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## **BRUSSELS WILL FORCE US TO CLEAN UP OUR RIVERS**

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Rivers and waterways throughout the West containing a cocktail of pollutants, sewage and hazardous chemicals will fail to meet new European purity rules, it was learned last night. Environment Minister Elliot Morley said new EU regulations meant rivers must be managed in new ways to improve quality. He conceded it could take a decade of work to satisfy a checklist of standards included in the Water Framework Directive.

The EU confirmed that 95 per cent of rivers risk failing tough new pollution targets set by Europe. This is despite £12 billion spent on sewage and storm water treatment since 1990, when water companies were privatised.

And just two months ago English Nature, in a joint report with the EU, raised concerns about the state of rivers Kennet and the Frome and the Wiltshire stretch of the River Avon.

The latest studies also show the quality in one in six urban river areas is currently "poor" or "bad". Stringent new criteria are also set to be put in place by Brussels.

"This is the beginning of a major change in this country into how we will measure water quality in the future," said Mr Morley. "It is going to be a big job."

The new checklist will gauge the impact of human activity on rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters, and their habitats.

It will also measure pollution washed off land and roads as 'run-off', said to clog up parts of the River Wye on the Herefordshire/Wales border.

David Withrington, rivers spokesman for English Nature, worked on the report that highlighted problems on the Avon, Kennet and Frome, the most westerly chalk river in Britain.

Mr Withrington said the EU directive, which will be brought in gradually up to 2015, will raise standards of river management.

"It will provide a checklist of general health for water. It will look at the impact of abstraction, taking water for drinking supplies and fish farms, and the shape of rivers," he said.

"In the 1930s they were sometimes dredged or straightened to help farming. But this meant gravel was lost, so salmon and other fish had fewer places to spawn.

"The new regulations will look at abstraction, pollution from agriculture and sewage, and invasive species - these include American crayfish, which carry fungal disease - and plants."

English Nature has been working to address water quality problems in the West, including cutting levels of phosphates, which can stifle vital wildlife habitats.

"Nitrates and phosphates are another big factor in river health," said Mr Withrington.

"More than 50 per cent of rivers examined had high levels of phosphates, which come half-and-half from agriculture and sewage. It leads to algal growth which causes oxygen depletion which kills native plants in the river like water crow foot."

But Professor Alan Jenkins, of the independent Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, believes concerns over water quality are ill-founded.

He said the EU directive was simply a different way of measuring purity and pollution.

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