# Clive Lewis proposes Water Bill to tackle sewage spills and promote public ownership



Clive Lewis, the Labour MP for Norwich South, has put forward a proposal for a Water Bill in the House of Commons aimed at addressing the ongoing issues within Britain's water sector. In his speech, which introduced the private member's bill, Lewis articulated a vision whereby failing water companies in England and Wales could be taken back into public ownership if they register multiple significant sewage spills.

Under the terms outlined in the proposed legislation, a company would face nationalisation after three major sewage discharges, with no compensation offered to existing owners. Lewis emphasised that the bill combines accountability with the goal of ensuring that water remains affordable for consumers. Notably, he mentioned the provision for free water “where appropriate.”

In a passionate address, Lewis condemned the current state of the water industry and attributed it to the legacy of privatisation initiated during Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister. He remarked, “Thatcherism’s shadow looms dark over our water system today,” suggesting that ongoing issues are deeply rooted in the privatisation ideology. His reforms aim to eliminate shareholder payouts from companies that neglect their regulatory obligations, stating, "Do it twice and you’re in the last chance saloon. Three strikes and you’re out."

The call for reform comes amid a backdrop of increasing public discontent regarding the practices of water companies, particularly as they face scrutiny over pollution and inadequate infrastructure investment while also raising consumer bills. Recent incidents underscore the urgency of reforms; for instance, Thames Water recently secured a £3 billion rescue loan to help navigate its financial difficulties, which have arisen due to substantial debt estimated at £16 billion.

Critically, Lewis dismissed the existing Water (Special Measures) Bill, which received Royal Assent in February, arguing that it fails to adequately address the systemic issues within the industry. He characterised the government’s efforts as insufficient, detailing that although the new legislation allows for stronger regulatory actions against company executives, it falls short of the necessary reforms.

In his speech, he cited Environment Secretary Steve Reed, highlighting the entrenched ideology surrounding privatisation in the water sector and criticising the reliance on such a model for managing a critical resource. He pointed out that public opinion is shifting towards support for renationalisation, reflecting a growing disillusionment with the current government and its handling of water management.

Lewis's Water Bill aims not only to address ownership but also to create a comprehensive water strategy, establish a commission to evaluate water management, and form a citizens’ assembly focused on the future of water ownership. He concluded his address with a cultural reference, stating, “It’s time our water returned to the tribe, to the people, to the public,” emphasising the connection between water as a public good and the community it serves.

The bill is currently set to undergo further discussion in the Commons, with Lewis advocating for a transformative approach to water management in the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2024/10/16/clive-lewis-private-members-bill-to-give-us-real-choice-over-the-future-of-our-water/> - Corroborates Clive Lewis's proposal for a Water Bill focusing on new targets for water management, including climate change and ownership models, and the establishment of a Commission on Water and a Citizens' Assembly.
* <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10211-2/> - Provides background information on the Water Bill introduced by Clive Lewis, including its objectives related to water ownership, climate mitigation, and the establishment of a strategy through a Commission and Citizens' Assembly.
* <https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/02/11/80120/> - Highlights the need for public ownership of water companies, criticizing the current system's failures and supporting Clive Lewis's bill as a chance to address these issues.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/governments-launch-largest-review-of-sector-since-privatisation> - Details the UK government's independent commission on water but notes that it excludes public ownership as a solution, contrasting with Clive Lewis's approach.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/25/thames-water-rescue-deal-financial-struggles> - Reports on Thames Water's financial difficulties and the recent £3 billion rescue loan, illustrating the financial challenges faced by water companies in the UK.