



## Save Our Waters Advocacy Pack



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## **Background**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for your interest in helping to Save Our Waters. We know, like you, the health of rivers, lakes and other wetlands is crucial for people and nature. In October 2014, the Government asked people to comment on draft plans, which set out how they would get these watery places to good health over the next 6 years. The final plans will be published at the end of this year; and there is still a lot of work to be done. Action is urgently needed to halt the loss of freshwater biodiversity and ensure its recovery. Your help is crucial.

Over the last thirty years our freshwater species have decreased by 76% globally. Here in the UK, just 21% of surface water bodies (these include rivers, lakes and streams) are considered to be in good ecological health and there are only a handful in pristine condition. There has been little to no measurable improvement over the last 5 years – and less than 1% of the UK's entire river length and only a small proportion of wetlands are formally protected.

Yet these freshwater habitats are vital for nature as well as societies, economies and individuals. Rivers, lakes and other wetlands are a critical part of our nation's infrastructure and they require investment so that their benefits can be realised. More needs to be done to help our aquatic habitats and the wildlife that depends on them to thrive.

This issue – the health of our water environment - is at the heart of Blueprint for Water's work. The Blueprint, a coalition of 16 Environmental NGOs, campaigns for improvement and progress in the way our water environment is managed. You can read more on the Blueprint for Water website – [blueprintforwater.org.uk](http://blueprintforwater.org.uk).

### **River Basin Management Plans**

There are 10 river basins in England and Wales, which all have a number of river catchments within them. River Basin Management Plans provide a framework to understand and manage the pressures facing our water environment and meet European water quality targets. They identify the issues each water body faces and then set out what needs to be done to tackle them – this involves empowering local citizens and groups to take an active part in this management.

These plans are essential to protecting and restoring our waters.

In December 2009 the Government published the first set of River Basin Management Plans. These showed that only 26% of water bodies in England and Wales were in good health, and set out measures intended to increase that to just 32% by 2015.

Our organisations were amongst many that expressed disappointment at this low level of ambition. However, progress against even these unambitious objectives has stalled or even reversed; from 2009 to 2013 the percentage of rivers in good health decreased from 26% to 24%. Since this data was collected the EA introduced new ways of monitoring our waters with a view to obtaining a classification that more accurately reflected the true status of our waters. In March 2015, the EA published the results of this new classification system which revealed that only 21% of surface waters were in good overall health.

There are a number of ecological and technical reasons why progress might have been delayed, but overall it is hard not to conclude that current management of our water bodies is failing even to maintain the status quo, let alone deliver improvement.

Launching the consultation on the draft River Basin Management Plans, the EA stated *“there are choices that Ministers could make to accelerate or decelerate the levels of action and ambition.”* To inform that decision the EA produced different scenarios with varying ambition, amount of money available and funding breakdown.

The EA's best case scenario suggests £8.5 billion net benefit to society by taking cost-effective actions that will get 75% water bodies to good health. Because of the new classification system, this figure is likely to change to 61%. It is clear that cleaner rivers, lakes, other wetlands and beaches will mean increased tourism and recreation for the surrounding areas, help to alleviate flooding, and improve the resilience of public water supply and quality.

However the EA's 'most likely scenario' – the business as usual approach - sacrifices £7bn of these benefits by aiming for just 37% to reach good health. Again, the new classification system means that this figure is now likely to be 24%. EA figures also show that this will cost £110 million more each year until 2021, than the more ambitious scenario – crucial problems will not be addressed, so more money will be needed to achieve far less benefit.

Managing our rivers and freshwater habitats properly is not only good for people and nature – but it also offers value for money. The Government must show how they will deliver this.

You can read Blueprint for Water's official **response** to RBMP consultation:  
**[blueprintforwater.org.uk/publications](http://blueprintforwater.org.uk/publications)**.

## **Save Our Waters**

When the Environment Agency published its draft River Basin Management Plans for consultation, Blueprint for Water launched the **Save Our Waters campaign** ([saveourwaters.org.uk](http://saveourwaters.org.uk)), which offered people an alternative way to respond to the consultation and show they care about the water environment. Over 900 people responded to the campaign and those responses were sent straight to the EA. 63% said they did not think their waters were healthy, and 73% wanted to be more involved in the decisions that affect the health of our rivers, lakes and other wetlands.

We believe it is essential that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs takes bold action to go beyond business as usual to deliver real benefits for the environment and best value for taxpayers, water customers and businesses.

