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WATER COMPANIES MUST PROVE THEY MEAN BUSINESS ON THE ENVIRONMENT
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A new report published today, Tuesday 15 April, by the Blueprint for Water coalition on the environmental plans of water companies reveals a yawning gap between the best and worst performers in England and Wales.

The Blueprint for Water coalition, which includes WWF-UK, RSPB and the Marine Conservation Society –, says water companies need to show leadership on the environment and open their industry to scrutiny, to prove they are meeting their customers’ demands to look after rivers, streams and beaches.

The report rates the new five-year plans from the 21 water companies in England and Wales using a traffic light system across 10 environmental areas: from plans to tackle damage from water extraction, to those stopping raw sewage discharge into rivers and onto beaches.

The Blueprint for Water coalition has found that three companies’ plans show real ambition, but no company is planning what they regard to be ‘good’ progress across all 10 of the areas.

Water company	Proportion of the Blueprint targets where company is planning...			
	... 'good' progress (%)	... some progress (%)	... insufficient progress (%)	Insufficient information (%)
Affinity Water	90	10	0	0
United Utilities	90	10	0	0
Wessex Water	90	10	0	0
South West Water	80	20	0	0
Southern Water	80	20	0	0
Yorkshire Water	80	10	10	0
Severn Trent Water	70	20	10	0
Thames Water	60	40	0	0
Portsmouth Water	50	38	13	0
South East Water	50	38	13	0
Anglian Water	40	50	10	0
Northumbrian Water	40	30	20	10
Bristol Water	38	50	13	0
Cholderton & District Water	38	13	25	25
Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water)	30	60	10	0
Sembcorp Bournemouth	25	38	0	38
Cambridge Water	25	63	13	0
South Staffs Water	25	25	38	13
Essex & Suffolk Water	13	50	13	25
Dee Valley Water	13	25	25	38
Sutton & East Surrey Water	0	38	38	25

Topline messages from the report are as follows:

- At the top of the ranking are three companies whose plans include good progress across 90% of areas: Affinity Water, United Utilities and Wessex Water.
- At bottom are six companies (Bournemouth, Cambridge, South Staffs, Essex and Suffolk, Dee Valley and Sutton and East Surrey Water), whose plans include good progress in less than a third of areas.
- Just a fifth have plans that make good progress to price water fairly through use of water meters and tariffs to protect lower income households and encourage water efficiency.
- Less than half of companies (45%) include good plans to keep our rivers flowing by reducing damaging abstraction licences and managing their operations to minimise the water they take from the most environmentally vulnerable sources.
- 60% are making sufficient progress with plans to deal with surface-water flooding, including making use of Sustainable Drainage Systems.
- Less than two thirds (60%) are making sufficient plans to tackle water waste (including through encouraging water efficiency and tackling leakage).

Janina Gray, Head of Science & Environmental Policy at the Salmon & Trout Association, and Chair of the Blueprint for Water, said:

‘Water companies consulted widely in preparing their business plans, and the public gave them a resounding message that – despite the economic climate – they do not want their water providers to pollute or damage the environment. Water companies are monopolies: customers can’t change supplier so it is really important that we shine a light on what’s planned so customers can make sure that they are getting what they asked for.

‘Today’s report shows that there is real innovation and ambition for the environment from parts of the water industry. We hope that this report shines a light on this so others will follow.

Rose O’Neill, Freshwater Programme Manager at WWF-UK said:

‘While many water companies have some really laudable environmental plans, there is very little evidence in the public domain to show whether or not they are achieving their goals. Anyone trying to get a clear view of how well they are performing on the environment will be looking into muddy waters at best.

‘And even with a clear steer from the regulator on public engagement – as was the case with these business plans – there were cases with seven companies where we could not quite tell what was going on. We need full transparency and proper public scrutiny so that everyone knows what their water bills are paying for, and so water companies can be held to account.’

