

Proposal: Water Pressure

To campaign and raise money to fund a Citizens' Assembly on Water in the UK, to respond to the suggested question:

“How might we manage our water in a way that is environmentally sustainable and equitable?”

This question is open for further suggestion, and ultimately will need to be acceptable to the Assembly.

DOCUMENT SPECS:

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Stakeholders: Movement & campaign participants

Distribution: Public

Purpose: For feedback from allied groups & supporters

Timeline: 'til it's done

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This is a live document, which will change as we make a campaigning alliance, and incorporate further suggestions as a consequence. All contributions are welcome, so please do use the comments and email [above] if you can't for any reason. Thanks!

Why?

Water is a collective resource to which everyone has a right. It should be stewarded as a commons.

How might it be managed for the benefit of all of us?

Right now, it isn't. Our waterways are polluted. Our drinking water is lost from failing infrastructure, unimproved in decades. The water companies have syphoned off billions to line executives' and shareholders' pockets. But there is no coherent plan for water conservation or sustainable provision, given the context of a changing climate. The regulators, e.g. Ofwat and the Environment Agency, have been left ineffective after cost-cutting by governments that just don't care about their brief. In addition to sewage dumping, there is no protection at all against agricultural, industrial, landfill, waste management or road traffic pollution.

The water scandal affects and offends every citizen of this country. It cuts across political, social, economic and cultural divisions. Campaigns and prominent campaigners against the current state

of affairs draw sympathetic national media attention.

By adopting this proposal, we can develop a way to resolve the water issue and to begin to restore our environment. In the face of government inertia, the Citizens' Assembly is the ideal mechanism to deliver a reset for our relationship with water. It cuts across all social divisions to bring a representative group of citizens together to make informed decisions that are proven to mirror wider public opinion. The people can take ownership of the solution. It sets a precedent for returning agency in swathes of public life, currently controlled by unaccountable quangos or local monopolies - think of the railways, the Post Office, the [Port of London Authority](#), the [Marine Management Organisation](#) (Who are they? We should know). Using a Citizens' Assembly and decision-making by the public means taking stewardship of resources we all own. We can deliver a broad, just, environmental and ecological restoration.

Objectives for the campaign

To have the public make recommendations about our complex water issues. The Assembly could address:

- Building public awareness and participation
- Improving water provision - organisationally and in the environment
- Improving drinking water availability, quality and usage
- Treating waste water and sewage comprehensively within the water system
- Identifying and preventing the other principal sources of water pollution
- Driving out water pollution from inland and coastal waters
- Setting standards for service provision and environmental and ecological protection
- Bringing water management, service standards and all contamination under effective oversight
- Designing regulation fit for purpose
- Providing for continued supply of clean water as we navigate a changing climate

Our campaign should:

- Bring maximum public attention to the Citizens' Assembly on Water and how that works
- Widen awareness around the plight of all aspects of water across the UK
- Deepen engagement with local challenges, recommendations and solutions
- Develop recommendations to fix the whole disaster
- Create maximum popular pressure for government action on the recommendations
- Empower citizens in stewardship of our water
- Celebrate the effectiveness of people-powered decision-making to resolve water issues

The Campaign

The campaign should comprise an alliance of water campaigning and environmental groups and individuals, as well as deliberative democracy experts. It should create an independent shared identity (suggestion is Water Pressure) and organise under that.

The Alliance will form a steering group, responsible for the objectives and oversight. The steering group will mandate, contract and monitor a professional campaign team to deliver the Citizens' Assembly on Water and champion its recommendations until we have a response from the government.

