

THE END SEWAGE POLLUTION MANIFESTO

A person is surfing on a wave, captured in a dynamic pose with arms outstretched. The entire image is overlaid with a teal color filter. The background shows the texture of the ocean waves.

A Plan for Sewage-Free Waters

Our five point plan for making the UK's waters healthy and safe again.



ENFORCE THE LAW

We have the regulations and laws we need to End Sewage Pollution. Now we must enforce them.



STOP POLLUTION FOR PROFIT

Water companies' first responsibility must be to the environment, not their shareholders and executives.



PRIORITISE HIGH RISK POLLUTION

Take immediate targeted action to tackle the highest risk pollution events.



EMPOWER A NATURE LED APPROACH

Harness the power of nature to End Sewage Pollution.



REVEAL THE TRUTH

Deliver UK wide transparency about sewage pollution.

OUR VISION



We want a UK where our rivers, lakes and seas are healthy and teeming with life. Fish are abundant, plants are thriving and nature is valued and protected. Where people can surf, swim, paddle or use the water free from the fear of becoming ill.



Where we can fish, dip our toes and soak in all the health and wellbeing benefits thriving ecosystems bring.

Where local communities and economies are centred around healthy blue spaces and people from cities to the coast are proud of their local natural blue spaces.

The next government has the power to deliver this vision, and can do so by adopting our 5 point plan to End Sewage Pollution.





ENFORCE THE LAW

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REGULATORS UPHOLD THE LAW

Current legislation (1991 Water Industry Act and the 1994 Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations) requires water companies to treat water 'effectively' and only permits overflows to discharge in 'exceptional circumstances'.

But this is not what's happening. Since the last UK general election untreated sewage has been discharged over 1 million times. Until regulators properly enforce the regulations and permits we already have, polluters will continue to pollute with impunity. The next government's top priority must be to uphold the rule of law.

REGULATORS ARE WELL FUNDED AND RESOURCED

Environmental protection budgets for regulatory agencies have been cut by more than 60% in the past decade. Resourcing for monitoring and enforcement have been particularly affected. Due to a lack of capacity Environment

Agency staff have even been told to ignore many pollution events. It's no surprise then that the number of water samples taken by the Environment Agency fell by 51% from 2010-2021, while prosecutions fell by 80%.¹

By reinstating the resources of regulators, and ring fencing adequate budgets for monitoring and enforcement activities, the next government can give the environment the protection force it needs.

POLLUTERS PAY

Current fines & penalties are too easily built into the operating costs of water companies. 'Record fines' of £2 Million to South West Water in 2022 equated to under 2% of the company's operating profit.² These punishments do not reflect the environmental damage caused by pollution and do nothing to discourage systemic pollution.

To be effective, regulators and the courts must be enabled to enforce penalties that fit the crime. Enforcement action must actively dissuade pollution.



1. <https://unchecked.uk/the-issue/our-environment/>

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/south-west-water-given-21m-fine-for-pollution-offences> <https://www.sas.org.uk/waterquality2022/dry-spills/profitteering-off-pollution>



STOP POLLUTION FOR PROFIT



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CAP CEO BONUSES

Water Companies are profiteering from pollution whilst water users pay the price. In the 2021/22 financial year, water companies paid out a cumulative total of £16.5 million to CEOs. This is despite firms racking up millions of pounds worth of fines and a cost of living crisis gripping the nation.

We want the government to set a cap on CEO bonuses of 100% of salary. With bonuses only permitted when environmental regulations have been complied with.

DIVIDENDS DEPENDENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

In the 2021/22 financial year, water companies paid out a total of £965 million in shareholder dividends despite there being over 300,000 untreated sewage discharges in the same year.

Water companies must continually reinvest in their infrastructure to protect water users and the environment, before making money for shareholders. To enable this shift, Ofwat must make dividend payouts contingent upon compliance with environmental regulations and permits.



PRIORITISE HIGH RISK POLLUTION



Take immediate targeted action to tackle the highest risk pollution events.

COMPLETE END TO UNTREATED DISCHARGES AFFECTING BATHING WATERS AND POPULAR WATER USAGE AREAS BY 2030

There has been an exceptional growth in people using the water since the last election. Over 7.5 million adults participated in paddlesports like canoeing and paddle boarding in 2022, and wild swimming and surfing have seen an explosion in interest.³ Despite this, the most popular spots for these activities are regularly impacted by sewage and people continue to get sick when doing what they love most.

To ensure the public can freely enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of blue spaces, priority must be given to ending sewage pollution in bathing areas and popular water usage areas.

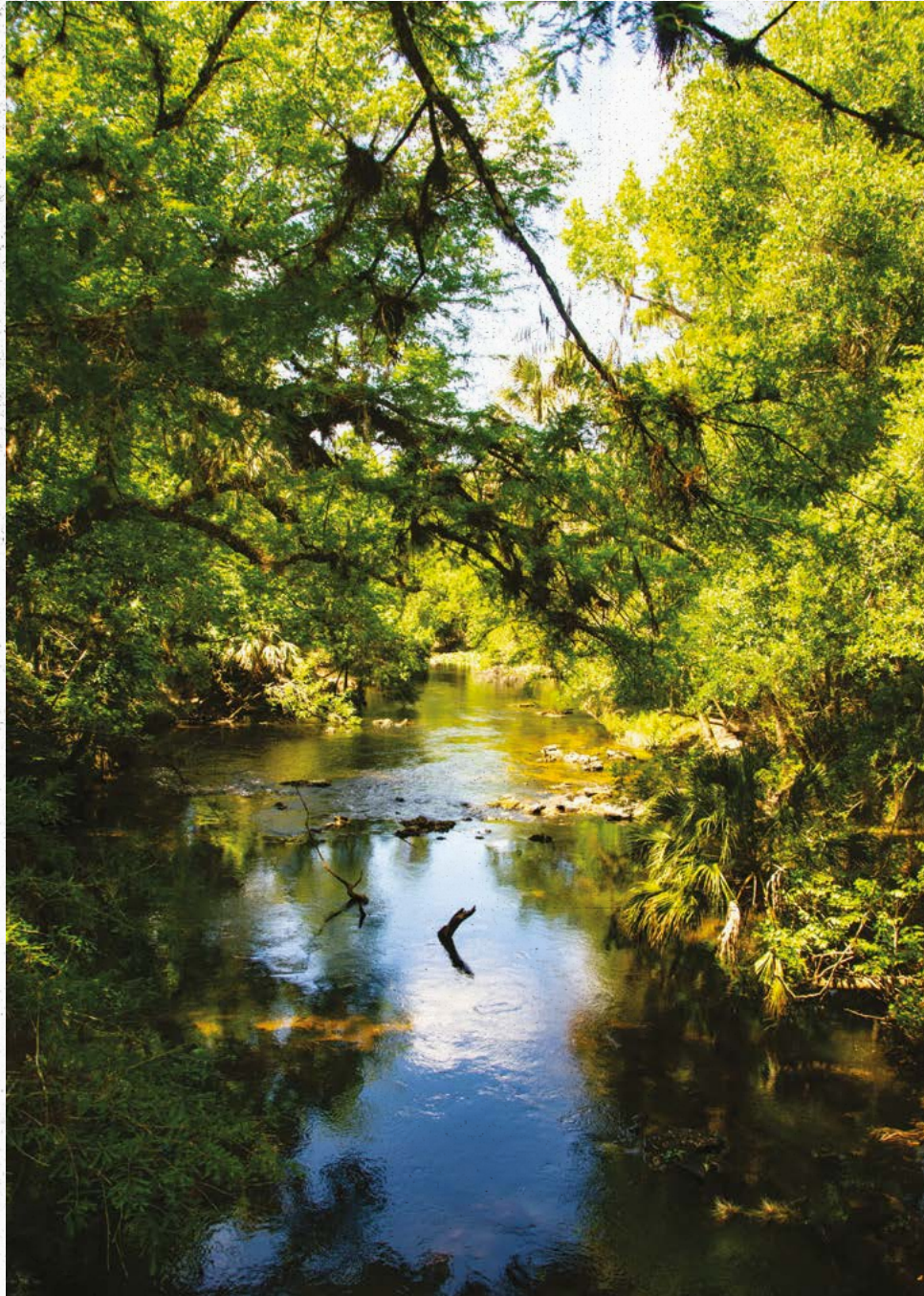
COMPLETE END TO UNTREATED DISCHARGES AFFECTING HIGH PRIORITY NATURE SITES BY 2030

High priority nature sites like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are invaluable places where our most iconic and threatened species should be protected. However, widespread pollution has ruined the water quality of these sites and wreaked havoc on the wildlife that call them home. 90% of river SSSI's England are now in an unfavourable condition.⁴

To save these habitats that make up one of the last bastions of our wild isles and halt the decline of nature, we must end discharges affecting these crucial sites.

3. <https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news/2023/paddlesport-activities-remain-buoyant-according-to-latest-watersports-participation-survey>

4. <https://www.endsreport.com/article/1823822/disgraceful-level-protected-water-habitats-worst-condition-doubles> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-water-environment-indicator-b3-supporting-evidence/state-of-the-water-environment-indicator-b3-supporting-evidence#groundwater-quantitative-and-chemical-classification> [a]



EMPOWER A NATURE LED APPROACH

Harness the power of nature to End Sewage Pollution.

A NATURE LED APPROACH

From sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and constructed wetlands at a local level, to landscape scale restoration projects, nature has huge potential to relieve the pressure on sewerage systems and prevent the use of overflows. When used in the right place and cared for effectively, they can be the most cost effective option with the co-benefits of

trapping carbon, improving biodiversity and reducing flood risk.

The next government should put nature first by removing barriers to the adoption of nature based solutions, and require water companies to prioritise the use of innovative and effective nature based solutions to solve water quality issues.



REVEAL THE TRUTH



Deliver UK wide transparency about sewage pollution.

ACCURATE AND ACCESSIBLE REAL-TIME WATER QUALITY INFORMATION YEAR-ROUND

Everyone has the right to make educated decisions about how they use the water. However there is currently a postcode lottery on transparency. In Scotland only 4% of overflows are monitored. In England and Wales, whilst over 90% of overflows are monitored, the data is incomplete, not accessible to the public nor available in real-time. Without this transparency we have no route for holding polluters to account. From the Scottish highlands, to the southern coast we need to see accurate and accessible real time water quality information provided by all water companies.

A TRANSPARENT BATHING WATER APPLICATION PROCESS

Communities are lining up with passion and enthusiasm to apply for inland bathing water status and improve the rivers and lakes they love. But they are met with an opaque system.

To champion inland bathing waters the next government must be clear about the requirements for designation, and actively support

community groups through the process. Everyone should be able to access safe bathing spots, that's why we want to see 200 inland bathing waters around the UK by 2030.

WATER QUALITY TESTING THAT SHOWS THE FULL PICTURE

Current bathing water quality testing regimes allow for the discounting of the worst pollution events and do not give an honest picture about the safety of the waters. The next government should enact a world-leading bathing water testing regime which tests for emerging threats to humans, such as antibiotic-resistant bacteria, viruses, microplastics, and the effects pollution is having on the environment.

TRANSPARENCY ACROSS THE SEWAGE SYSTEM

Whilst overflows have rightly come under increasing public and political scrutiny, water companies must also be required to be transparent about the quality of treated sewage discharges. Without this transparency water companies will be able to simply shift pollution to areas with less scrutiny.

WHO WE ARE

We are a coalition of water lovers and water users united by our ambition to End Sewage Pollution and recover the UK's rivers, lakes and seas.

We surf and swim the UK's coasts, we fish and canoe the rivers, and row and admire the lakes. We are conservationists and environmental champions. We are national organisations and local groups. We are communities and business owners. We are everyday people driven by our shared vision of healthy and safe waters thriving with wildlife.

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