# The Water Commission’s Final Report: Why It Falls Short – And What Must Come Next

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At the end of July, the Independent Water Commission **released it’s** final report on the state of our

water industry with recommendations on how the industry could be fixed. River Action, alongside Surfers Against Sewage, has analysed the recommendations against **our five core principles for real reform.**

Our conclusion? While the Commission makes some useful noises about reform, it **ultimately ducks the bold changes needed to end sewage pollution** and protect people and nature.

Here's how the Commission performed when measured against our principles – and why government must now go much further with its upcoming White Paper.

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## 1. Operating for Public Benefit

The Commission's approach accepts the profit-driven privatised model of water companies as a given. Instead of rethinking this broken system, it focuses primarily on tighter regulation.

This is not enough. Decades of evidence show that shareholder-first models drain money out of the system while rivers fill with sewage. The Commission ignored credible international evidence that public benefit ownership models – like those in much of Europe – deliver lower bills, more investment, and cleaner rivers.

Without a fundamental redesign of ownership, governance, and financing, alongside regulatory reform the crisis will continue.

## 2. Democratic Decision-Making

The Commission's proposal for Regional Water Authorities is a step forward, hinting at more democratic oversight. But as drafted, these bodies risk being toothless talking shops.

Real reform requires municipal-level oversight, with local authorities, communities, and environmental groups holding real power over how water companies invest, operate, and deliver. Without this, decisions will remain in the hands of profit-driven boards.

## 3. Protecting Public and Environmental Health

The Commission acknowledges sewage pollution is a major public health crisis – but stops short of the urgent action needed.

Taskforces and reviews won't protect the thousands of people falling ill after using polluted rivers and seas. We need immediate legal duties for all water companies, regulators, and government to protect public and environmental health, backed by stronger permits and updated Bathing Water Regulations that safeguard everyone, year-round, from emerging pollutants like 'forever chemicals' and microplastics.

## 4. Tough, Independent Regulators

The Commission rightly diagnoses regulatory failure. But renaming regulators without changing their powers, duties, and resources will not fix the problem.

We need a strong, independent regulator with a clear duty to protect public and environmental health – not water company profits. And where companies fail, government must use the **Special Administration Regime** to reset them around public benefit principles, starting with Thames

Water.

## 5. Transparency

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The Commission calls for more monitoring – which we welcome – but still clings to the discredited model of operator self-monitoring, where water companies mark their own homework.

That system has failed. Independent monitoring, citizen science, and full real-time transparency are the only way forward. People deserve to know what's happening in their rivers and seas.

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## The Bottom Line

The Water Commission's report was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset a failing system. Instead, it tinkers at the edges, leaving the profit-driven model intact and communities exposed to sewage, debt, and declining water quality.

Government must now go further. The upcoming White Paper must:

> **Restructure water companies** to deliver public benefit, not private profit.
> **Embed democratic oversight** at local and regional levels.
> Put **public and environmental health at the heart of water law** and regulation.
> Create a **tough, well-funded regulator** with the power to act.
> **End operator self-monitoring** and deliver full transparency.

Anything less will leave us trapped in the cycle of pollution, public anger, and political failure.

You can read our full indepth analysis HERE.