First court hearing for River Wye pollution claim

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Date : 27 April, 2026

A first hearing for the rivers Wye, Lugg and Usk pollution claim will take place at the High Court in London on **Monday, 27 April 2026**.

The claim, which is the biggest ever to be brought in the UK over domestic environmental pollution, now has **more than 4,500 people** on board.

The hearing next week will determine key aspects of the way the case will be managed, including a timetable and a deadline for other residents and businesses to join the legal claim.

River Action is supporting the legal claim and is organising a show of support outside the Royal Courts of Justice on the morning of the hearing. The giant Goddess of the Wye, a large-scale puppet symbolising the river, will appear outside the court alongside clean water campaigners calling for action to protect these threatened waterways.

The legal claim is against industrial chicken producer Avara Foods Limited and its subsidiary Freemans of Newent Limited, as well as the region’s sewerage operator Welsh Water.

It is argued that Avara's and Freemans of Newent's industrial chicken operations plus Welsh Water's management of the sewerage system have resulted in widespread pollution in the rivers Wye, Lugg and Usk. All three defendants have denied the allegations.

The High Court hearing on 27 April will see the parties appear in court for the first time to argue how the claims should be managed going forwards. The claimants will argue that the community should be given a longer opportunity to join this environmental legal action, and that the poultry defendants should be ordered to disclose details of the locations of their industrial poultry operations across the region.

The legal claim against Avara, Freemans of Newent and Welsh Water alleges that pollution has been caused by water run-off from farmland containing high levels of phosphorus, nitrogen and bacteria from poultry manure spread on the land as fertiliser. It also alleges bacteria and nutrient pollution in the rivers has been caused by the discharge of sewage directly into the rivers from Welsh Water sewerage systems.

The claim was filed at the High Court in autumn 2025.

Leigh Day partner Oliver Holland, who leads the claim, said:

> *"This first court appearance marks an important step in the Wye, Lugg and Usk pollution claim. There has been a great deal of effort put in by the community and environmental campaigners to help drive the proceedings to this point, showing the strength of feeling from those involved about the state of the rivers. They feel that the government and regulators have not done enough to prevent the deterioration of these rivers, leaving court action as their only option to pursue environmental justice.*
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> *"In this hearing, important aspects of case management such as deadlines for the next stages and disclosure of information by both sides will be determined. We are hoping for a positive outcome, and to be able to look ahead to presenting our clients' arguments in full to the High Court in due course."*

River Action's head of legal Emma Dearnaley said:

> *"This case comes at a critical time for some of our most cherished rivers and the communities connected to them. We believe industrial-scale chicken production supplying major supermarkets and fast-food chains has placed immense pressure on the Wye, Lugg and Usk, driving nutrient pollution levels that these sensitive ecosystems cannot absorb. Sewage pollution must also be reduced and stopped to reverse the decline of these rivers.*
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> *"River Action supports this claim because it gives a voice to thousands of people who*

refuse to accept the continued degradation of their rivers. Communities should not have to live with the consequences of sewage pollution or an intensive farming model that we believe pollutes their waterways. This action offers an important way to hold those allegedly responsible to account and secure the systemic change needed to protect and restore our rivers for generations to come."