



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Second River Pollution Summit**
DATE **20 March 2023**
BY **Mark Drakeford, First Minister**

On 8th March, I chaired the second River Pollution Summit to discuss river water quality and the impact this is having on development. This was a follow up to the summit which was held at the Royal Welsh Show in July 2022.

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 to tackling phosphorus pollution.

We discussed the need to be able to move at speed and accelerate actions, to strip away any unnecessary complexity and provide certainty and consistent messaging across the range of different challenges. This will provide our partners with much needed confidence to be able to make decisions.

We need to bring forward, quickly, mitigation measures to create headroom to support sustainable development now whilst also securing the longer-term investment to restore our rivers.

Following a robust discussion, I am pleased to say that all organisations have agreed to work together to deliver the '[Relieving Pressures on SAC River Catchments to Support Delivery of Affordable Housing](#)' Action Plan.

The action plan focusses on the following themes:

- the need for a joined-up approach and the need for fit for purpose governance and oversight arrangements to support decision making in failing SAC rivers;
- the need to use natural solutions more effectively in order to deliver multiple benefits;
- the need to work constructively with the agriculture sector to find solutions to reduce and address excess nutrients in the soil and SAC rivers of Wales;

- delivering short term solutions to address current planning constraints;
- development of a unified nutrient calculator to directly aid planning decisions on nutrient neutrality which will have the ability to take account of catchment-level data, local features and needs;
- provide clarity to stakeholders on the suitability of potential mitigation actions and interventions to reduce pollution;
- a unified approach to catchment consenting in failing SAC rivers; and
- increasing our understanding of practical measures within catchments which could be provided by Nutrient Trading.

I am confident that delivering the actions identified will allow housing development in the affected SAC river catchments to restart.

There is no single measure which will solve this problem and even a contribution of measures will take time to undo the cumulative harm of the past.

Across the Welsh Government we are committed to improving the quality of our rivers across Wales and the River Basin Management plans, published last year, outline the actions required to allow our rivers to thrive. Although there have been improvements, we need to take an integrated catchment approach focussing on multi-sector co-operation and nature-based solutions to drive water quality improvements. Only by combining the actions of every sector can we tackle multiple risks impacting our lakes, rivers and streams and deliver real improvements to the quality of our waterways.

I would like to thank 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.