The EA's summary of responses has now been published, which includes reference to Save Our Waters: **[https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/portal/ho/wfd/draft\\_plans/consult](https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/portal/ho/wfd/draft_plans/consult)**

## Summer opportunities

### Local groups – what can you do?

The River Basin Management Plan consultation closed mid-April 2015 and the final plans are due to be published at the end of the year. Now is the time to act and speak up for our rivers, lakes, streams, other wetlands and bathing waters.

The next stage of the Save Our Waters campaign is to engage with your local MP about your local river, lake or other wetland and this pack is designed to help you. From **now until October** you can help to ensure the right measures are included in the River Basin Management Plans to restore them to good health.

There are three ways to get involved:

### If you have a little bit of time to spare....

1. Write to your MP

We need as many people as possible, up and down the country, to highlight the plight of their local water body and what is needed to address the problem. By writing to your MP (to assist you we have provided a letter template in this pack) you can help to make sure this issue remains in the political spotlight.

Let the Blueprint know if you would like any further assistance in responding to any reply.

### If you have a bit more time to spare...

2. Attend a constituency surgery

MPs hold a regular surgery to give the people in their constituency an opportunity to meet them and discuss the issues that matter to them. You can use the information and templates in this pack to raise concerns about the health of our rivers, lakes and other wetlands with your MP.

MPs will usually advertise where and when they are holding their surgeries in the local paper, at local libraries and on their websites.

3. Invite your MP to visit the river, lake, stream or other wetland you love

You can invite your MP to visit your local river, lake or other wetland over the summer – a great time to get out and see the beauty of some of our water bodies. Here, you can really show the MP why this matters so much and highlight the particular issues the water body faces and what is needed to address them. A member of the Blueprint for Water will be able to offer support if you would like to do this – please get in touch with us and we'd be happy to talk more about it.

## Contacting your MP

As a constituent, you have the right to talk to your MP about local problems and issues and ask them to do something about it on your behalf. There are a number of ways your MP can ensure your concern is heard – we want them to write to the Secretary of State on your behalf.

If you don't know who your MP is you can find out here - <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

Here are some useful tips when contacting or meeting your MP:

- Even if you haven't had any dealing with politicians before, remember your MP wants to hear from you! They need to know what matters to their constituents and your local experience and knowledge makes you the expert. You can use your personal experiences to show just why this issue is so important.
- It is important to be clear about what you want to say, whether you are writing to your MP or meeting them. Use the information and templates in this advocacy pack along with your own knowledge.
- Be clear on what you are asking your MP to do – in this case, writing a letter to the Secretary of State about the issue or meeting you on the river so you can talk to them in more detail about it.
- If you have met your MP, send a thank you letter, covering the issues discussed and agreed actions. You can follow these up in a couple of weeks to check whether your MP has made progress.
- Tell the Blueprint for Water about any communications or meetings and what your MP has agreed to do for you.

## **What information to include and discuss**

You know your rivers better than anyone so please feel empowered to talk about them at a personal level. The goal is for your MP to understand you are a passionate local individual/group who know about their river and that more needs to be done to not only protect it, but safeguard it for future generations

Below are some helpful facts and points to complement your own knowledge:

- Only 21% of surface waters in England are in good health. This equates to 17% of rivers, 23% of lakes, 18% of estuarine water bodies and 52% of coastal waters, which highlights the poor state of our water bodies generally and lack of progress that has been made.
- 2015 is a key year for the Government to show its commitment to the water environment by setting out bold and ambitious River Basin Management Plans that are able to protect and restore our waters for the benefit of people and nature.
- We want to work with local groups, anglers, and concerned river enthusiasts to ensure that the final plans contain the necessary ambition to achieve the Water Framework Directive objectives.

## Letter to MP

You can use the wording below as a template letter to your MP. There are two options. Both allow you to add in specific detail about the water body you care and know about. The first asks your MP to write to the Secretary of State, and the second option invites your MP to visit your local water body.

Let us know when you have taken action – [emails@blueprintforwater.org.uk](mailto:emails@blueprintforwater.org.uk)

Once you hear back from your MP, if you'd like support responding, please get in touch and we can help.

### 1. Template letter to MP requesting they write to the Secretary of State

Dear X

I am writing to you as a constituent who loves and enjoys living close to the (river/lake/wetland X - insert name of local water body).

I regularly (fish/dive/snorkel/swim/walk/picnic/birdwatch) alongside here/on the river and enjoy the wildlife (stress iconic and important species e.g. salmon/barbel/water vole/kingfisher).

