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From: Michael Cole <[REDACTED]>  
Sent: 14 July 2022 16:44  
To: MORRISSEY, Joy <joy.morrissey.mp@parliament.uk>  
Subject: Rape and Pillage

Joy

Here is a very good example of how infrastructure has been neglected under the Conservative Government. What is needed is for MPs to stop this flagrant abuse because the water companies will not spend any of their profits on major infrastructures. Please stand up and be counted Joy, you are now complicit in destroying one of our most precious habitats if you personally do nought.

**Here is the insanity we find ourselves in this week as water companies use the force of the law and the complicity of the regulators to suck our chalk streams dry at the times when they are at their most vulnerable.**

Southern Water along with all similar companies, have abstraction rights enshrined in law. Essentially, they can take water from our rivers for free which, in turn, they process and sell. For most of the time, roughly eight months of the year, there is plenty of water. What they take, barring some of the most fragile headwaters, makes little or no difference to the overall ecology of the chalkstreams. I see nothing wrong with that; man cannot exist without exploiting natural resources.

However, the water companies do not have unlimited abstraction rights, their right to abstract being suspended once the daily river flow falls below a certain threshold. It seems a sensible and rational precaution in times of a drought. Why would a water company want to over exploit a natural resource? I'll tell you why, because they have a get-out-of-jail free card which, with a mighty bound, they are able to free themselves of such pesky regulation.

They are playing that card right now, as you read this piece. The flow on the River Test has fallen below the threshold of 355 million litres per day. At this moment Southern Water should stop the pumping to rely on alternate sources, desalination plants, reservoirs and their like to maintain supplies to homes and businesses.

Oh, just a minute. There is no desalination plant – Southern Water owners Macquarie have cancelled it. Reservoirs? Heaven forbid that anyone should build a new one. It hasn't happened in the 33 years since privatisation and the only one sure to happen for now is Havant Thicket opening (we hope) in 2029. However, it is not owned by Southern Water who will have to buy this water if they want it. Or they probably won't.

Because what do water companies care? When the going gets tough they turn to those guardians of the chalkstreams the Environment Agency and Natural England for a waiver to the regulations. Please sir, may we carry on pumping? Of course you can boys, don't worry about it.

You can see where the water companies are coming from in all this. If there is no incentive, no hard stop to the amount of water they can freely pillage, so why bother with expensive infrastructure? They simply lodge a Drought Permit application which allows for a seven-day formal consultation period (you can imagine how that 'consultation' goes ....) before the waiver is granted.

It is easy to blame the water companies, but they will only operate within the rules of the game, so what is the solution? Clearly the EA and Natural England are no use; there is zero chance that the applications coming down the line for the Test, Itchen and many other parched chalkstreams this summer will be denied despite the ecological consequences.

The fault really lies with government. They fixed the rules of this particular game, so they need to fix them back. It should not be difficult to use the power of the market to alter the behaviour of the water companies.

Simply charge them a usurious amount for these waivers. A charge levied in such a way that it can't be passed on to the customers and a charge that makes building new infrastructure look cheap. At that point I'd happily wager we'll rapidly see a rash of reservoir building, desalination plant construction and a host of other imaginative solutions.

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