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Thérèse Coffey MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR.

Tuesday 8th November 2016

Dear Minister,

The Angling Trust is the national representative and governing body for all disciplines of angling in England. It is united in a collaborative relationship with Fish Legal, a separate membership association that uses the law to protect fish stocks and the rights of its members throughout the UK. Angling is one of the UK's most popular pastimes and also makes an important contribution to the economy, generating £4 billion and supporting 40,000 jobs. We represent more than 1,800 of the many angling clubs, fisheries and riparian owners throughout the UK, whose fishing rights are worth at least £1 billion. The value of those rights is largely dependent on the health of the water environment, a key feature of which is the flow or water level.

The Angling Trust, alongside other conservation and fisheries organisations, has long campaigned for complete reform of the existing water abstraction licensing regime. The right to abstract water from rivers, aquifers, reservoirs etc. in England and Wales was formally created by the Water Act of 1963, by amalgamating the plethora of previous licences into a single permitting regime. At the time, this was done with little or no consideration of what level of abstraction water bodies could actually sustain. Since then, we have seen a significant increase in both per capita use of water, population numbers and use of water for irrigation of crops.

It is our belief that the current regime is therefore no longer fit for purpose and has resulted in inexcusable damage to the aquatic environment through excessive levels of abstraction being permitted. A third of river catchments in England and Wales are either 'over-licensed' or 'over-abstracted' according to the Environment Agency, with more water abstracted than the environment can sustain and/or the potential for more to be taken in the future. Furthermore, around 600 water bodies are at risk of failing to meet Water Framework Directive standards due to low flows resulting from abstraction.

Low flows in rivers and water levels in lakes have a variety of damaging impacts on fish stocks: pollutants are concentrated, temperatures increase, oxygen levels decrease, there is less wetted area for invertebrates and other food favoured by fish, they are more vulnerable to predation, they are less able to migrate up and down rivers to complete their lifecycle and there is a greater risk of disease.

In recent years there have been periods during which we were given reasons to be optimistic about the prospects for reform. In December 2011, the Angling Trust, alongside most environmental NGOs, warmly

welcomed the government's Water White paper – [Water for Life](#). This document outlined the government commitment to reform the water abstraction regime to protect the environment better and increase the resilience of water supplies to climate change. Despite this, the 2014 Water Act lacked ambition and failed to address the two major issues of abstraction reform and demand management.

In 2013, the Angling Trust launched the [Chalk Stream Charter](#) to highlight the threats to England's precious chalk streams, with over-abstraction being among the most significant of these threats. Some once iconic chalk stream fisheries, such as the River Beane in Hertfordshire, have been reduced to little more than a desiccated ditch in parts as a direct result of over-abstraction. The charter was successful in raising awareness of the plight of our chalk stream ecosystems and the Angling Trust was again optimistic in December 2013 when Defra published '[Making the Most of Every Drop: Consultation on Reforming the Water Abstraction Management System](#)'. This was long awaited, extremely welcome and we were broadly supportive of the proposals outlined. When implemented, the proposals will go a long way towards ensuring that we have a sustainable and resilient water management system that encourages efficiency of use while protecting the environment. However, there was little evidence of any meaningful progress for two years.

In December 2015, the government reaffirmed its commitment to reform the water abstraction licensing system and the Angling Trust, WWF and others welcomed this news. However, there seems to have been little to no progress subsequently and we have grave concerns that this can is going to be kicked down the road for yet another year. Recent information from the Environment Agency has also indicated a significant decline in ambition since we were last updated, and we are very concerned that the promise to act is going to be broken and reform once again delayed. We are not alone in this and are aware that The Blueprint for Water Coalition, of which we are a member, has also written to you expressing their similar concerns.

In order to prevent further damage to the unique and irreplaceable aquatic environments of the UK it is now absolutely essential that the government includes abstraction reform in the next Water Bill. I would welcome your reassurance that this will be the case.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Lloyd". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive
Angling Trust & Fish Legal