

Dear Colleague on Water

Please find below the Dear Colleague letter that I have received from the Government

Dear Colleagues,

Our Integrated Plan for Delivering Clean and Plentiful Water

I'm pleased to announce that the government has today published a Plan for Water.

Link can be found here –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-water-our-integrated-plan-for-delivering-clean-and-plentiful-water/plan-for-water-our-integrated-plan-for-delivering-clean-and-plentiful-water>.

I completely understand the concerns that you and your constituents have about the health and resilience of our rivers, lakes and seas, and the pressures they face, which is why I am setting out this plan for a truly national effort to protect and improve them. Here in the UK, we look after globally significant wetlands, 85% of the world's rare chalk streams, and world-famous coastlines, lakes, and rivers. These waters are a focal point of local communities and an important part of our national heritage. More than ever, people expect access to clean and plentiful water. Yet our complex, interconnected water system is under greater pressure than ever before from population growth to climate change. Through investment and regulation, we have seen improvements in recent years.

We have cleaner bathing waters – 93% are 'good' or 'excellent', up from 76% in 2010. Since privatisation, leakage has reduced by a third and we are five times less likely to suffer supply interruptions. We were the first government to start comprehensively monitoring storm overflows – from 10% in 2015 to 100% by the end of this year, and to introduce new targets on water companies to increase investment and tighten legal permits on storm overflows. In January 2023 we set out our goals and targets with the Environmental Improvement Plan. We are now delivering an Integrated Plan for Water which brings together the significant action already taken, along with more investment, stronger regulation and tougher enforcement on those who pollute.

The Plan covers both the water environment – how clean it is – and water resources – how much of it we have. We need to look at both things together. It addresses every source of pollution, including from storm overflows, agriculture, plastics, road run-off, chemicals and pesticides – as well as the pressures on our water resources as a result of hotter, drier summers and population growth. The Plan outlines our actions across three areas. Firstly, we will transform management of the whole water system in a joined-up way.

We will deliver new long-term catchment action plans, backed up by new

funding, to improve all water bodies in England. Water companies will speed up their infrastructure upgrades – bringing forward around £1.6 billion for work to start between now and 2025 to reduce sewage discharges, nutrient pollution and increase water resilience. This includes creating a new Water Restoration Fund, using money from water company fines and penalties to support local groups and projects like re-meandering rivers and restoring habitats, as well as increasing the scope and maximum penalty amount that the Environment Agency can issue against water companies for damaging the environment.

Our actions will secondly deliver a clean water environment for nature and people, by addressing each of the multiple pressures and sources of pollution on our water bodies. This includes a ban, subject to consultation, on the sale of wet wipes containing plastic, developing new proposals to restrict the use of ‘forever’ chemicals (PFAS), and more than doubling the money for slurry grant infrastructure for farmers to £34 million.

Finally, the plan sets out actions to secure a plentiful supply of water, in order to meet our long-term water needs for people, businesses, and the environment and close the 4 billion litres of water a day supply-demand gap we will experience by 2050 otherwise. This includes streamlining the planning process so that key water supply infrastructure – such as reservoirs and water transfer schemes – can be built more quickly, and securing new investment by water companies to spend on new water infrastructure in the next two years, including to increase our water resilience. The attached Annex includes further details on our new policies. If you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely