AIRE Collaborative Workshop

### **A National Quality Mark Scheme**

#### ***How can it work for landholders' benefit?***

**Park Centre, BAE SYSTEMS Farnborough**

**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016**

#### **Why does SAGTA regard the NQMS as important to Landowners?**

NQMS is important to Landowners because the Environment Agency intend to publish a Position Statement. It is likely to say that provided a report meets the standard set out by the NQMS and has been carried by a suitably qualified person, they will adopt a light-touch approach to reviewing that report.

Where reports are submitted as part of a regulatory process in which the EA are a consultee (e.g. Town and Country Planning process for a remediation scheme) it will totally change the level of interaction we will have. In many cases they will remove themselves from the process altogether and will not comment on schemes and verification reports. Their role will become one of quality auditing a sample of submissions.

Given this is a fundamental change to existing ways of working it is important that landowners understand how the scheme will affect our project delivery and expectations for EA agreement and project closure.

#### **Aims and objectives**

The proposed National Quality Mark Scheme (NQMS) has been the subject of a great deal of comment and debate in recent months following the release of a preliminary version for public consultation. Much has been achieved in conveying the initiative's aims and objectives to the sector as a whole, but work is still underway on finalising the details. As "*the Devil is always in the detail*" SAGTA believes that there will always be a benefit to any initiative in providing a platform for interested parties to exchange views and perspectives and help develop levels of understanding. As matters have been advancing, SAGTA in conjunction with CL:AIRE, feels that this point in its development affords an appropriate opportunity to contribute as to how the ultimate effectiveness of the initiative can be optimised.

From SAGTA's perspective, its members represent a range of responsible landholders with policies that are already directed towards procuring and receiving high quality technical support from industry practitioners. As such, an NQMS scheme, may not bring the same level of tangible benefits that it would to other sectors/practitioners. Indeed there is fear that if it is not developed or implemented appropriately it may result in increased costs for limited benefits especially for those in the sector like SAGTA members who have already invested in quality.

That said, SAGTA is united in its commitment to support appropriately devised industry initiatives that facilitate improvements in regulatory protocols for all concerned. There is therefore a desire to ensure that the experience and advice of SAGTA members is made available to the Land Forum in order to optimise the effectiveness of the NQMS initiative. If developed appropriately the perceived vision for the NQMS is that it will lead to greater efficiencies in both processes and timeliness of outcomes that are ultimately to the benefit of every sector involved.

This workshop, which is organised on a collaborative basis by SAGTA and CL:AIRE, aims to provide the opportunity to share current thinking and, where appropriate, challenge perspectives. It is hoped this will provide a real contribution to establishing an effective framework that gains universal trust and confidence that indeed benefits all participants in the sector.

Preliminary thinking on workshop topics (upon which working groups will be invited to consider to develop a finalised framework) currently involve:

- Overview
  - Establishing a common understanding of how the scheme works
  - What aspects of land contamination management it covers
  - What the priorities should be for such a scheme
- Scheme administration - converging the delivery requirements
  - Managing SQP performance
  - Meeting regulatory requirements
- Sector perspectives

Many other issues may well arise and, as is always the case with both SAGTA's and CL:AIRE's events, both groups hope to welcome both new and familiar participants from a diverse range of sectors with shared ambitions to help take matters forward.

We, therefore, look forward to this opportunity to facilitate a valuable day in the open environment we have always championed as an essential feature of our sessions.