



Wildlife & Countryside Link
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Sir Jon Cunliffe,
Chair, Independent Water Commission

By email

20th December 2024

Dear Sir Jon,

It was a pleasure to meet you at the roundtable you held with eNGOs in November. During that session I spoke about the work of Blueprint for Water as a coalition that brings together sector understanding of, and ambition for, water policy. I write now as Chair of Blueprint to share with you our hopes for the Commission's work and the upcoming 'Call for Evidence'.

As we set out when we wrote to welcome you into your role as chair, we hope that your Commission will recommend comprehensive, cross-sector solutions to restore water systems at catchment scale, by considering the full range of pressures on freshwaters, including the water industry, agriculture, chemicals, transport, housing and infrastructure development.

To do this, there are a number of topics where shifts in policy, regulation and practice will be needed to secure the best outcomes for our rivers at affordable cost, whilst also delivering additional societal benefits. The call for evidence could helpfully pose questions on these challenging issues. For example:

- What changes are needed to enable a more holistic, cross sector approach to improving the water environment, including through improvements to the River Basin Management Planning process?
- How can the role of Catchment Partnerships in delivering against objectives for the water environment best be facilitated?
- What evidence is there to support a move towards outcomes-based regulation, enabling sectors to plan based on securing best-value multiple benefits, rather than by adhering to prescriptive actions?
- What processes are needed to ensure that improvements to the water environment are delivered without detriment to other Government ambitions, for example on carbon?

We are also keen to understand how the commission may make the case for changes outside of its direct remit; for example, where evidence supports longer-term changes, and these could also be given more immediate effect through imminent opportunities, such as within changes to planning processes, or via delivery by water companies and flood bodies under forthcoming settlements.

The Blueprint for Water membership of 20+ national eNGOs is well-placed to offer the commission opportunities for site visits to hear directly about the challenges and opportunities on the ground relating to the above topics and others. If this would be of interest, please do let us know. We will also be engaging collectively and individually with the call for evidence when it is published in the New Year, and hope to have the opportunity to engage with the person appointed to the expert panel to represent environmental interests; we would be grateful if you could share details when that appointment is announced.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Commission in the coming months and, in the meantime, I wish you and your colleagues all the best for the festive season,

Very best,



Ali Morse,

Water Policy Manager, The Wildlife Trusts and Chair, Blueprint for Water.