

Clive Lewis' Private Members' Bill to give us real choi...

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My friend and fellow Green New Deal Group member, Clive Lewis MP, will be tabling a bill for the reform of the water industry in the House of Commons today.

As he says of this [in his own press release](#):

Labour MP's Private Members' Bill to overhaul failing water system

Clive Lewis, the Labour MP who came fourth in the Private Members' Bill ballot, will introduce a bill to overhaul the management of water in the UK on Wednesday 16th October.

Lewis' placement in the ballot means his bill is guaranteed debate time in parliament. His bill will have its second reading early in 2025.

The bill will set new water targets and objectives for water management, including in relation to ownership, and climate adaptation and mitigation.

But from my point of view, this is the most important part of the Bill:

The bill will establish a Commission on Water to advise the Secretary of State on achieving those targets and objectives.

The remit of the Commission will include looking at different models of water ownership, and what measures are needed to adapt the UK's water management to meet the demands of climate change. The Commission will also set up a Citizens' Assembly to undertake a public deliberation exercise exploring different models of water ownership.

As Clive says:

Through the bill, Lewis aims to promote a national conversation about the future of water management and ownership in the UK. It comes in the context of the climate crisis threatening the UK's water resilience, as well as growing public anger at ongoing

sewage scandals and mismanagement by private water companies.

And he added in a more personal quote:

This bill establishes a blueprint for democratic practice: for creating an open conversation about the state of our water and its future management - particularly in respect of the deep climate adaptation required - drawing on all expertise and ideas available to us, and which leaves no rock unturned in examining the root causes of the current failure so mistakes are not repeated. This bill does not presume a particular end point, and aims to push the public debate beyond simplistic and unhelpful narratives of privatisation vs nationalisation.

This bill puts the conversation about the future management of water where it should be - in the hands of parliament and the public. This is a conversation that must take place in broad daylight, not behind the closed doors of boardrooms, or through opaque industry lobbying. Water belongs to all of us, so how it is managed is a question of economic democracy. This should not be difficult for any government to grasp.

I am delighted to see that Clive has adopted this approach, although the reality is that he had little choice but to do so. Private Members' Bills may not be what is termed 'Money Bills' by the House of Commons authorities, meaning that they are not allowed to mandate additional government expenditure of any significant amount.

We knew this when Clive and Caroline Lucas developed what was called the Decarbonisation and Economic Strategy Bill in the last parliament, which was more commonly called the Green New Deal Bill. I wrote the structure of that Bill, suggesting that instead of committing the government to spending, the Bill required that the government commit to an inquiry into the need for that spending. As a result, it got tabled when otherwise it might not have done.

Clive is replicating that approach in the current Bill, calling for an inquiry into means of future management of the water industry, which might include nationalisation, without directly demanding that outcome because other options might be better alternatives.

I warmly welcome Bill and Clive's initiative in tabling it. This debate is required, and what he has to offer is a vast improvement on the very weak Bill on water tabled by the government, which merely extends the penalties on water companies, which everyone knows do not work and cannot work without reducing their already small investment in water infrastructure.

This may not become law, but the government most definitely needs to take note of this Bill.