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**From David Hill**  
Director-General, Environment Rural and Marine

To Helen Venn,  
Chief Regulatory Officer, Office for Environmental Protection

(via email)

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

Dear Helen,

Thank you for your letter of 22 June. I am responding on the points you raise in relation to the timetable for River Basin Management Plans. The Secretary of State and Dame Glenys Stacey discussed Environment Act targets in their meeting last week and we will follow up separately on those points.

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 require the Environment Agency to publish the third cycle update to river basin management plans (RBMPs) by the statutory deadline of 22 December 2021. It is also a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that the updated plans are published. Due to delays arising from a diversion of the Environment Agency's resources to address the exceptional national emergency of the Covid-19 pandemic, the third RBMPs were not published in 2021.

Some of our key stakeholders, including water companies, were also diverting resources to deal with the national emergency. Other stakeholders were furloughed. They requested an extension to the second statutory consultation on the third cycle RBMPs to give them more time to respond. The Environment Agency extended the consultation period by several months to September 2020 with a delaying effect to the rest of the process to update the plans.

The third cycle RBMPs were the subject of a final, 6-month, statutory consultation period between 22 October 2021 and 22 April 2022. The representations received are currently being considered. The Environment Agency is due by autumn 2022 to submit the third RBMPs to the Secretary of State for approval. The Environment Agency is planning (subject to the Secretary of State's approval) to publish the updated RBMPs by 22 December 2022.

The Environment Agency has kept both Defra ministers and external stakeholders informed of the delay and the revised timetable which is included in the latest [ministerial](#)



[guidance on river basin planning](#). We are not aware of any delays to environmental improvements as a result of the delay to publication of the updated plans. River basin management planning is an ongoing, continuous process, with the RBMPs updated every six years. There are no gaps in the process. The second cycle (2015) plans remain in place until the third cycle plans are published and implemented.

This delay also affects the timing of the plans for the cross-border river basin districts with Wales for which UK and Welsh ministers have joint responsibility, as you mentioned. Please note we are not responding on behalf of the Welsh Government as this is a devolved matter.

Yours sincerely,



**David Hill**  
**DG Environment, Food and Marine**  
**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**