

Wildlife and Countryside Link  
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30th October 2024

Dear Sir Jon,

Congratulations on your appointment as chair of the Government's Water Commission.

We are writing ahead of the March for Clean Water on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, when thousands of people will march through London to demand action to clean up our water environment.

Transformational change is essential. Our rivers and seas are choked with pollution and water shortages are already becoming critical. From weak regulatory enforcement to day-to-day abuses by water companies, the current model has failed.

To turn things around, we hope your Commission will recommend comprehensive, cross-sector solutions to restore water systems at catchment scale. Catchment governance should be improved to tackle the full range of pressures on freshwaters, including the water industry, agriculture, chemicals, transport, housing and infrastructure development.

Bold policy changes are needed to ensure that polluters always pay, to modernise and empower regulators to defend nature, and expedite nature-based solutions across whole landscapes. Action must begin immediately, without waiting for the next investment cycle.

We hope you will consider:

- Structural reform of the water sector—including governance, legal identity, structures, and rules on debt and dividends—to ensure that UK companies never again squeeze essential public services and environmental assets for profit.
- The sufficiency of targets and action plans for water by [strengthening the](#) Water Framework Directive regulations and ensuring that measures within River Basin Management Plans are robust, specific and time-bound.
- The adequacy of cross-sectoral governance for meeting environmental targets. For example, ensuring that regulators have sufficient funding to deliver an effective advisory, prevention, monitoring and enforcement regime.
- The amount of public and private funding necessary to meet environmental targets. For example, how polluter pays approaches could be strengthened and [fines ring-fenced for nature's recovery](#), and how the use of nature-based solutions can be [accelerated and expanded](#).

Alongside these considerations, we are urging Government to take immediate action in areas outside of the set Commission terms of reference to ensure full delivery of their manifesto commitment to clean up rivers, ponds, wetlands and seas. Priority actions that could help clean up waters now include a **water-friendly farming commitment**, fully funded **catchment plans capable of meeting environmental targets**, and a **requirement for regulators and companies to take a nature-first approach**. We set out how these policies could be swiftly implemented in [a briefing](#) enclosed with this letter.

We are united in our call to stop pollution and ensure that regulators enforce strong laws to clean up water for people and wildlife, and stand ready to work with you through the Water Commission to help deliver these vital changes.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation, A Rocha UK

Jamie Cook, CEO, Angling Trust

Sandra King, CEO, Beaver Trust

Dr Rose O'Neill, Chief Executive, Campaign for National Parks

Marcus Kern, on behalf of Dirty Water Campaign

Dr Sasha Woods, Director of Science and Policy, Earthwatch Europe

Catherine Gunby, Executive Director, Fidra

Rosie Downes, Head of Campaigns, Friends of the Earth

Jeremy Biggs, CEO, Freshwater Habitats Trust

Kathy Wormald, CEO, Froglife

Doug Parr, Policy Director, Greenpeace UK

Charlie Norman, Director of Campaigns and Public Affairs, Inland Waterways Association

Paul Coulson, Acting Chief Executive, Institute of Fisheries Management

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive, Keep Britain Tidy

Gareth Cunningham, Director of Conservation and Policy, Marine Conservation Society

Melissa Green, Chief Executive, National Federation of Women's Institutes

Dr Sarah Whild, Chair, the National Forum for Biological Recording (NFBR)

Hilary McGrady, Director-General, National Trust

Ben Seal, Head of Access and Environment, Paddle UK

NidaAl-Fulaij, Chief Executive, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Lizzie Carr MBE, Founder, Planet Patrol

Professor Alastair Driver, Director, Rewilding Britain

James Wallace, CEO, River Action UK

Michael Copleston, Director, RSPB England

Brendan Costelloe, Director of Policy, Soil Association

Giles Bristow, CEO, Surfers Against Sewage

David Murray, Executive Director, Sustainability First

Philip Brownlie, Head of Public Affairs, Swim England

Chris Coode, CEO, Thames21

Anna Daroy, Chief Executive, The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental  
Management

Richard Cooper The Cleddau Project

Matt Larsen-Daw, CEO, The Mammal Society

Mark Lloyd, CEO, The Rivers Trust

Joan Edwards OBE, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, The Wildlife Trusts

Shaun Leonard, Director, The Wild Trout Trust

Kate Norgrove, Executive Director of Conservation, Advocacy and Policy, WWF-UK

Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link