

30 June 2017

River Kennet celebrates safer future

Action for the River Kennet (ARK) and Thames Water celebrated the completion of a £30 million project to reduce abstraction from the Rivers Kennet at Og at an event in Mildenhall, Wiltshire, last week.

Over 100 people including representatives from the Environment Agency, Natural England, WWF and the Angling Trust joined the event. The new pipeline will let Thames Water reduce the amount of water it exports to Swindon from the Kennet Valley during periods of low flow. This will help protect the wildlife that needs a healthy river in order to survive.

The celebration marked a major milestone in ARK's 27 year campaign to protect the River Kennet.

Thames Water's CEO Steve Robertson said 'Thames Water need a healthy environment to be able to supply our raw product: water. Without a healthy ecosystem we would not have a product to sell, and ARK's successful campaign has led to us invest £30 million in this new pipeline to protect the Kennet. This is a significant step forward in a long journey to protect the environment at the same time as supplying our customers.'

To mark the occasion, Steve Robertson presented ARK's president Sir Nigel Thompson with a framed photograph of the Kennet.

Local children, Richard Benyon MP, and ARK's chairman Richard Clarke joined Steve Robertson for a ceremonial release of baby eels, known as elvers. The elvers had been cared for by pupils from Long Lane School, Newbury as part of the Water Matters project.

Richard Clarke, said 'Today's event is a celebration of partnership working to protect one of the finest rivers in the UK. Releasing elvers into the Kennet is a symbolic moment: eels are one of the world's fastest declining species, protecting the Kennet will help eels and other species to survive.'

With the new pipeline in place Thames Water plans to reduce the quantity of water it abstracts from groundwater sources close to the chalk stream, in periods of low flow, to 6 million litres per day, with only 3 million litres exported to Swindon. Action for the River Kennet would like to see this export reduced to zero, and they look forward to continuing to work with Thames Water to achieve this goal.

Notes to editors and images:

- 72km in length, the River Kennet rises west of Marlborough and joins the River Thames at Reading. Mainly rural in character, the catchment is defined by the chalk uplands of the Marlborough and Berkshire Downs to the North and the Hampshire Downs to the south.

Much of the river forms a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the number of rare plants and animals that are unique to chalk watercourses.

- Thames Water's abstraction at Ogbourne has now closed, although the company retains an emergency license if problems should arise that prevent the company from supplying Swindon through the new arrangements. An emergency license is also in place at Axford.
- Thames Water's press release on one of the new booster stations on the pipeline can be found here: <https://corporate.thameswater.co.uk/Media/News-releases/Camouflaged-booster-station>.
- For more information on the work of Action for the River Kennet, please visit: <http://www.riverkennet.org/>.
- Local schools were represented by Long Lane Primary, Newbury, St John's Marlborough, Marlborough College and Ramsbury Primary School. All the students are working with ARK to improve the water environment.
- For more details contact Charlotte Hitchmough 07880 515859 or 01672 512700



From left to right *Steve Robertson (Thames Water), Richard Clarke (ARK), Martin Salter (Angling Trust) and Richard Benyon MP with students from St John's Marlborough and Ramsbury Primary School, ready to release elvers.*



Sir Nigel Thomson (President, ARK) and Steve Robertson (CEO, Thames Water).

Image credits: John Sutton/Clearwater photography. Full resolution images are attached.