

Wildlife & Countryside Link  
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The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

*Sent by email*

9<sup>th</sup> January 2025

CC: 10 Downing Street

Dear Secretary of State,

### **Water Restoration Fund**

Thank you for the improvements you have made so far to the Water (Special Measures) Bill. We have been grateful for your collaborative approach.

In your remarks leading up to the bill, you often spoke about the need for polluters to pay the price for environmental damage. There are good provisions in the bill that will help ensure polluters think twice before breaking the rules.

But the polluter pays principle should be more than a deterrent—it must also ensure that polluters pay to clean up the damage they cause. We are writing to ask you to formalise the Water Restoration Fund in the bill, so that fines paid by water companies automatically go towards nature recovery.

The Fund is meant to ensure that Water Company fines pay for remedial work on freshwater and estuarine habitats and their catchments. Implementation has been slow, with decisions on 2024 grants still outstanding, but the principle of the fund remains exactly right—charities and consumers should not be left to pay the price of water industry failures.

The Water Restoration Fund is a very important funding stream to remediate the impact of pollution and to deliver the Environmental Improvement Plan. Discontinuing the Fund would be a major setback in restoring our freshwaters to good health and it would put the Government's manifesto commitments on restoring the water environment in doubt.

Guaranteeing the future of the fund, ensuring that polluter fines will be used for nature recovery, would help cultivate a strong pipeline of projects and attract more investment in river and estuarine restoration.

We would be grateful for the chance to meet with you or your Ministers to discuss how we could make the fund operate more effectively in future to deliver our shared objective of restoring the natural environment.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust

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

Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife & Countryside Link

Patrick Begg, Outdoors and Natural Resources Director, National Trust

David Murray, Executive Director, Sustainability First

Paul Coulson, Chief Executive, Institute of Fisheries Management

Ben Seal, Head of Access and Environment, Paddle UK

Kathy Wormald, CEO, Froglife

Jeremy Biggs, CEO, Freshwater Habitats Trust

Jim Foster, Conservation Director, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust

Craig Macadam, Conservation Director, Buglife

James Wallace, Chief Executive, River Action

Matthew Gould, CEO, The Zoological Society of London

Martin Janes, Managing Director, the River Restoration Centre (RRC)

Lisa Worledge, Director of Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust

Sandy Luk, Chief Executive Officer, Marine Conservation Society