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Press Release

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Water industry should seize opportunity to protect environment and consumers

Water companies should use their current planning and expenditure review as an opportunity to provide better protection for the environment and tackle rising prices for water customers. This is the message that an influential group of environmental and angling organisations will present to Environment Minister, Phil Woolas, at an event hosted by Martin Salter MP in the House of Commons today. The water industry is currently planning its activities and expenditure for 2010 to 2015 [1].

The Blueprint for Water coalition [2] is calling for large-scale water efficiency projects to reduce demand for water, coupled with initiatives to stop pollution at source.

Nearly two billion pounds has been spent in the last five years on energy intensive treatment processes to make drinking water quality acceptable for consumers. Investment now in action to improve water quality at source will save the public money in the long term. As the price of energy bills rise there is a real need for the planning review to consider fair pricing for water.

“We can’t go on for ever just building our way out of trouble”, said Tony Burton Director of Strategy and External Affairs at the National Trust. “We need to reduce the amount of water we waste and stop pollution getting into the water in the first place. This will secure our future water supplies at less cost to the public, and at the same time secure much-loved rivers and wildlife sites across England and Wales.”

“Tackling pollution at source by changing the way land is managed offers a better deal for both customers and the environment.”

The Blueprint for Water is also calling for a rapid move to universal metering. Jacob Tompkins, Director of Waterwise said, “the current way in which we are charged for water regardless of how much we use is increasingly unfair. England is lagging behind almost every country in Europe.”

Action is also needed to address the rising demand for water, water wastage and the impacts of climate change on our freshwater ecosystems.

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Notes to editors

[1] 2009 Periodic Review of Water Prices (PR09)

Plans for water industry investment are set every five years through negotiations between water companies and Ofwat, their economic regulator, with guidance from the Government. The next review has now begun and provides a crucial opportunity to:

- take forward large-scale water efficiency programmes;
- tackle water quality problems at source through catchment management initiatives that offer many benefits for biodiversity and the environment ; and
- protect nationally and internationally important river and wetland sites by amending or revoking damaging abstraction licences and taking action on water quality.

[2] Blueprint for Water is a campaign of Wildlife and Countryside Link and is supported by a unique coalition of nature conservation, angling and water efficiency organisations concerned with the health of our water environment, including:

- Anglers' Conservation Association
- Association of Rivers Trusts
- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
- Marine Conservation Society
- The National Trust
- Pond Conservation
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Salmon & Trout Association
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- Waterwise
- WWF-UK

3. Per capita water consumption has increased by 30% since 1970. This has resulted in 500 rivers, lakes and wetlands in England being classified as “at risk” of damage from excessive water withdrawals.

4. More than 50% of public water requires treatment to control pollution from agriculture at an annual cost of over £200 million.

5. Over 70% of our rivers are too contaminated to support a sustainable population of salmon.