The campaign team needs to:

- Define the campaign plan, including:
 - political expertise to frame all activity in a wider context
 - a target date for the Citizens' Assembly
 - targets towards achieving that outcome
- Define campaign and Assembly budget targets
- Agree and appoint campaign team members to roles
- Define the optimum level of public support for the Citizens' Assembly and sustain it
- Include members whose sole responsibility is to liaise with and respond to grassroots and community submissions
- Raise the funds with which to support the Campaign Team and hold the Assembly
- Commission opinion polling throughout the campaign to demonstrate consistent levels of public support
- Use public support to ensure the UK Government implements the unadulterated recommendations Commission the Assembly
- Broadcast expert testimonies from the Assembly in real time, show deliberative conversations after the Assembly and stay with the campaign until we get the Government's response
- If the Government's response is negative, explore escalatory options
- If (1) the required funding and/or (2) sufficient public support are not achieved in the timeframes defined, the campaign is terminated. If that happens, it may be possible to agree to redirect funds raised to a parallel campaign, e.g. [Rights of Rivers?](#)

If there is the public support and funding to hold the Citizens' Assembly, but a government commitment to respond is not forthcoming, there needs to be an alternative plan. This circumstance must be evaluated before going ahead with the Citizens' Assembly. The Alliance needs to agree in advance its responses to possible outcomes.

The campaign should provide for and use regular opinion polling to measure public support levels throughout campaigning for the Citizens' Assembly, during the Assembly and afterwards, until there is an acceptable response to the recommendations.

Funding

The steering group must set an initial estimate of the costs of the Citizens' Assembly. It must also create an estimate of campaign costs. The combination of these will be the target budget total, to be raised by crowd-funding. Additional sources of funding will be explored e.g. charitable trusts, or others.

The Citizens' Assembly

The Assembly format is well-defined. Organising responsibility and the budget are passed to a contracted, neutral third-party organiser, such as the Sortition Foundation or Involve.

Building public support for the campaign objective needs to address public understanding of what the Citizens' Assembly is and how it works. The campaign should reference events such as the Peoples' Plan for Nature in the UK and the best examples from overseas. It must support local initiatives, actions and [community assemblies](#) to maximise public awareness of what to expect and how to participate.

For the Citizens' Assembly on Water, it is absolutely key that the whole process and its essential integrity are communicated and adhered to rigorously to win and retain public confidence in our proposition.

Advantages of a Citizens' Assembly

1. Decisions are made by a representative, demographically correct sample of citizens in the country.
2. Assembly members are independent and not motivated by profit or the electoral cycle.
3. Assembly members are knowledgeable; they will receive education in the 'pestle' - political, environmental, social, technical, legal and economic issues of water.
4. Assembly members then get to deliberate with others from different walks of life. A young parent who needs lots of water might be on a table with a farmer, an ecologist and a retired person.
5. They make recommendations in the best interests of everyone's future.
6. Media coverage ensures public access to expert testimony in real time.
7. How recommendations have been created will be publicly available online, after the assembly has reported.

Provisional timeline

- **At the start** - reaching out to deliberative democracy experts to help run the citizens' assembly and deliberative democracy groups to run water related community assemblies in 2025.
- **At the start** - reach out to other NGOs, campaign groups, companies who might be interested to co-host the citizens' assembly.
- **At the start** - reaching out to potential funders such as Rowntree to fund the organising of community assemblies as well as the actual Citizens' Assembly.
- **Three months from start** - public launch of campaign.
- **Four months from start** - community assemblies, people's assemblies, POPs, etc. rolled out all over the UK about water.
- **Six/seven months from start** - outcomes of UK-wide community assemblies feed into main question as well as themes for the main Citizens' Assembly on Water After receipt of funds and public support and government commitment - The Citizens' Assembly on Water

- **On conclusion** - public presentation of report and outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly on Water.
- **Implementation phase** - ensure that the UK Government implements the unadulterated recommendations.

Next steps of the Alliance

- Get a provisional estimate of the costs of the Citizens' Assembly and review project viability
 - Take the finished proposal to a range of likely allies to form the campaign group
 - Agree campaign roles, candidates, duration and estimated costs - principal campaign roles should be fully remunerated
 - Setting targets and plan to achieve and measure an appropriate level of public support
 - We campaign!
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