



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Sir Oliver Heald QC MP  
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Dear Sir Oliver,

Thank you for your email of 14 May enclosing the Chalk-Streams First paper from Charles Rangeley-Wilson. I apologise for the delay in responding to you. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

We know how rare and valuable our chalk rivers are. We share stakeholder concerns about river flow and the health of chalk rivers, with regards to pressures from abstraction and extreme weather events, including prolonged dry weather, droughts, floods and land pollution. My officials are aware of the paper you enclosed and are engaging with relevant stakeholders to assess the proposals.

Chalk river flows have been particularly low in recent years due to a prolonged lack of groundwater recharge. Despite recent winter rainfall, there have been three consecutive years of low rainfall in many parts of the country. The 2017 Water Abstraction Plan sets out the Government's commitment and actions to protect our water environment. We expect that by 2021, across England, sustainable abstraction will be achieved for 90% of surface water bodies and 77% of groundwater bodies.

Since April 2016 the Environment Agency (EA) has reported benefits to 81.85 km of river due to abstraction reductions. The EA has already changed 46 abstraction licences relating to 10 chalk rivers. Per year, this has returned 9.4 million m<sup>3</sup> of water back to chalk rivers and removed the risk of another 1.6 million m<sup>3</sup> per year being taken. This is equivalent to the average annual domestic water use of approximately 200,000 people.

Since April 2016, under the Revitalising Chalk Rivers Programme, the EA has reported, together with its partners, 7.84 km of habitat improvements, including weir removals, river and plant form restoration and vegetation management.

**RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP**