



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear Philip, Alan,

I am writing to you to set out my expectations when it comes to holding the sector accountable for the unacceptable sewage discharges in our precious waterways. I welcome the working relationship that we have already established since I joined Defra and look forward to working closely with you in the weeks and months ahead.

Water company performance, specifically, is below the standards we should expect. The public rightly expect that I will hold not only water companies, but also their enforcement agencies to account, and that is one of my top priorities in this role. I expect significant improvements in the regulatory oversight of water companies.

The Government has provided the Environment Agency with stronger legal powers in relation to water companies and wider sectors which may pollute our environment. We have lifted the cap on variable monetary penalties (VMPs) so that these are unlimited, and expanded the scope of offences to which these penalties apply. As you know, these powers are now in force.

These new tools will be available to your enforcement teams and we expect the Environment Agency to deliver penalties, in line with your Enforcement and Sanctions Policy, that are tough whilst proportionate to the nature of the offence. I look forward to seeing your use of these new powers to ensure that polluters are held to account and are appropriately deterred from breaking our environmental laws.

I will also be writing to water companies demanding measures to drive significant improvements to tackle sewage discharges from storm overflows.

I look forward to working with you both to drive the improvements we all want to see in water company performance to protect and enhance our waters.

Yours sincerely,

RT HON STEVE BARCLAY MP