

## Philip Dunne MP launches new Bill to tackle river pollution

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP for Ludlow, has today published his Private Member's Bill designed to tackle river pollution from untreated sewage and improve water quality.

In 2019, raw sewage was discharged into rivers across England and Wales for over 1.5 million hours, compromising these vital habitats for wildlife and endangering the health of people who use our rivers for recreation.

Philip Dunne MP, who is also chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee, said:

*"Our rivers are a vital part of our natural heritage. It is right the Government has committed to restoring at least three quarters of our waters to their natural state.*

*But it is clear from last week's latest assessment from the Environment Agency that we are a long way from achieving that, with fewer than one in six of our rivers in good health. This threatens the aquatic life and iconic species that rely on these precious habitats, such as freshwater fish, kingfishers, otters and dippers.*

*The discharge of untreated sewage is a major part of the problem, entering our rivers from the very treatment works whose purpose is to clean it up. Our regulations and investment have not kept pace with changes in behaviour and pressure from development, so now pollutants enter our rivers untreated, with the perpetrators licensed to spill.*

*This poses a significant health risk to those who wish to enjoy our rivers for leisure and recreation.*

*The River Severn and its tributaries the Clun, Corve, Kemp, Onny, Rea, Teme and Worfe all flow through my constituency. They are nothing like as healthy as when I was a child, but they should be.*

*That is why I have brought forward this Bill, which aims to cut discharges of raw sewage into our rivers - protecting our precious habitats for wildlife and people to enjoy."*

The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill places a duty on water companies to ensure that untreated sewage is not discharged into rivers and other inland waters. The Bill will require water companies to set out plans progressively to reduce their reliance on combined sewer overflows (CSOs). It proposes increasing levels of transparency, as firms will be mandated to report publicly not just on the frequency and extent of sewage discharges from CSOs and any other sewer catchment assets, but also on the impact on water quality as this is enabled by advances in technology.

The Bill also proposes measures to upgrade drainage infrastructure to separate household sewage from surface water drainage, helping reduce the risk of overspills. It includes measures to reduce harmful products such as non-biodegradable wet wipes, commercial fats and oils from being disposed down the drains. It also proposes measures to expand the number of inland bathing waters and establish targets to increase those classified as "good" or "excellent".

The Bill has widespread support from environmental charities and NGOs including,

**Mark Lloyd**, *CEO of the Rivers Trust* said: “We are very grateful to Philip Dunne MP for taking on this very important issue with such vigour after The Rivers Trust raised it with him earlier this year. We hope that this Bill will be converted into legislation urgently. Changing weather patterns, population growth, more plastic items being flushed down toilets and an historic lack of investment in infrastructure all conspire to cause raw sewage to pollute our precious rivers far too often. We need to get a grip of this wicked problem and make our water environment a place that inspires delight, rather than disgust.”

**Hugo Tagholm**, *CEO of Surfers Against Sewage* said: “Only 16% of waterways in England currently meet good ecological standard, exactly the same as in 2016. Without urgent change to the status quo, sewage will continue to pollute our blue spaces which are so crucial to the health and wellbeing of water users up and down the country. This ambitious and timely Bill will make sure water companies deliver on their environmental responsibilities and clean up their act.”

**Ali Morse**, *Water Policy Manager at The Wildlife Trusts* and chair of environmental coalition *Blueprint for Water* said: “This Bill could be the driving force behind big changes to benefit people and wildlife, encouraging water companies to implement more ‘nature-based’ solutions to protect our waterways. These include purpose-built ponds to capture rainwater, stopping it from overwhelming sewers and releasing raw sewage into rivers. Regulators and Government must ensure water companies prioritise these measures. Customers want to see this too. People expect rivers to be clean enough to swim in, and healthy enough to support thriving wildlife.”

**Stuart Singleton-White**, *Head of Campaigns at The Angling Trust* said: “Healthy waters are essential for people and nature and over the last six months more people than ever have been connecting with their local waters. Many have taken up angling for the first time, getting up close to our wonderful rivers. Yet alarmingly pollution incidences seem to be increasing and our water quality getting worse. Too often raw sewage is being discharged into our rivers. The Angling Trust and our partnership, Fish Legal, have been fighting polluters since 1948. We’re delighted to support this new Bill and hope it will bring about the change required to improve water quality monitoring, modernise sewage infrastructure and reverse the degradation of our rivers.”

**Sharon Moat** of the *Chalk Aquifer Alliance* said: "We are looking forward to our unique but beleaguered chalk streams benefitting from the removal of raw sewage from what should be crystal clear water that we can all enjoy."

**Guy Linley-Adams**, solicitor with *Salmon and Trout Conservation* said: “The Bill is a welcome and necessary correction to the post-privatisation legislation for controlling sewage pollution of rivers, streams and lakes. As we leave the EU, we need to increase the level of ambition and this Bill does that. All sides in this debate, including water companies, recognise that we need to build back better post-Covid, including in our water infrastructure, so this Bill deserves, and I’m sure will get, very strong cross-party support.”

## Note to editors

1. The full text of The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill and further information can be found at: (<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2625>)
2. The Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP has been Member of Parliament for Ludlow since May 2005. In February 2020 he was elected Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee. He is also a member of the Conservative Environment Network Parliamentary Caucus.
3. Untreated sewage is discharged directly into rivers from licensed Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) managed by the 9 water and sewerage companies in England, which are permitted by the Environment Agency (EA) to exceed consented concentrations during periods of heavy rainfall. Recent data obtained by the Guardian [[link to article](#)] established 6,508 inland CSOs discharged untreated sewage into rivers over 200,000 times across England for over 1.5 million hours in 2019, meaning that they likely occurred far more regularly than just during periods of intense rainfall.
4. The government set an ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan to improve at least three quarters of UK waters and return them to their natural state. However, the latest assessment by the Environment Agency showed that just 16% of England's rivers meet the criteria for 'good ecological status', unchanged from 2016.

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