



CaBA Chalk Stream Restoration Implementation Plan 2022

NGO Members – statement

The Implementation Plan 2022 from the CaBA Chalk Stream Restoration Group is the first in what is intended to be an annual publication of progress against the recommendations set out in the Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy 2021.

The Strategy was developed by a multi-stakeholder group from government, the regulators, water companies, and NGOs. It made over 30 recommendations, across the three pillars that constitute the “trilogy of ecological health” central to the restoration of our precious chalk streams at the catchment level; water quantity, water quality, and habitat quality.

A year has passed since the publication of the strategy, and it is inevitable that progress would not be consistent across all the recommendations. We welcome progress against those recommendations that have been completed or are underway. We acknowledge developments and progress in a number of areas from both OFWAT and the Environment Agency, and we welcome the commitments shown by the water companies through their flagship restoration proposals, forthcoming water resource management plans, their AMP rounds, and their WINEP proposals.

However, it is important to note that much of this progress is still at the “drawing board” stage, where there might be a promise to act but no clear commitment on how this will happen. With many, we will not see any material difference to our chalk streams for years, even decades to come. It is, therefore, important that we do not lose sight of what is needed, and that by continuing to track progress and publish an annual review of that progress, as a CaBA group, we keep each other to task and do not allow either the regulators or the water companies to prevaricate when the solutions appear too complex or too expensive. Our chalk streams are too important for us to allow that to happen again.

The recommendations set out in the strategy will be diminished if in the years to come we make good progress in some areas but not in others. The value of the strategy is not solely in the individual recommendations, but in how they all sit together and make up that “trilogy of ecological health”. This is underscored by the integrated policy recommendation that stitches together the three pillars of water quantity, water quality, and habitats.

It is, therefore, disappointing that of the four integrated recommendations, no tangible progress has been made on three of them: the creation of a priority designation for chalk streams; a review of the cost benefit analysis to support the real value of improvements to chalk streams; and development



rules for chalk streams to mitigate the impact economic development has on our chalk streams, given that many of them flow through areas of high economic activity and pressure. The Environment Agency and water companies have a part to play in addressing this failing, but the primary responsibility to deliver progress lies with Defra.

We recognise that the past year has been marked by political uncertainty and turmoil. As a result, since its publication a year ago, the Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy has seen three Secretaries of State, and three ministerial teams come and go, and in some cases come again. In Defra that turmoil has eroded the opportunity for meaningful, much-needed immediate change which only highlights the importance of support from all quarters of the government and its regulators.

We urge Defra Ministers to reaffirm their commitment to move forward the recommendations in the Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy 2021. In particular, through the (delayed) Environment Act targets of water quality and biodiversity, through a determined response to the draft water resource management plans, river basin management plans, and through the forthcoming state of the environment report. Above all Defra must bring their ambitions into focus by ensuring in the coming year, they deliver on the “one big wish” of the Strategy, that chalk streams be accorded a higher status to drive investment, action, and above all improvement.

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