



**ocean
conservation**
all-party parliamentary group

**Sewage Pollution: What are the Solutions?
And AGM**

22nd March 2021

Virtual Meeting: Zoom
10:00 – 11:30

ATTENDEES

MPs and Lords

Steve Double MP - Chair
Derek Thomas MP – Co-chair
Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle
Gagan Mohindra MP
Matthew Offord MP
Selaine Saxby MP
Derek Thomas MP
Cherilyn Mackrory MP
Sally-Ann Hart MP
Geraint Davies MP
Liz Saville Roberts MP
Tony Lloyd MP
Chad Male on behalf of Liz Twist MP

Stakeholders

Hugo Tagholm, CEO of Surfers Against Sewage
Henry Swithinbank, Policy Officer, Surfers Against Sewage and Secretariat
Hannah Freeman, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT)
Ash Smith, Founder, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP)
Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, Environmental Audit Committee Chair and lead sponsor of The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill
Matt Wheeldon, Director of Asset Strategy and Compliance, Wessex Water
Christine Colvin, Director of Partnerships & Communications, Rivers Trust

Alice Carrington-Windo, Water UK

MINUTES

AGM: Election of Officials

Proposals for official officer positions were given and voting took place with the election of the following officers:

Chair: Steve Double MP, (Geraint Davies MP proposed, seconded by Liz Saville-Roberts MP)

Secretary: Derek Thomas MP

Vice Chairs:

- Cherilyn Mackrory MP
- Geraint Davies MP
- Kerry McCarthy MP
- Caroline Lucas MP
- Liz Saville Roberts MP
- Mathew Offord MP
- Selaine Saxby MP
- Gagan Mohindra MP

(All proposed by Steve Double MP and seconded by Geraint Davies MP)

Secretariat: Surfers Against Sewage (proposed by Steve Double MP, seconded by Liz Saville-Roberts MP)

2021 Plans

Henry Swithinbank, on behalf of the Ocean Conservation APPG Secretariat, provided an overview of the APPG's Plans for 2021. He reiterated the Ocean Conservation APPG's vision to restore the ocean for the good of people and the planet. He outlined plans to collaborate with the Tidy Britain and the Microplastics APPG, host a reception on the benefits of ocean recovery as well as the possibility of member visits to relevant projects. Finally, Henry outlined plans to increase the visibility and influence of the APPG and grow its membership.

The Group discussed that in the run up to COP26 the APPG's work should highlight the benefits Ocean Conservation and Recovery can have in tackling climate change.

The Group also discussed that with the imminent relaxation of lockdown measures, there was likely to be an increase in plastic pollution and littering. **Geraint Davies MP, Sally-Ann Hart MP** and **Tony Lloyd MP** all highlighted the widespread pollution they saw in their constituencies following previous lockdowns. They highlighted the need for government led information campaigns to tackle this.

The Secretariat advised that Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) had previously provided the Responsible Beach Guide and agreed to share this with the Group. **Hugo Tagholm** also highlighted the upcoming SAS Million Mile Beach Clean.

Steve Double MP agreed as chair of the APPG to raise the issue of post lockdown pollution with DEFRA and highlight the need for government lead anti littering campaigns.

10:30 Roundtable Discussion

10:40 - Steve Double MP left the meeting 10:40

Derek Thomas MP took over from Steve Double as chair of the roundtable discussion.

Presentations

Hannah Freeman provided a short presentation emphasizing the importance of a blue recovery and the role of nature-based solutions to help tackle sewage pollution. She highlighted that whilst wetlands are being lost at a staggering rate, if they were delivered at a spatial scale, they could hold the power to control the amount of sewage entering the environment

She stressed the need for partnership working between wider society and government as well as a policy framework to unlock barriers to the implementation of nature-based solutions. Hannah highlighted the need for standards for best practice, measurable targets as well as financial incentives to drive public sector investment.

