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Blueprint for Water coalition response to Defra's Water White Paper

The Blueprint for Water is a unique coalition of environmental, water efficiency, and fishing and angling organisations which was set up to call on the Government and its agencies to set out the necessary steps to achieve sustainable water by 2015. The Blueprint for Water is a campaign of Wildlife and Countryside Link.

Water is our most precious natural resource. It is vital to people's health and happiness, vital for the environment and our wildlife, and vital to our economy. But this most precious asset is in crisis. That is why in 2006, we launched the Blueprint for Water, setting out 10 steps to sustainable water.

Four years on, during the *International Year of Biodiversity*, our rivers, lakes and ponds remain our most threatened habitats; targets for restoration and creation of wetlands remain unmet; and River Basin Management Plans promise just 5% improvement by 2015.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Water White Paper consultation. We hope that our 10 step action plan, which sets out our key asks and priorities for reform will be reflected in both the Water and Natural Environment White Papers to achieve the vision for a healthy and vibrant freshwater environment. The Blueprint coalition's 9,000 staff, 6 million members and 128,000 volunteers are also ready to play their part in helping deliver this vision. We would welcome a meeting to discuss our response to this consultation and the 10 step action plan as laid out in the recently published Blueprint for Water. For more information, please visit www.blueprintforwater.org.uk.

This response is supported by the following 14 organisations

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Angling Trust
- Association of Rivers Trusts
- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Council for British Archaeology
- Marine Conservation Society
- National Trust
- Pond Conservation
- RSPB
- Salmon & Trout Association
- Waterwise
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- WWF – UK

1. What do you see as the main issues around water that you or your community face? And how would you address them?
(This might include the service you receive from your local water company or the condition of a local river)

Our water and wetland landscape is critically damaged. We have redundant weirs and dams disrupting the movement of fish and other wildlife; rivers isolated from their floodplains by hard defences; ponds and wetlands wiped off the map by drainage and agricultural intensification; and uplands that have been over-grazed, burnt and drained, polluting sources of drinking water and increasing the risk of flash flooding.

We should protect and restore rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands in partnership with local communities;

- By 2012, the Government and its agencies should encourage partnership in water management by adopting a local catchment scale approach to water quality, water resource and flood risk management.
- By 2012, the Government and its agencies should assess the cumulative effects of river engineering on wildlife and use powers to remove or mitigate the impact of redundant and poorly designed physical obstructions.
- By 2012, the Government should implement the Lawton Review's recommendation to establish ecological restoration zones where networks of clean water ponds and wetlands are created to provide high quality wildlife corridors.
- By 2015, water companies should set out plans to increase investment in multifunctional catchment management schemes that protect raw water quality and enhance biodiversity, landscape and amenity.
- By 2015, the Government and its agencies should establish measures to restore and protect ecologically significant ponds, headwaters, streams and wetlands in the next generation of River Basin Management Plans.

European agriculture policy has been hugely successful in delivering plentiful food but at considerable environmental cost. Many rivers and groundwaters are polluted with high levels of fertilisers and pesticides; damaging wildlife and driving up water bills. We know that given the right incentives farmers can produce good food and healthy water.

Reward farmers who deliver healthy rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands, and provide a range of other benefits to society;

- By 2011, Government should fully fund all primary objectives of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, with better targeting to support wetland wildlife, deliver clean water and healthy soils and reduce run-off.
- By 2012, Defra should use current EU rules to shift 10% (£160m/ year) of Single Farm Payment funding into schemes that protect wildlife and stop agricultural pollution from damaging rivers, lakes, ponds and coasts.
- By 2014, the farming industry should take responsibility for funding of advisory elements of Catchment Sensitive Farming and the Voluntary Initiative.
- By 2014, the Common Agricultural Policy should be reformed to encourage sustainable farming practices and reward farmers for the delivery of public benefits, including better water quality and more wildlife.

