



Action for the River Kennet

12 May 2021

Press Release

Queen's speech offers hope for cleaner rivers

Action for the River Kennet welcomed the announcement in the Queen's Speech yesterday that included new legal duties to tackle sewage discharges into rivers.

The Kennet and Pang river catchments have the dubious honour of being home the sewage treatment works that discharge most often and for the longest time of any sewage treatment works in the Thames Water area. In fact, five of Thames Water's ten worst performing sewage treatment works in 2020 affected the Kennet and Pang, so this Bill has the potential to reduce the pollution in our local rivers.

Three new measures on storm overflows will be added by to the Environment Bill later this year. The Bill will return to Parliament shortly after the Queen's Speech, with the new legal duties due to be on the statute book by the Autumn.

During and following wet weather storm overflows release diluted untreated sewage into rivers, to prevent overloading the sewers. However, their use has increased in recent years as climate change has led to greater rainfall and water infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth.

The legal duties added to the Environment Bill will drive the changes needed to improve our water environment. The three duties are:

- a duty on government to publish a plan by September 2022 to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows;
- a duty on government to report to Parliament on progress on implementing the plan; and
- a duty on water companies to publish data on storm overflow operation on an annual basis.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

"The concerning issue of untreated sewage in our rivers demands urgent action. The inclusion of these measures in the Environment Bill will ensure steps are taken to tackle unacceptable levels of pollution.

"While we cannot get rid of storm overflows overnight, we are working hard to accelerate progress in this area to protect our precious water environment and wildlife."

ARK Director Charlotte Hitchmough said:

Action for the River Kennet, Elcot Park, Elcot Lane, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 2BG

Registered charity no.: 1120725 www.riverkennet.org email: charlotte@riverkennet.org

'In 2020, 400,000 people signed the 'End Sewage Pollution' petition, including many ARK members. We asked our MPs to support the Sewage Bill in parliament, and we asked our members to urge them to do the same. 5,000 people asked their MP to support the bill and 130 MPs did so, including Laura Farris and Danny Kruger, both MPs in the Kennet Catchment. I'm delighted that their efforts were not in vain and that elements have been included in the new Environment Bill. We hope that the improved legislation will result in cleaner rivers for us all to enjoy, but this is just a first step on a long journey to making that a reality.'

ENDS

Charlotte Hitchmough
charlotte@riverkennet.org
 07880 515859

Notes to editors

Action for the River Kennet is part of the national Rivers Trust movement calling for an end to sewage pollution.

Five of the top ten worst performing Sewage Treatment Works (based on frequency and duration of storm overflows) in the Thames Region in 2020 spill into waterbodies in the Kennet and Pang catchments.

Source: Event Duration Monitor Data, 2020, Environment Agency.

Water Company Name	Site Name	Total Duration (hours) of all spills prior to processing through 12-24 hour counting method	Counted spills using 12-24hr counting method
Thames Water	HAMPSTEAD NORREYS STW	4111.95	204
Thames Water	CLANFIELD MARSH STW	3843.33	176
Thames Water	SOUTH LEIGH STW	3342.86	154
Thames Water	BURGHFIELD STW	3227.18	143
Thames Water	MORTIMER (STRATFIELD) STW	3222.12	144
Thames Water	MARLBOROUGH STW	2872.22	151
Thames Water	EAST SHEFFORD STW	2753.49	121
Thames Water	WHEATLEY STW	2678.75	145
Thames Water	COTTERED STW	2604.94	152
Thames Water	ROEHAMPTON VALE TQ21725306 CSO	2527.76	141