



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP  
Chief Secretary to the Treasury  
HM Treasury  
The Correspondence & Enquiry unit  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Chief Secretary

**SPENDING REVIEW BID: TACKLING PHOSPHATE POLLUTION IN THE RIVER WYE**

We are writing as MPs for Herefordshire, Brecon and Radnorshire, and the Forest of Dean. Together with our colleague David Davies, the MP for Monmouth, who shares our concern, we cover the length of the River Wye.

As you will be aware, there is a very serious issue of phosphate pollution in the Wye, which is having grievous environmental consequences for marine and plantlife in the river, threatening the wider ecosystem, undermining tourism and recreation, and leading to the imposition of bans on building and other development which are damaging the local economy.

Over the past eighteen months we have formed the Wye Phosphates Working Group. Its purpose has been to focus attention on the issue and bring the key agencies, Natural Resources Wales, the Environment Agency and Natural England, and the Nutrient Management Board, local councils, the water companies and other stakeholders together.

What we need is a clearly designated, coordinated and responsible cross-border and cross-agency taskforce with accountable individual leadership tasked with tackling phosphate pollution in the River Wye, according to an agreed and properly funded strategy. Unfortunately, it is now quite clear that this is not going to happen without real leadership and support from HM Government, in conjunction with the Welsh Government.

Good progress has been made by DEFRA and MHCLG (now DLUHC) ministers, but we need to give more priority and urgency to this work. The need for urgency was specifically recognised by the Deputy Prime Minister in recent Oral Questions, when he said "the Government understand, and my right hon. Friend champions eloquently, the importance of the River Wye. We will do everything we can to support him with preserving it for future generations."

We are therefore making a request, and a recommendation.



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The request is that you agree a three-year integrated spending package with DEFRA and DLUHC in the forthcoming Spending Review, specifically focused on cleaning up the Wye. The outline cost of this is likely to be in the range £10-£15M, but it should be scaled to the need. Please regard this as a formal spending bid.

An effective long term approach will require considerable amounts of water- and soil-testing and enforcement, among other things, and these in particular will inevitably bear a cost. But that cost is extremely small compared to the critical current impacts, let alone a potential full-scale crisis. If these issues are not addressed it is also quite possible, some would say likely, that the wider Wye Valley catchment area will be subject to further restrictions on economic development, which would seriously affect human wellbeing, local economic growth and levelling up.

Moreover, as you will know, Southern Water was recently sentenced to pay a record-breaking £90m fine after pleading guilty in court to nearly 7,000 unpermitted pollution discharges. This investigation was the biggest that the Environment Agency has ever conducted. Earlier this year, Thames Water was also fined £4 million and £2.3 million for separate pollution incidents. In addition to these fines, four water companies still require improvements, and no single company achieved all the environmental expectations set out for 2015–2020.

So, our recommendation is that you consider using some of these fines to fund the clean-up of at-risk rivers, and in particular the Wye. This would be a highly appropriate use of the funds received, and it would send a wider signal that polluters should and will be made to pay for damage to the environment.

Finally, we would be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these concerns as soon as Parliament reconvenes.

With all good wishes,

Jesse Norman MP

Bill Wiggin MP

Fay Jones MP

Mark Harper MP