



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Sir Oliver Heald MP
House of Commons
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Dear Sir Oliver,

Thank you for your email of 26 October to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent, Mark Wilkinson, Chair of Friends of the Rib & Quin, about the future of chalk streams. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Government is committed to working with the Catchment Based Approach Group (CaBA) to provide protection to chalk streams. CaBA have recently released their [Chalk Stream Implementation Plan](#) which sets out the progress made on 34 recommendations to improve the health of England's chalk streams.

98% of the water abstractive for consumptive use in Rib & Quin supports public water supply and is abstracted from the Upper Lee Chalk groundwater body. These abstractions have been investigated in a number of studies spanning a 10-year period from 2005-15. These found the main influences on flows in the river are rainfall, land use and channel modifications. There is an ongoing technical investigation looking into water resource pressure on Upper Lee Chalk Aquifer, which provides baseflow to the Rib & Quin River. This is expected to be completed in 2025.

Water companies are currently releasing their Water Resource Management Plans for consultation. These will provide details on how they plan manage the supply and demand of water within the region, including their approach to protecting chalk streams. Affinity Water have published their [draft WRMP](#). Their approach aligns with the regional management plan for [South East](#). These are both open for public consultation until 20 February 2023.

There are six Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works (STWs) in the Rib & Quin catchments. The current phosphorus limits have been agreed for final effluent discharges for five of the STWs, including Buntingford and Barkway. The agreed completion date for these phosphorus removal schemes is 22 December 2024. Water company plans for Asset Management Period (AMP) 8 may include additional reductions in phosphate to meet new targets.

The Environment Agency (EA) has taken a number of additional steps to manage sewage discharge. These include:

- Encouraging local authorities to engage water companies when producing their local plans to ensure their plans are suitable for the growth of an area.
- Publishing [Event Duration Monitors](#), provided to the EA through water companies annual returns, showing the frequency and duration of sewage discharges online.
- The Water Situation Report is published, monthly, to provide a summary of hydrological and hydrogeological conditions affecting rivers you can find the latest edition [here](#).
- Performing regular checks against permit conditions. Barkway's sewage discharges followed the facilities permit conditions for volume of discharge. The EA will carry out an evaluation of their performance by the end of December 2022.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write about this important issue.



REBECCA POW MP