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Water Management:

We are in a dirty water emergency with sewage pollution affecting our rivers, lakes and beaches. I am also troubled by cuts to the Environment Agency's budget which has in turn led to drastic cuts in monitoring, enforcement and prosecution. This has given rise to a drastic increase in illegal discharges, damage to nature and tourism and putting people's health at risk.

I am aware of initial reports from the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which indicate its belief that the Government and water companies may have broken the law over sewage in waterways. This is unprecedented, and I want to see action to put an end to this appalling situation, bring water companies in line and clean up our waterways. The Government has a two-month period in which to respond to the OEP, which comes to an end in November. I will follow developments on this matter closely.

I do not believe the Government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan is sufficient for eliminating sewage dumping into our natural environment. I am also concerned that its Plan for Water does not do enough. It has been criticised by a House of Lords Committee as being inadequate for solving the problems facing consumers and the environment in terms of water.

I want to see mandatory monitoring of all sewage outlets, the proper resourcing of the Environment Agency to properly enforce rules, and a legally binding target to end 90% of sewage discharges by 2030. I would also support automatic fines for discharges and a standing charge penalty for discharge points without monitoring in place.

In my view, the polluter should pay. Failures to improve should be paid for from company dividends, not through customer bills or lack of investment in the system. I believe water bosses who routinely and systematically break rules should be held professionally and personally accountable through the striking off of company directors and imprisonment for allowing serious leaks.

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