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Blueprint warning of potential for higher flood risk and damage to wildlife from new Government proposals

Wildlife and countryside groups from the Blueprint for Water coalition have responded robustly to the Government's recently published proposals [to revise the flood consenting system], warning that by watering down the current safeguards and protection there is a real prospect of triggering an environmental double whammy – higher flood risk and damage to wildlife habitat.

In a strongly worded letter to the Water Minister Dan Rogerson MP the coalition said:

“We are writing to express our serious concern at the government’s proposal to remove key safeguards against flooding, and the knock-on impacts this will have on people and our natural heritage (both natural and historic). We urge you to reconsider a number of proposals that risk avoidable damage.”

The Defra ‘consultation on integrating flood defence consents into the Environmental Permitting regime’ is recommending that draining, diverting, dredging or covering rivers should be allowed without any expert inspection of the sites in question and that in future applicants would be granted permission to scrape out, drain or divert rivers without any checks on likely impacts on wildlife or the environment.

Currently landowners have to apply for flood defence consents when carrying out river improvement works. Blueprint believe there is scope to improve the current consenting system, but not to reduce the scrutiny it offers. A series of Government pilot studies set up to test the deregulated approach have not yet reported.

Janina Gray, Head of Science for the Salmon & Trout Association and Chair of The Blueprint for Water said:

“We believe that the Government are acting rashly, by pre-empting the findings of the very dredging pilots that were set up to test whether or not a system of flood risk management was needed and workable. There is a very real chance that these proposals could put thousands of people at risk of flooding and they also risk widespread environmental damage, with inexperienced applicants being given the green light to alter parts of the functional floodplain.”

The coalition also questioned the governments’ decision not to go ahead with the provisions of the 2010 Floods and Water Management Act requiring the installation of Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS) on all new developments despite voting for these measures when in opposition.

Defra expects this decision alone to cause over £100 million of flood damage each year¹, as new development floods neighbouring homes and businesses. This cost will be borne by the British public, in flooded homes and in higher water bills and insurance premiums. SuDS are a really positive

¹ The Defra Impact Assessment for Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act



solution to surface water flooding which can help address many of the major problems we face as a society. Not only do they protect communities from flooding, they create valuable habitat for wildlife and beautiful open space in our towns and cities which can measurably benefit human health and well-being. SuDS are generally cheaper than traditional drains, but whichever way you look at it, there is an overriding public need to not flood our communities

Carrie Hume, Head of Conservation Policy at Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust said:

“Proper scrutiny and care needs to be applied to all activities that could cause flooding of homes or damage to wildlife. We do not think it appropriate that up to a mile of a river should be dredged, diverted or drained without even a site visit – nor that new development can be built that could flood its neighbours. It is a core government responsibility to control these activities and to prevent these risks from harming people, property and wildlife”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The Blueprint for Water coalition is a unique coalition of environmental, water efficiency, fisheries and angling organisations which call on the Government and its agencies to set out the necessary steps to achieve “sustainable water”. The Blueprint for Water is a campaign of Wildlife and Countryside Link. More information is available at www.blueprintforwater.org.uk

2. See Defra’s [consultation](#) on changes to the flood consenting regime, and [details](#) on permits provided by the Environment Agency.

See Government [announcement](#) putting in place a weakened system for SuDS than required by the Flood and Water Management Act, despite the majority of responses criticising these proposals at [consultation](#).

3. For more information contact Harry Bellew, RSPB, Media Officer: Harry-Jay.Bellew@rspb.org.uk / 01767 693418/ 079127801794.

The following 11 organisations support this press release:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Angling Trust
- BugLife- The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Friends of the Earth
- Institute of Fisheries Management
- RSPB
- The Rivers Trust
- The Salmon & Trout Association
- Waterwise
- Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
- Wild Trout Trust