Collectively, water companies are doing more to protect and enhance our environment than most other industries. This is challenging, especially when they have to spend a lot of their customers’ money cleaning-up after other sectors, like agriculture, which can pollute sources of drinking water and contaminate rivers and streams.

Phil Burston, Senior Water Policy Officer at the RSPB said:

‘Our assessment shows the industry is doing more than ever before to address its impact on the water environment and is leading the way compared to other sectors. But with just a quarter of our rivers, streams and coastal water bodies in good ecological health, it’s clear that there’s a huge amount still to be done. While water companies can continue to improve their performance, other sectors need to step up and we need to see stronger leadership from the Government, as well as company boardrooms, to ensure this happens.’

The Blueprint for Water coalition wants to see water valued for the precious resource that it is and it is calling on Ofwat and the water companies to consider this assessment as the business plans are finalised over 2014 to ensure that they fully deliver for customers and the environment.

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Notes to editors

1. The Blueprint for Water coalition is a unique coalition of environmental, water efficiency, fishing and angling organisations which 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. More information is available at: www.blueprintforwater.org.uk.

The following 12 organisations support *Blueprint for PR14: An environmental assessment of water company plans*:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Angling Trust
- Buglife
- Freshwater Habitats Trust
- Marine Conservation Society
- The Rivers Trust
- RSPB
- Salmon & Trout Association
- Waterwise
- WWF-UK
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

2. The *Blueprint for PR14: An environmental assessment of water company plans* can be downloaded here: www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Blueprint_for_PR14_Assessment.pdf. This report shows how the Blueprint for Water coalition has rated water companies’ business plans against the environmental outcomes we set in 2012, in *Blueprint for PR14: Environmental outcomes for the price review* (www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Blueprint_for_PR14.pdf).

The 10 areas of environmental action that the report rates companies on are:

- Reducing abstraction licences where they risk damaging the environment;
- Managing operations so less is taken from environmentally sensitive sources;
- Giving fair consideration to measures to reduce demand;
- Ensuring no increase of water taken from the environment;
- Including tariffs for all on meters to protect customers and to encourage water efficiency;
- Promoting metering including 80% metered in water stressed areas;
- Implementing widespread catchment management;
- Improving water bodies to Good Ecological Status;
- Reducing pollution from sewage works and other discharges;
- Preventing rainwater from overwhelming sewers including through use of SuDS.

3. The detailed methodology for the report can be downloaded here: www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Blueprint_for_PR14_methodology.pdf.
4. A number of Blueprint coalition members are engaging in projects with water companies, which are available to visit:

Dove Stone, near Oldham: RSPB and United Utilities nature reserve, at the heart of the original 'SCaMP' project: <http://corporate.unitedutilities.com/scamp-index.aspx>. Contact Dave O'Hara, Peak District Site Manager, at dave.ohara@rspb.org.uk, or on 01457 819888 or 07739 921460.

Haweswater, Lake District: RSPB and United Utilities farms in the Lake District, where RSPB and United Utilities are delivering 'SCaMP' 2 objectives. Contact Lee Schofield, Site Manager, at lee.schofield@rspb.org.uk, or on 01931 713376 or on 07703 888226.

River Beane, nr Stevenage: Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Affinity Water project on reducing abstraction. Available for interview, including broadcast on Monday 14 April, afternoon. Contact Emma Robertshaw, The Wildlife Trusts, erobertshaw@wildlifetrusts.org, 07779 657515.

River Frome and Stinsford Channel, nr Dorchester: Dorset Wildlife Trust and Wessex Water project, where Dorset Wildlife Trust has permission to film on two stretches on these waterways. Available on Monday 14 April, morning until 12pm. Contact Emma Robertshaw, The Wildlife Trusts, erobertshaw@wildlifetrusts.org, 07779 657515.

5. Water companies have submitted business plans for the period 2015 – 2020 to the regulator Ofwat. On Friday 4 April Ofwat published detailed feedback on all the company plans: http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/pricereview/pr14/prs_web140404pr14rbrrcboard.