Our waterways continue to be polluted by industry, agriculture and the urban environment. Treating the impact of pollution with energy-intensive technology rather than tackling the cause hits people's water bills and drives up carbon emissions. To date little has been done to mitigate pollution from land and threats from new chemicals continue to emerge

Introduce targeted regulations to reduce harmful pollutants in water;

- By 2012, the chemical production and retail industries should fund independent risk assessments and monitoring strategies for substances of high concern.
- By 2012, the Government and its agencies should designate waters at high risk from diffuse pollution as candidate Water Protection Zones and regulate if voluntary action fails to meet required standards by 2015.
- By 2012, the Government should introduce comprehensive measures to control pesticide pollution including statutory safeguard zones and catchment based approvals for high risk pesticides.
- By 2015, the Government should ban phosphates in all domestic and commercial cleaning products.
- By 2015, the Government and its agencies should complete catchment scale monitoring and evaluation of sediment pollution risk and introduce effective measures to protect sensitive habitats and species.
- By 2015, the Government should introduce reduction targets for pesticides and endocrine-disrupting chemicals released into the aquatic environment.

Climate change, population growth and urban expansion are pushing England's historic drainage systems to breaking point. In 2008/09 alone, there were over 14,000 events of untreated sewage being dumped directly into rivers and the sea. Although water companies promise significant investment, we need new sustainable approaches to improving sewer capacity and mitigating the impact of intermittent discharges.

Reduce discharges of sewage into urban environments and ecologically sensitive areas;

- By 2012, the Government should remove the automatic right to drain surface water to a public sewer by fully implementing the Flood and Water Management Act (2010).
- By 2012, manufacturers of domestic and industrial water appliances should introduce colour coding for foul and surface water pipes to avoid misconnections.
- By 2012, the Government and its agencies should identify those septic tanks that pose the greatest threat to the aquatic environment and, where owners do not rectify faults, take regulatory action.
- By 2014, Ofwat should increase economic incentives for meeting environmental quality objectives by using low-carbon solutions to sewer overloading, intermittent discharges and wastewater treatment.
- By 2015, the Government and its agencies should review operating conditions of all combined sewage outflows and ensure those most likely to cause damage are monitored and permits enforced.

Wetlands are the engines of the water world – filtering water, sustaining flows, reducing floods, storing carbon and providing networks through the landscape for wildlife. Many habitats and species remain critically threatened while taxpayers' money is still being wasted on flood defence and land drainage works that damage wildlife and ecosystem services but deliver little public benefit.

Restore large areas of wetland and floodplain to create and link vital wildlife habitats, improve water quality, protect soil carbon and reduce urban flooding;

- By 2011, all Government spending on flood risk management works (capital and maintenance) should be prioritised on the basis of need and demonstrable benefit.
- By 2012, the Government should strengthen planning policy to safeguard floodplains and riparian land as part of its commitment to protect wildlife and promote wildlife corridors.
- By 2012, Defra should direct all Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management authorities to protect peat soils from damage caused by flood defence and land drainage works.
- By 2012, the Government and its agencies should implement Lawton Review's recommendation to support climate adaptation by making space for water and wildlife along river corridors.

The Flood and Water Management Act (2010) should unlock many of the barriers that have prevented the use of Sustainable Drainage systems (SuDs). However, questions remain about long-term funding while the enabling legislation and guidance have yet to be published.

Create a modern urban drainage network that can mitigate surface water flooding and trap pollution;

- By 2011, Defra should identify long-term funding streams for the adoption and maintenance of SuDs by local authorities.
- By 2012, Defra should ensure that National Standards for SuDs integrate and promote their potential wildlife and amenity benefits.
- By 2012, local authorities should promote the benefits and opportunities of retrofitting SuDs to householders and businesses.
- By 2014, local authorities, the Highways Agency and water companies should launch a major SuDs retrofitting programme in areas where surface run-off and sewer overflow is causing pollution and flooding.

