

## Water (Special Measures) Bill – Public Bill Committee Evidence

09.01.25

### Executive Summary

1. This is written evidence for the Commons Public Bill Committee for the Water (Special Measures) Bill submitted by Campaign for National Parks, the only national charity campaigning to protect and improve the 13 National Parks in England and Wales. We work with an umbrella of more than forty environmental and amenity groups, representing over four million people who share our passion for Protected Landscapes<sup>1</sup>.
2. Despite their treasured status, every single lake, river and stream in England’s National Parks is polluted, and only 1 water body in Welsh National Parks meets the highest standards<sup>2</sup>. This is because sewage works in National Parks deliver much lower levels of protection than outside the Parks and operate to much weaker standards.
3. It’s time that the international importance of National Parks was recognised by water companies and regulators. During the 2024 election campaign Labour committed to cleaning up Lake Windermere as a priority<sup>3</sup> and we believe the Water (Special Measures) Bill is the perfect legislative vehicle to ensure water companies and regulators are forced to act.
4. That’s why we are supporting two amendments to the bill tabled by Tim Farron MP and Charlie Maynard MP at Committee<sup>4</sup>:
  - **Amendment to Clause 2:** A requirement for water companies to include plans to eradicate illegal pollution incidents on Lake Windermere and within all National Parks.
  - **New amendment NC27:** A requirement for undertakers to meet new ambitious environmental objectives for Windermere and all other rivers, lakes and streams across all National Parks.

### Why changes to the Water (Special Measures) Bill are needed to clean up National Parks

5. The lakes, rivers and streams in National Parks are the lifeblood of these landscapes and deliver a range of benefits. National Park waterways are home to a huge variety of wildlife, including rare species such as water vole, beaver, bittern, eel and salmon. They provide drinking water to a big part of the UK population, including Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. They support natural flood management, help tackle climate change, and are, of course, much valued by people as places for recreation and relaxation.
6. Every year, millions of people explore their rivers, pools, lakes and wetlands, whether that’s navigating their waterways by boat or taking the plunge and wild swimming. From the Lake District to the Broads, the waterfalls of Bannau Brycheiniog to the chalk streams of the South Downs, these waters are world-renowned and beloved by the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/national-parks-movement/our-council/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/health-check-report/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.savewindermere.com/news/labour-cleaning-up-windermere>

<sup>4</sup> [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0141/amend/water\\_sm\\_rm\\_pbc\\_0107.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0141/amend/water_sm_rm_pbc_0107.pdf)

7. Lake Windermere in the Lake District National Park has enormous national significance as a UNESCO World Heritage site, inspiring the likes of Beatrix Potter, William Wordsworth and Arthur Ransom. It is also ecologically significant, home to rare and protected species such as Arctic Charr, Atlantic Salmon and European river eels, to name a few. It also has enormous economic significance, bringing in around £1 billion to the economy each year, and the country's most visited National Park.
8. The scale of sewage pollution in National Parks is vast. The Campaign for National Parks Health Check found just 5 of the 880 water bodies in the English Parks met the highest ecological standards and every single one was polluted. Only 1 water body in Welsh National Parks meets the highest standards<sup>5</sup>. In 2022 there were 377 sewage releases from storm overflows within the boundaries of National Parks in England and Wales totalling 176,818 hours – equivalent to 7,367 days<sup>6</sup>.
9. In England, just 39% of rivers and 15% of lakes within National Parks in an ecologically healthy state, meaning waters are clean enough for fish, bugs and plant species to thrive. In Wales, the situation is better, but 49% rivers and 79% of lakes in National Parks are not in good health<sup>7</sup>.
10. Lake Windermere, England's largest and most iconic lake, had become national pollution hotspots with 140 million litres of sewage pumped into the lake between 2021 and 2023.<sup>8</sup>
11. Even in the most pristine rivers and lakes in England's National Parks, traces of toxic chemicals including mercury and other priority hazardous substances are found. These toxic chemicals can remain in the ecosystem for decades. Recent University of York research found widespread toxic chemical pollution within some National Parks<sup>9</sup>.
12. The sewage works in Windermere and across National Parks are not fit for purpose and actually deliver much lower levels of protection than outside the Parks. In summer months, when river flows are lowest, and freshwater ecosystems at their most sensitive, populations can swell significantly, far exceeding numbers that the works are designed to deal with. The 2021 Census showed 399,400 people lived in National Parks in England and Wales<sup>10</sup>, but National Parks England estimate over 90 million visitors to the ten English Parks each year<sup>11</sup>
13. Many sewage works in National Parks operate to much weaker standards than urban equivalents and are not required to use secondary or advanced sewage treatments, so in the National Parks even legal 'treated' outfalls are damaging. Under the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (as applied in England and Wales) agglomerations with populations of more than 22,000 people are required to have at least secondary treatment of sewage<sup>12</sup>. Most of these, by nature, are within urban areas.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/health-check-report/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/health-check-report/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/health-check-report/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdrj70dynk1o>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/study-reveals-pharmaceuticals-polluting-englands-national-parks/>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/nationalparkresidentsenglandandwales/census2021#>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/19/england-national-parks-facing-financial-peril-due-to-budget-cuts>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/1994/2841>

14. During the 2024 election campaign Steve Reed committed Labour to cleaning up Britain's waterways with Windermere as a priority. Sir Keir Starmer also wrote about his personal connection to the Lake District and expressed his displeasure at the raw sewage being pumped into Windermere<sup>13</sup>. We welcome the proposals brought forward in the Water (Special Measures) Bill, but we but don't believe the legislation goes far enough in targeting action in National Parks.

**We're supporting two amendments to the Water (Special Measures) Bill tabled by Tim Farron Mp and Charlie Maynard MP**

**15. Amendment to Clause 2: Pollution Incident Reduction Plans**

This part of the Bill requires water companies to prepare pollution incident reduction plan ("a plan for how the undertaker intends to reduce the occurrence of pollution incidents that are attributable to its sewerage system"). This amendment requires undertakers to include plans to eradicate pollution incidents within all National Parks, including Lake Windermere.

**16. New amendment NC27: Environment duties with respect to National Parks**

This is a new amendment requiring water companies to adhere to and deliver stronger environmental objectives and duties within National Parks and the Broads, so as to protect waters across National Parks from sewage. The amendment would give the Secretary of State regulation-making power to extend protections to specific bodies of water, such as Lake Windemere.

**Contact**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.savewindermere.com/news/the-westmorland-gazette-keir-starmer-expresses-fury-at-raw-sewage-in-windermere>