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The shocking state of England's rivers

Immediate: Thursday 26 March 2015

As the Environment Agency release figures today that reveal just 17% of England's rivers are in good health, the Blueprint for Water coalition is urging communities across England to make a stand and speak up for the rivers, lakes, wetlands and beaches that they love.

Environment Agency improvements in gathering evidence have led to a truer picture of the health of England's rivers, which is far worse than previous official figures suggested.

Blueprint for Water, a coalition of 16 environmental and fishing organisations, is urging everyone to respond to the Environment Agency's current consultation on River Basin Management Plans, which determine how our water ways will be managed over the next six years. The group has developed the Save Our Waters website to enable people to respond to the consultation and help these watery places. Rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, estuaries and beaches are essential for people and wildlife; not only are they used for pleasure (walking, canoeing, fishing), but they're also essential for drinking water, sanitation and flood management.

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

"The figures released today are shocking and show us that things are worse than we thought. Just 17% of England's rivers are in good health. This is unacceptable and threatens wildlife and livelihoods. It is more important than ever that everyone gets involved with this consultation. We're asking everyone, as they plan their Easter break, to take two minutes to respond via the Save Our Waters website."

Rose O'Neill, Water Policy Manager, WWF, and member of Blueprint for Water, said:



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“It’s clear that we are failing our rivers and the wildlife they impact. We need to see government action to restore these rivers, for example by reducing abstraction and tackling pollution from sewage works, farms and roads. There’s still time to add your voice, but I’d urge everyone to respond quickly as the consultation ends in two weeks.”

Rob Cunningham, Head of Water Policy, RSPB, and member of Blueprint for Water, said:

“We shouldn’t ignore great efforts by wildlife groups, rivers trusts, water companies and others to make real improvements to our rivers but we clearly need a step change if we are going to make meaningful progress on diffuse pollution, abstraction and physical damage and that needs government to take action.”

Every response on the Save Our Waters website is sent directly to the Environment Agency. It also offers an option for those who have a little more time to contribute their views. For more details, visit www.saveourwaters.org.uk

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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. Environment Agency figures in 2014 showed that 29% of England’s rivers were at good ecological status. Latest data shows a drop to 17%, with the apparent ‘decline’ a result of a more robust monitoring system that offers a much truer reflection of water body health, as well as tougher environmental standards.
3. Over the last six years Blueprint organisations at a local and national level have worked hard with the Environment Agency, community groups, water companies and others to improve the water environment. While there has been some notable achievements the



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Environment Agency's evidence suggests that there has only been a 2% improvement in the health of the nation's waters in real terms.

4. River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) provide the framework to understand and manage the pressures facing our water environment in an integrated and cost-effective way. After the current consultation on RBMPs closes on 10 April, Defra and the EA will review the consultation responses for final Ministerial signoff in December 2015.
5. Individuals and organisations are being encouraged to respond to the current consultation via www.saveourwaters.org.uk. All responses are sent directly to the Environment Agency.
6. For more information contact Rebecca Pain, Business Media Communications Manager, WWF, T: +44 (0)1483 412303 | M: +44 (0)7971 149666

The following 12 organisations support this press release:

- Angling Trust
- Friends of the Earth
- Freshwater Habitats Trust
- Institute of Fisheries Management
- Marine Conservation Society
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Rivers Trust
- The Salmon & Trout Association
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Waterwise
- Woodland Trust
- WWF - UK