



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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23 October 2024

Dear River Action/Water Campaigners

Government Action to Clean Up Our Rivers, Lakes, and Seas

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you personally for your continued commitment, passion and work in the campaign for clean water – and I want to reassure you that I share your anger at the record levels of sewage pollution in our waterways.

The health of our waterways is a matter of significant concern to us all, and it is encouraging to see so many people – from larger environmental organisations to local wild swimming groups and individual campaigners - actively engaged in this important cause.

People are rightly concerned that swimming and surfing at our beaches, kayaking on our lakes and paddling in our rivers could leave them and the surrounding wildlife exposed to pollution. Our children should be able to enjoy clean waterways without fear of pollution. Billpayers want value for money on a water service that delivers for them and the environment.

This is why I want to reiterate this Government's commitment to cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas.

I have made safeguarding our waters my top priority and have wasted no time in acting.

Just 70 days after the election the Government introduced the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which demonstrates our determination to hold water companies to account and ensure that they deliver for their customers and the environment.

This legislation will put into law tough new measures to hold these companies accountable and ensure they meet the high standards that the public rightfully expects. This includes strengthening regulation to ensure water bosses face personal criminal liability for lawbreaking, and giving the water regulator new powers to ban the payment of bonuses if environmental standards are not met.

But I know this alone is not enough.

That is why today I have launched an Independent Commission into the water sector in what will be the largest review in the water sector since privatisation.

The Commission, launched by the UK and Welsh Governments, will report back by June 2025 with recommendations on how to tackle systemic issues to fundamentally transform the water sector.

The Commission will be chaired by Sir Jon Cunliffe, former Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. Sir Jon has decades of regulatory experience and is committed to taking a thorough and serious approach to evaluating and reforming the water industry model to ensure it meets the high standards required to protect both the public and the environment.

Its recommendations will form the basis of further legislation to deliver much needed reforms to address long-term failings in the sector, attract investment to drive environmental improvements, and put our water sector on a sustainable footing.

Its objectives are to create a water system where customers and nature recovery are at the heart of decision-making and delivery, where regulators are designed in the right way to hold water companies to account and where public trust is restored in the sector.

I recognise that cleaning up our water system requires a new partnership between Government, water companies, customers, and all those who work to protect our environment. We can't reform the sector overnight, but the work of change has begun.

Your insight and expertise will be crucial. Your contributions, via the upcoming public call for evidence, will feed into the Commission's recommendations and help drive meaningful reforms to the sector.

This is the beginning of the change we promised. Greater investment to restore pride in our waterways; to provide opportunities for sports and recreation in clean waters, whether it's rowing on the Thames, going for a morning dip at the local bathing spot, or fishing in a chalk stream; to protect wildlife and biodiversity-rich water habitats that, in turn, can help us tackle the ever-growing impacts of climate change.

This is our opportunity to make sure our children – and their children – have the chance to create the wonderful memories I remember from my youth - to splash about in our lakes, row on our rivers, or spot a kingfisher on a summer's day. Let's seize that opportunity together.

I wish you all a safe and well attended March for Clean Water on 3 November and look forward to working together towards our shared ambition of cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Steve Reed". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

Steve Reed MP

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs