



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Dr Guy Mawle
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Dear Dr Mawle,

Thank you for your letter of 21 January to Julie James, Minister for Climate Change, regarding your concerns over the condition of the River Usk and Wales' rural rivers in general. I have been asked to respond.

The Minister for Climate Change is extremely concerned about the impact of pollution on the quality of our rivers. Clean water and a healthy environment are essential for life in Wales and tackling pollution is a priority. The causes are complex the main cause is run-off from animal waste and chemicals used in agriculture, and other causes include pollution from disused mines, run-off from built up areas, storm overflows and sewage pipes being wrongly connected to drainage networks. No single measure will solve our nature crisis, and more needs to be done to tackle all causes of river pollution.

The issue of high phosphorus (P) levels in rivers is particularly challenging. Natural Resource Wales' (NRW) initial assessment of P levels in our river Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), including the River Usk, indicate that the reason for waterbodies failing P targets are from a diverse range of sources. Reductions in nutrients entering the rivers need to be sought in a wide range of sectors across the catchment.

Welsh Government officials are driving a cross-sectoral and holistic approach forward via the work of the SAC Rivers Oversight Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Director of Water, Flood and Coal Tip Safety. The Group has representatives from all relevant sectors in Wales including Ofwat and will provide strategic direction to expedite a number of key areas.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

As you may know, NRW has set up a project board to investigate and tackle phosphorus pollution and dealing with the issue is part of their Corporate Plan. The Welsh Government is funding Habitats Regulation Assessment training for local authority officers and this is another element of the management solution.

NRW is working with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to undertake modelling to apportion sources to pollutant levels on a sub-catchment level. NRW will lead on a communications plan, with the key messages from the reports accessible to all stakeholders. These reports will help determine a plan of action. The River Usk is included in NRW's '4 Rivers for LIFE' project. £9 million will be spent over the next 5 years to bring the River Usk and three other SAC rivers into good condition.

Nutrient Management Boards will be key in driving local, catchment based solutions. NRW has been working with Natural England (NE) on the SAC Rivers Phosphate project. NRW has also been holding regular meetings with the Senior Specialist Water Quality at NE to share information regarding approaches, especially around water quality standards, Core Management Plans and conservation objectives.

A roadmap for Storm Overflows in Wales is being developed with the aim of tackling the impacts of Storm Discharges on Welsh rivers. The work is overseen by the Chairs of NRW, Ofwat and both water companies.

This Government has already taken action by making sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mandatory on most new building developments. This will relieve pressure on the sewer network by redirecting and slowing down the speed at which surface water enters the network – ensuring CSOs are only used as a last resort.

Planning for the long term, the first non-statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs) will be published by water companies in 2022. These new Plans will deliver more action to help sewerage companies better address the risks that some sewerage assets, such as storm overflows, may pose to the environment.

We expect the DWMPs to set out a long and short term plan to reduce the discharges from CSOs and any environmental harm from them. This will include improved treatment of sewage, improved storage capacity and natural, environmentally friendly ways of reducing the volume of water entering the sewage system.

Ultimately, there needs to be a fair balance between the Welsh Government's economic goals and the environment upon which they depend. Decisive action is needed to tackle the climate and nature emergency so that people can go on treasuring Wales' rich natural resources for generations to come. The Minister for Climate Change works with Members of the Senedd and other stakeholders to develop solutions to this complex issue.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Gulliford
Water Policy Branch