2. *What would encourage you/your community/organisation to conserve water? (For example, would you like information on where your water supply comes from and its effect on the environment? Would it help to know how much water you use, what water efficient products are available or where you could get more advice on water saving?)*

For every three litres of water we use, one is wasted. Tackling this waste can help reduce our impact on wildlife as well as cut bills and carbon emissions. Although some good progress has been made since the Blueprint was first launched, water efficiency is far from mainstream and plans for fixing leakage have stagnated.

Reduce water consumption by at least 20% through more efficient use in homes, buildings and businesses;

- In 2011, the Water White Paper should set out plans to make all homes water-efficient, making the links with existing energy saving retrofitting programmes.
- By 2012, the Government should ensure investment required to improve water efficiency and reach sustainable levels of leakage is treated equally to resource development.

- By 2012, all new housing should be 'water-neutral' with developers offsetting demand through efficiencies elsewhere. Building in water stressed areas should only be permitted if developers contribute to an overall reduction in demand through efficiency savings.
- By 2012, the Government should introduce water efficiency standards for products (including taps and showers) and require public sector procurement to specify highly water-efficient goods

One third of our rivers are damaged or at risk from licensed abstractions. Despite the considerable effort put into developing strategic abstraction plans and programmes by the Environment Agency, little action has been taken to amend or revoke licenses that threaten water and wetland habitats.

Reform abstraction licensing to reduce pressure on rivers, lakes and wetlands today and increase flexibility to adapt to future climate change;

- By 2012, the water needs of freshwater species and habitats should be re-assessed using best available science and information.
- By 2012, the water-stressed area designations should be updated to better reflect abstraction pressures, environmental sensitivity and climate change projections.
- By 2015, all abstraction licences should include flow-related restrictions and time limits to allow regular review in light of environmental sensitivity and climate change pressures.
- By 2015, the Government and its agencies must amend or revoke abstraction licences that present high risk of damage to the ecology of rivers, still waters and wetlands.

3. *What would you change about the current way of paying for water? (This could include opting for a meter, being able to change supplier, or support for those who need it most)*

Only a third of households in England pay bills that reflect what they use. Although half will be metered by 2015 only a rapid and planned move to universal metering, with tariffs that discourage waste and protect vulnerable groups, will ensure this precious resource is properly valued.

Make household water bills reflect the amount of water people use;

- In 2011, the Government Water White Paper should include:
 - Proposals to achieve universal water metering by 2020.
 - Plans to link smart energy meters for every home with smart water meters.
- By 2015, all water customers in water-stressed areas should be metered.
- By 2015, metered tariff schemes that protect vulnerable customers, deter waste and reflect environmental impact should be implemented nationally.

The polluter pays principle should be at the heart of water policy. However, enforcement of legislation is patchy and fines for pollution do not fully reflect damage caused. As a result, those who pollute continue to profit while the environment and those who depend on it suffer the consequences.

Make those who damage the water environment bear the costs through more effective law enforcement, tougher penalties and fairer charges;

- By 2012, the Government should remove the statutory limit on fines and require fines to take account of the damage caused.
 - By 2012, Government and its agencies should improve effectiveness of enforcement of existing anti-pollution laws, including better cross-compliance checks targeted at environmental risk.
 - By 2012, the crop protection and fertiliser industry should fund measures to reduce diffuse agricultural pollution and create new clean water habitats to mitigate ecological impacts.
 - By 2014, the Government and its agencies should reform the charging schemes for water abstraction and waste discharge to fully reflect environmental costs and seasonal sensitivity.
 - By 2014, the Government should create a *Catchment Restoration Fund* financed from fines, abstraction/discharge charges and public funds to support works to restore rivers and their catchments.
- 4. If you could choose just one priority action for either the Government or water companies – what would it be and why? What could you do to help?**

We believe the Government and the water industry should follow the recommendations set out by the Blueprint for Water
http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2010/Blueprint_for_Water_2010.pdf .