However, it currently isn't in a healthy state because (detail local issues - taking too much water out for homes and businesses/pollution from agricultural and business/flooding/drought/litter/over-widening/deepening).

These pressures, damaging the (river/lake/wetland X), are not just confined to (insert place name). They are symptomatic of a bigger, national scandal – just 17% of rivers across the whole of England are healthy, with many suffering because of over-abstraction, pollution and poor management. This is bad for people and wildlife and cannot be allowed to continue.

2015 is a key year for the Government to show its commitment to the water environment with the new six-year plans, River Basin Management Plans, setting out how all groundwater, rivers, streams and lakes should be managed so they can become healthy. The consultation on these draft plans ended in April; time is running out to make a

difference. We must act now. I would therefore like you, as my MP, to write to the Environment Secretary, on behalf of your constituents, telling her about the current health of our local water bodies and the importance of improving their health in years to come.

## **2. Template letter to MP requesting a meeting on the river or relevant water body**

Dear X

I am writing to you as a constituent who loves and enjoys living close to the (river/lake/wetland - insert name of local water body).

I regularly (fish/dive/snorkel/swim/walk/picnic/birdwatch) alongside here/on the river and enjoy the wildlife (stress iconic and important species e.g. salmon/barbel/water vole/kingfisher).

However, it currently isn't in a healthy state and suffers from (detail local issues - Taking too much water out for homes and businesses/pollution from agricultural and business/flooding/drought/litter/over-widening/deepening).

These pressures, damaging the (river/lake/wetland X), are not just confined to (insert place name). They are symptomatic of a bigger, national scandal – just 17% of rivers across the whole of England are healthy, with many suffering because of over-abstraction, pollution and poor management. This is bad for people and wildlife and cannot be allowed to continue.

2015 is a key year for the Government to show its commitment to the water environment with the new six-year plans, River Basin Management Plans, setting out how all rivers, streams and lakes should be managed so they can become healthy. The consultation on these draft plans ended in April; time is running out to make a difference. We must act now. I would therefore like to invite you to meet with us (name of group/individual) on (river/lake/wetland X) so I can talk to you more about this issue.

## Media

### Template press release for MP office

Below is a template press release to use, with photo, after the visit. You can send to your MP's office afterwards to add to the MP's website. The office may want to change the MP quote – the below is a suggestion.

## **[MP name] visits [insert name of water body e.g. River Wey] to help 'Save Our Waters'**

[Name of MP] visited the [name of water body and location] with local constituents on [insert date] to see first-hand why protecting and restoring our precious water bodies is so important.

In December 2015 the Environment Agency is due to publish its final River Basin Management Plans which will set out how water bodies across England will be protected over the next six years. Currently, the [insert name of water body] is in [good/moderate/poor] state of health, and [name of MP] wants to make sure that improves. It is under pressure from [over-abstraction/pollution/human modification].

[INSERT MP NAME] said:

"Our rivers, lakes, streams and beaches are essential for people and wildlife, supporting business, leisure and wildlife. I was pleased to have the opportunity to visit the [name of waterbody]. It is a valuable and important local asset – used not only for [boating/kayaking/angling – insert relevant activities] but also a source of water for home and businesses.

"I am committed to keeping the health of our rivers on the agenda and will continue to raise this issue on behalf of my constituents with the Secretary of State."

ENDS

**Contacting your local paper**

Local papers are keen to hear about local issues – why not contact them to let them know that you have spoken to/met your local MP about this issue. They may want to cover the story in more detail, which would help to raise awareness and keep the issue in the public eye. Please keep the Blueprint up to date so we can support if needed.

## Additional resources

There are lots of other resources available to help - all of which can be downloaded from the Save Our Waters website: [saveourwaters.org.uk](http://saveourwaters.org.uk)

- Save Our Waters infographic
- Blueprint for Water response to RBMP

## Social media

You can also raise awareness about these issues by using social media. Below are some suggested general tweets to use, but please use detail about your local river, lake or other wetland. You could tweet about what you love about your watery area – swimming, sailing, walking, fishing – remember to include **#SaveOurWaters**.

With only 17% of England's rivers in good health, now is the time to act and #SaveOurWaters <http://bit.ly/1tFK4OY>

Speak up for the river, lake or wetland you love #SaveOurWaters <http://bit.ly/1tFK4OY>

We need to halt the loss of vital freshwater habitats – get involved today #SaveOurWaters <http://bit.ly/1tFK4OY>

Everyone can get involved and help #SaveOurWaters <http://bit.ly/1tFK4OY>

Blueprint for Water is a campaign of Wildlife and Countryside Link

