



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Robbie Moore MP
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs**

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
kate.brady@parliament.uk

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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 11 September the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP on behalf of your constituents about the campaign for a new system for managing our rivers in this country. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The Government published the Plan for Water in April 2023. This is our comprehensive strategy for managing our water environment, including our rivers. It brings together the significant steps we have already taken with a suite of new policy actions. It aims to change the way that we manage water, improve water quality, and continue to secure our water supply.

The Plan for Water is underpinned by three main things:

1. Increased investment for improvements including £2.2 billion from water companies to spend on new and better infrastructure in the next two years, more funding for catchment-scale groups, and increasing slurry grant funding for farmers.
2. Strong regulation including more Environment Agency (EA) inspections of wastewater treatment works, banning plastic wet wipes (subject to consultation) and new restrictions of 'forever' chemicals that damage our waters.
3. Tougher enforcement including bigger penalties for water companies and tighter control over water company dividends.

Managing the water system

The pressures facing our water environment and systems are complex and interconnected. Recognising this, the Plan for Water sets out an integrated approach to transforming how we manage our water system, considering these pressures in the round rather than in isolation. The Plan for Water is built on a catchment approach to managing the water system. In the Plan, the Government committed to improve delivery and coordination at a catchment level with tailored long-term plans to cover all water bodies to bring together cross sector and partnership working. Catchment plans will create the framework to implement the Plan for Water catchment by catchment and community by community.

The Plan further outlines the steps we will take to ensure smarter regulation strengthening powers to hold water companies and other responsible parties to account for cleaning up our water. We will also streamline the policy and legal framework which underpins our management of the water system, to ensure integration with other environmental plans and help secure outcomes for our water bodies.

River pollution

The Plan for Water also contains widespread policies to address the varied sources of pollution in our waterways; to protect and restore water habitats; and to boost funding towards improving the water environment. We will take action to tackle every source of pollution storm overflows, agriculture, plastics, road run off, and chemicals and pesticides. Progress has already been made, but we will step up our actions to keep pace with the growing pressures from climate change, population growth, and urbanisation.

We have already boosted funding for the EA with £2.2 million per year specifically for water company enforcement activity so that robust action is taken against illegal breaches, including storm overflow permits.

The EA can now use new powers to impose unlimited penalties for a wider range of offences, ensuring they can take action that is proportionate to the seriousness of the breach. This follows the Government changing regulations to significantly broaden the scope of the existing civil sanctions regime to target a much wider range of offences and remove the previous cap on penalties. This provides the EA with the tools they need to hold water companies to account.

Securing our water supply

Climate change and increasing population are also putting pressure on our water supply, which the public, businesses and wildlife all rely on. We need to go further to deliver clean and plentiful water for everyone. Managing water abstraction sustainably is one of the actions needed to ensure this and protect our water bodies. However, this must be complimented by additional actions to reduce water demand and increase supply including by addressing leakage, increasing water efficiency, upgrading water supply infrastructure, and improving our resilience to drought.

The Plan contains widespread actions which, delivered together, will transform our water environment.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



ROBBIE MOORE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs