



All Party Parliamentary Water Group

Co-Chairs: Angela Smith MP and Baroness McIntosh of Pickering
Vice-Chairs: Neil Parish MP, Lord Bird and the Earl of Selborne GBE FRS
Treasurer: Luke Pollard MP

A River Runs Through It: Working Together To Improve River Health For The Benefit Of Society, The Economy And Wildlife

Tuesday October 17, 5.00 -6.30pm, Committee Room 9, House of Commons

(Non-Verbatim Minutes)

The All Party Parliamentary Group's October meeting was titled: *A River Runs Through It: Working Together to Improve River Health for The Benefit of Society, The Economy and Wildlife*.

Guest Speakers:

- Glyn Davies, Executive Director of Global Programmes, WWF
- John Russell, Senior Director of Strategy and Planning, OWFAT
- Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive, Environment Agency
- Mike Pocock, Affinity Water

Baroness McIntosh chaired the session, welcomed attendees and introduced the guest speakers.

Glyn Davies said that WWF have published two reports in the past month, [Water for Wildlife](#), and [Flushed Away](#) which both explore the on-going problems of river health. He highlighted that, globally, there has been an 81% decline in wildlife populations associated with freshwater since 1970. In England, he said that a quarter of rivers are at risk of over abstraction, with South East England being under the same pressure as Southern Spain. He highlighted a number of on-going challenges including:

- The need for faster investment by water companies due to increased pressures of urbanisation and climate change;
- Greater attention needs to be paid to sewage outflows. Until these are monitored, it is not possible to fully understand the impact they have on river health.
- Current regulation is not stringent enough. The sector needs the introduction of a Water Bill.
- Individuals have a role to play in helping the situation.

Sir James Bevan said that WWF's recent reports remind the sector of how precious rivers and streams are. However, he said that water quality is improving with pollution loads declining "dramatically" over the past 7 years. He added that serious instances of water pollution have been cut by more than half, and rivers that were dead in the past now have salmon.

He said that sewage and water companies are only part of the problem, and particularly stressed that individuals all have a role to play in improving river health.

On over abstraction he said that the Environment Agency (EA) will “bear down” on over abstraction, and will set increasingly tough targets for water companies to meet. He also said that the EA will work more closely with farmers to give them advice and guidance.

Finally, he said that the EA is working with Government on a 25-year environmental plan in order to leave the Environment in a better way than we found it.

Mike Pocock began by welcoming WWF’s report. He said that changes to the environment have to be introduced in a balanced way that doesn’t put water suppliers under excessive pressure. He also said that not all environmental issues are caused by over abstraction, and noted that the sector must also look at alternative solutions. He further added that the sector must move at a pace that society can cope with, particularly with regard to balancing cost, maintaining supply and improving standards.

John Russell said that the environment is at the heart of OFWAT’s work, and that the organisation works closely with DEFRA and the EA to deliver mechanisms to protect the environment.

He highlighted that since privatisation, water companies have invested over £140bn in improving the environment. For example, he said that the amount of water lost by leaks is down by a third and sewer collapses have reduced by 40%.

He said WWF’s report served as an important reminder for the sector as to how much remains to be done in the area.

Touching on PR19 he said that OFWAT will expect water companies to take care of the environment. They will also expect companies to have bespoke performance commitments for environmental delivery and reducing abstraction.

Baroness McIntosh then opened the floor to questions and comments.

Lord Berkeley welcomed WWF’s report and said that it should go even further, to set the standard particularly high as business reviews take place.

James Bevan agreed and said that all the recommendations in the report are sensible suggestions that companies should look at implementing.

Catherine Moncrieff asked about long-term waste water plans and how the sector can encourage these.

John Russell said that the sector is making good progress on them, and they will play a part in PR19.