



Water and Abandoned Metal Mines (WAMM) Programme

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Cleaning up rivers polluted by abandoned mines

The government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP2023) published in 2023 stated that abandoned metal mines are the largest source of metal pollution to English rivers and into the marine environment.

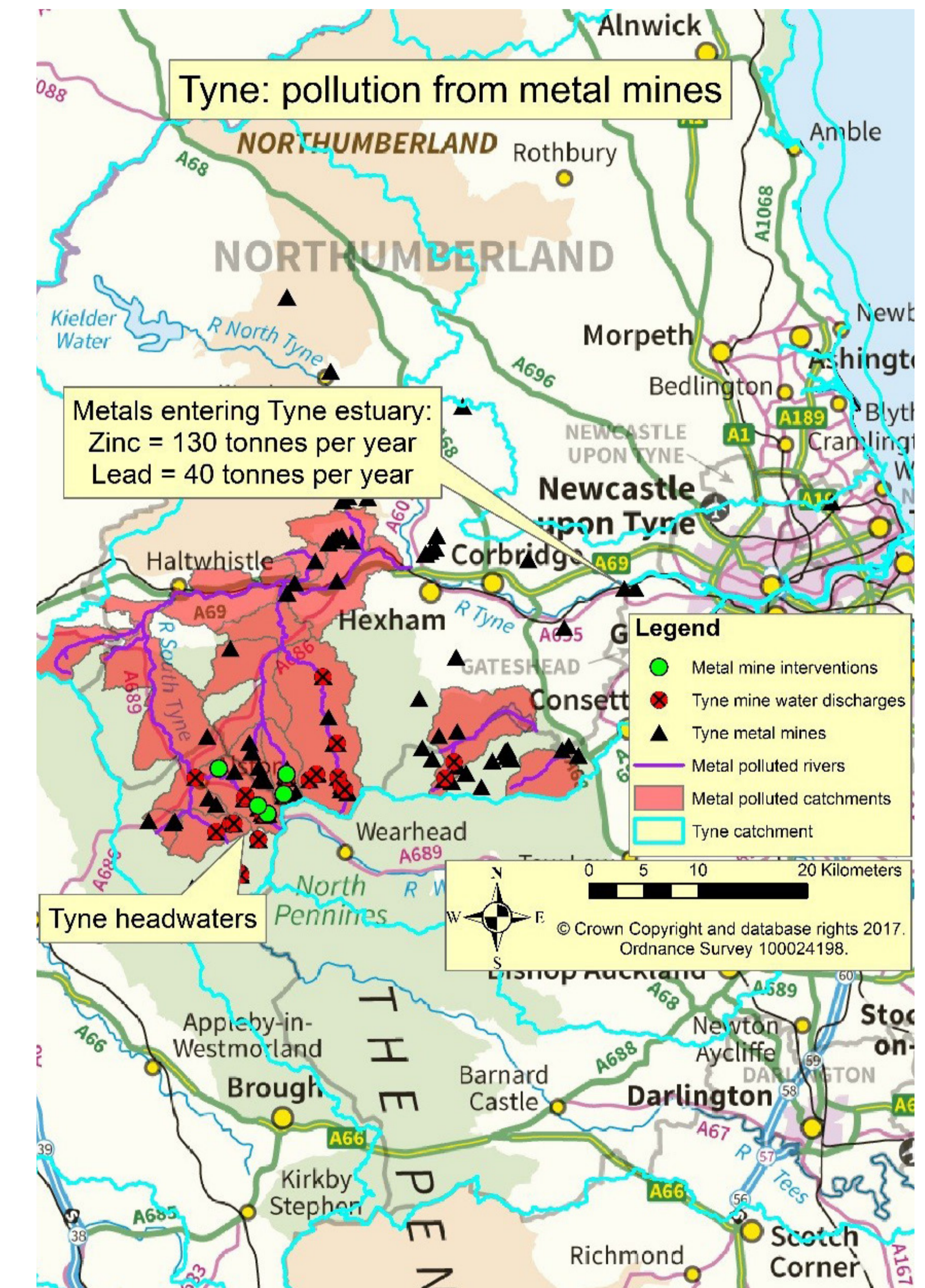
Before 2000, mine operators could abandon mines without having to take responsibility for dealing with ongoing pollution of rivers after mining ended. If Government does not act, rivers will continue to be severely polluted by metals from these mines for hundreds more years.

The WAMM Programme was set up in 2011 to start cleaning up rivers polluted by abandoned metal mines in England. It is a partnership between the Environment Agency, the Mining Remediation Authority and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Environment Act abandoned metal mines water target

In January 2023, Parliament adopted several legally-binding targets under the Environment Act 2021. One target is to halve the length of English rivers and estuaries polluted by harmful metals from abandoned metal mines by 2038. The Environment Agency has determined that the baseline length of rivers and estuaries polluted by abandoned metal mines is 1,491km; therefore, pollution must be addressed in at least 746km of rivers. The EIP2023 includes an interim target to construct eight mine water treatment schemes and 20 diffuse interventions by 31 January 2028. The WAMM Programme is the primary way to achieve the interim and statutory targets.

WAMM currently operates five treatment schemes. Each year, these treat 7.4 billion litres of mine water and prevent 750 tonnes of harmful metals from polluting rivers. Two of these schemes count towards the EIP2023 interim target: Coombe/Gwindra (Cornwall) and Nent Haggs (North Pennines).



The map above shows the areas within the Tyne management catchment that are polluted by abandoned metal mines