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP discussed the Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill and the need for enhanced government policy and legislation. He discussed the fact that water companies have been spilling sewage legally into rivers on a routine basis due to; inadequate infrastructure, increasing climate pressures and inadequate investment. He stressed that whilst this problem won't be solved overnight, politicians need to raise awareness. He stated that whilst the section on environmental drainage plans in the Environment Bill is a step forward, it does not go far enough and that nature-

based solutions are the way to go. He finished by stating the need for better data on water quality which will also help drive change.

Ash Smith highlighted the role of emerging technology in tackling sewage pollution. He discussed how spot sampling and current annual environmental performance documentation does not provide an accurate picture of water quality in the UK. He stated the need for live data in order to properly deal with water quality issues, as well as the benefits of citizen science to support this live data. He highlighted the next step will be working with AI to process these huge amounts of data.

Discussion

Derek Thomas MP introduced the remaining stakeholders to the discussion

Christine Colvin pointed attendees to an interactive map available on The Rivers Trust website looking at CSO overflows around the country.

Matt Wheeldon stated his support for the Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill and his hopes that with greater exposure, it will lead to better protection of the environment.

What are the benefits of nature-based solutions?

The group discussed the benefits of nature-based solutions to sewage pollution.

Hannah Freeman reiterated that wetlands can help treat wastewater as it passes through the environment so that by the time it reaches waterways, it should not be polluted. **Sally-Ann Hart MP** highlighted the issue of sewage pollution in her constituency and suggested the WWT help Southern Water work out how they can deal with their sewage overflows using nature-based solutions.

What are the benefits of real time information on sewage pollution?

Chad Male (on behalf of Liz Twist) stated that he greatly benefits from Surfers Against Sewage's app, the Safer Seas Service to provide real time information about sewage pollution at his local beach, Teignmouth. He highlighted he had also witnessed a recent surge in the use of rivers in the Blaydon constituency for swimming and kayaking. He asked whether there was any technology available that would also make river users aware of pollution incidents.

Hugo Tagholm explained Surfers Against Sewage is building on the Safer Seas Service to include inland waters. He reiterated that water sports are becoming increasingly popular in riverine locations which meant that they needed to be protected from surface run-off and sewage. Hugo highlighted the improvements in coastal water quality since the 1990s as result of improved legislation and stated

that in this decade of ecosystem restoration we need to see the same improvements in our rivers.

Why is legislation important?

Matt Wheeldon stated that legislation would be a useful enabler to unlock further water company action. He stated that nature-based solutions will be a real advantage in treating and diluting sewage but argued there are limitations to the use of these solutions such as wetlands and in some cases the most effective solution would be hard engineering. He also highlighted real time monitoring is required to solve the problem.

Alice Carrington-Window added that there is variability in risk with nature-based solutions and that a regulatory framework which allows us to take risks is required. She finished by stating how the EA needs to be properly resourced to do holistic testing to account for different solutions.

Ash Smith highlighted that in May 2018 the Environment Agency required the water industry to classify and rectify storm overflows. He argued that the water companies willfully chose to ignore this requirement. In response **Matt Wheeldon** stated that storm overflow classification will become statutory as part of Environment Bill. He highlighted that the Water Industry does not want storm overflows to cause harm and the primary driver of priorities is the impact of a spill.

What opportunities are there for parliamentarians to address the issue of sewage pollution going forward?

Hannah Freeman stated that the drainage and wastewater management plans (contained in the Environment Bill) are significant step in the right direction. She highlighted that many water companies had little strategy or knowledge of where their assets were, these plans will help rectify this but expressed concerns that this may not make it into investment business plans.

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP stated that the work of WASP to collect more data will transform our understanding of what is causing the problem of pollution in rivers. He highlighted that government had an opportunity to make change by influencing company capital spending through Ofwat guidance.

Mr Dunne stated he was continuing to pursue legislative options with the government to get key parts of his Sewage Bill into law, such as amending the Environment Bill in the Lords. He encouraged members of the group to support him as this work continued.

Closing remarks

The group agreed to continue the conversation with Mr Dunne to understand how the group can best support the aims of the Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill moving forward.

Meeting closed 11:30