



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **River Pollution Summit at the Royal Welsh Show**

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BY **Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister**

Last week, on the opening day of the Royal Welsh Show, I convened a summit to discuss the phosphorus pollution of our rivers in Wales and how we can work together to improve the situation.

The summit brought together senior representatives from regulators, water companies, developers, local government, farming unions, academia and environmental bodies to discuss the development of a strategic and joined-up approach.

Phosphorus pollution in Wales' Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) rivers is a serious issue which defies easy solution. It is having a significant impact on the environment, house building, food production and land management. Particular concerns exist about the potential impact on the Welsh Government commitment to build 20,000 new low-carbon social homes for rent and the designation of inland waters for recreation.

With the support of Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and water companies, a number of projects and programmes are already underway to help ensure our water is of the highest quality.

But despite this, our rivers are under pressure from a range of challenges, including extreme weather, pollution, climate change and population growth.

There is no single measure, which will solve this crisis and there is no quick fix. We need a "Team Wales" approach, where government, regulators and all relevant sectors – work together, over the immediate and medium-term to realise long-term results to improve the water quality in our rivers.

I very much welcome the commitment from all the representatives present at the 18 July summit and the pledges made. We agreed to work together to move forward with the existing initiatives and to develop and put in place new measures to tackle water quality, to address planning constraints, and to develop an action plan.

The following eight areas of intervention were agreed at the summit, for which the Welsh Government will be providing support:

1. **Nutrient Management Boards and fit for purpose governance and oversight arrangements.** The Welsh Government will provide new funding to support the work of nutrient management boards, with up to £415k being made available in 2022-23 with additional provision in 2023-24 and 2024-25. This is in addition to Welsh Government funding already in place:

- £40 million of funding over the next three years to address water quality problems across Wales
- £10 million to directly support on-farm infrastructure investment in 2021 to enhance nutrient management and help farmers reach compliance with the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations
- A package of support for farmers, foresters, land managers and food businesses worth over £227 million over the next three years to support the resilience of the rural economy, which includes supporting actions to tackle agricultural pollution.

In addition, we will work with partners to review existing governance structures to ensure the all-Wales collaborative approach, endorsed at the summit on 18 July, is streamlined and fit for purpose. This will help ensure that government, regulators and all sectors are working as efficiently as possible to secure water quality improvements and support the implementation of policy and practical solutions.

The outcome of this review will be confirmed this autumn as part of a *SAC Rivers Action Plan* (see point 8). The Welsh Government will monitor progress closely and in early 2023 will reconvene the river pollution summit.

2. **Enabling nature-based solutions.** Building on existing evidence and knowledge, we will develop a regulatory approach to enable nature-based solutions within catchments to mitigate phosphorus loading and to reduce the impact on the environment.
3. **Identify and implement appropriate short-term measures.** Identify and implement short-term interventions, drawing on financial support from developers, Welsh Government and other partners, as appropriate. This may include, for example, assessing the potential benefits of package treatment plants as an interim solution ahead of improvements to wastewater treatment plants.
4. **An all-Wales nutrient calculator.** Building on the work of nutrient management boards, we will develop and promote a unified nutrient calculator as a tool to directly aid planning decisions on nutrient neutrality, which can take account of catchment-level data and local features and needs.
5. **A consolidated 'menu' of potential mitigating actions and interventions.** We will draw together the latest evidence, good practice and guidance, including on soil and land management to aid nutrient management board decisions on a suite of measures to reduce pollution.
6. **Catchment consenting.** We will explore how best to take forward an approach to catchment consenting, including the associated regulatory requirements, to broaden the

range of mitigation measures available to reduce point and diffuse source pollution in SAC rivers.

7. **A platform for nutrient offsetting and exploring potential for nutrient trading.** We will build on current trials to assess the potential for nutrient offsetting to facilitate the implementation of more integrated practical measures within catchments, and, in the long-term, assess the merits on nutrient trading.
8. **A long-term roadmap supported by an action plan.** Working with all partners, we will develop an agreed roadmap in a *SAC Rivers Action Plan* this autumn setting out clear actions, timescales and responsibilities building on the evidence pack produced for the summit. We will work together to ensure these actions are delivered through appropriate structures and organisations.

We are providing more support and funding than ever before and will continue to promote a collaborative approach, bringing together delivery partners, including regulators, developers, farmers, water companies and communities, to identify and implement sustainable solutions to reduce the pollution in our rivers.

In doing so, we can maximise opportunities to provide wider benefits, such as improved access to nature, decarbonisation, flood protection and enhanced habitat and biodiversity.

I would like to everyone who took part in the summit – we all have a role to play in improving the quality of water in our rivers and reducing phosphorus pollution.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.

<https://gov.wales/tackling-phosphorus-pollution-special-area-conservation-sac-rivers-information-and-evidence-pack>