



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

20th October 2023

Sean Ganthwaite

RE: RIVER MANAGEMENT PETITION

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the petition on change.org regarding the management of our rivers. I have read your comments with interest.

I would like to assure you that my ministerial colleagues and I fully appreciate the importance of our rivers. The volume of sewage and other pollution being discharged into our waters is completely unacceptable. The Government's 'Plan for Water', published earlier this year, sets out more investment, stronger regulation, and tougher enforcement, to tackle every source of pollution.

As part of the plan, over £2.2 billion of investment has been accelerated. This will be directed into vital infrastructure to improve water quality and secure future supplies, with £1.7 billion of this to tackle storm overflows. Ministers have set stringent targets for water companies to reduce storm overflows, driving the largest infrastructure programme in water company history of £60 billion over 25 years. This is a credible plan, which includes front-loading action in particularly important and sensitive sites, including bathing waters.

Regarding regulation, Ministers are driving up monitoring and transparency. Monitoring of storm overflows has increased substantially, from only 7 percent in 2010 to 91 percent now, and companies are on track to reach 100 percent by the end of the year. It is precisely because of this monitoring that action can be taken to fix storm overflows and hold water companies to account. The Government is also clear that water companies must not profit from environmental damage and Ofwat has been given increased powers under the *Environment Act 2021* to hold them to account for poor performance. In March, Ofwat announced new powers that will enable it to take enforcement actions against water companies that do not link dividend payments to performance for both customers and the environment.

In July, Ministers introduced laws to remove the £250,000 cap on penalties that can be handed out by environmental regulators, as well as significantly broadening their scope to target a much wider range of offences. This will ensure that regulators have the right tools to drive compliance across a range of sectors, including water companies. Fines from water companies are being reinvested into the new Water Restoration Fund, which will deliver on-the-ground improvements to water quality and support local groups and community-led schemes which help to protect our waterways.

Further, the Environment Agency has launched the largest criminal investigation into unpermitted water company sewage discharges ever at over 2,200 treatment works. I am assured that Environment Agency funding is closely monitored to ensure that it can carry out its duties and functions effectively. Its funding for inspections comes directly from the permits issued to companies; enforcement is funded by the Government, and in the current Spending Review period, the Environment Agency's environment RDEL (Resource) grant for 2022/23 increased to £96 million from £56 million in 2020/21.



I am assured that these measures and others are making progress and Ministers will continue to make further improvements where necessary. Our bathing waters continue to improve, with 93 percent classified as good or excellent in 2022, compared to 76 percent in 2010. There is now 80 percent less phosphorus and 85 percent less ammonia in our rivers, compared to 1990 when water was privatised.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Pursglove'.

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**