

## **Launch of Thames Tunnel Now!**

**Today, 15 major environmental charities and amenity groups representing over 5 million people have come together in a unique coalition in support of proposals to construct the Thames Tunnel to end the scandal of 39 million tonnes of untreated sewage which enters the capital's river every year. Please see below the joint statement agreed by the Thames Tunnel Now partners, including RSPB, WWF, Thames21, Angling Trust , River Thames Society and London Wildlife Trust.**

### **Support the Thames Tunnel Now!**

A coalition of national and local organisations has called for MPs and local councils to support the construction of a new tunnel under the Thames which will stop tens of millions of tonnes of sewage overflowing into London's river each year. The tunnel proposal, which is the result of more than ten years of exhaustive research and development by Thames Water and the Environment Agency, is the only viable solution to dealing with "London's dirty secret": when as little as 2mm of rain falls in the capital, the sewers overflow into the river.

David Walliams fell ill recently while swimming the length of the river as a result of swallowing river water. Thousands of people use the river for rowing, angling, sailing and canoeing. Many walkers and cyclists use the towpath, and adults and children go on to the foreshore where sewage is deposited. Many thousands more would be encouraged to make use of London's greatest natural asset if it were not routinely polluted with sewage from London's population which has grown from 2.5 million in 1865 when the sewers were built to 8 million today.

Sewage overflows in the summer are particularly damaging to wildlife in the river, which supports a wide range of freshwater and marine fish. The Thames has been described as a wildlife superhighway through the capital and is an important nursery area for millions bass and flounder – very important commercial and recreational angling fish species. Every time there is a major overflow of sewage, tens of thousands of these fish die, damaging the fragile eco-system.

It is a large scale problem which requires a large scale solution for the capital for at least the next 120 years. It will cost £3.6 billion, and will be paid for by Thames Water customers; each household will pay £60-65 extra a year, with bills starting to rise in 2013. Thames Water bills are currently among the lowest in the country and the new higher rates will still be lower than many other water companies' in the UK. Construction of the tunnel will create 4,000 direct jobs and many more associated jobs as well as a clean and healthy tidal river which could support many thousands more employment opportunities in recreation, leisure and tourism industries of the future.

A spokesperson for the coalition said:

*"It is completely unacceptable for people to be faced with raw sewage in one of the most sophisticated cities in the world, and for tens of thousands of fish to die from suffocation every time it rains heavily in the summer. Opponents of the scheme should ask themselves if they would like their child to go sailing or fishing among human faeces, sanitary towels and condoms, or if they would like*

*a healthy river full of wildlife for millions of people to enjoy for generations to come. We call on the Thames Tunnel Now Coalition's collective membership to encourage their MPs and London local authorities to support this pioneering project – which is the only real option for a clean Thames – today.”*

The scheme faces opposition from a small but vocal group of local authorities who have raised concerns about the construction sites and other essential temporary infrastructure. As a result, they are likely to oppose the whole basis for the scheme during the second phase of a major public consultation process which will be launched on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November, and threaten to create costly delays to the implementation of the scheme. Delay means continuing the harm heaped onto the capital's environment.

Carlo Laurenzi OBE, Chief Executive of London Wildlife Trust, says

*‘The Thames Tunnel is an important project for the long term health of the River Thames. At the moment untreated sewage overflows into the Thames regularly, as the Victorian sewerage system cannot cope with London's current population. A less polluted river would create greatly improved conditions for a wide range of wildlife. We all must ensure the wider legacy of the Tunnel is one of ecological gain along its whole route. London Wildlife Trust calls for proper and creative mitigation in excess of any damage caused during the construction phase, for the benefit of both wildlife and local residents.*

## **Notes to Editors and Further Quotes**

**The Thames Tunnel Now Coalition comprises:** Angling Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WWF-UK, London Wildlife Trust, Inland Waterways Association, Thames21, River Thames Society, Salmon & Trout Association, Thames Anglers Conservancy, Royal Yachting Association, Mammal Society, Marine Conservation Society, National Association of Boat Owners, Thames Rivers Restoration Trust, Barge Association. We fully expect many more organisations to join the coalition in the coming days and weeks.

### **Supporting quotes from members of the TTN Coalition:**

**Rose Timlett, Freshwater Manager at WWF-UK** said: “It’s really important that we work with local councils to install sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) alongside the Thames Tunnel to protect the natural environment and reduce the risk from flooding. But the scale of the problem is huge – at this stage it seems SuDS alone won’t deal with the sheer volume of waste water produced in London.”

**Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Angling Trust** said: “I have been campaigning, in a number of roles, for nearly 20 years for action to stop the vast quantities of sewage flushing into the tidal Thames every time it rains. These sewage overflows kill huge numbers of freshwater and marine fish and are completely unacceptable. At last we have a chance to solve the problem, to create a fantastic fishery in the heart of London and along the Thames estuary and support fish stocks in the North Sea. Anglers must make their voice heard to ensure that this fantastic scheme goes ahead and we drown out the voices of those who would prefer to see millions of tons of harmful filth being dumped into the river if it means they don’t have to have a few years of construction works in their borough. There is no alternative to the Thames Tunnel, let’s get on with building it.”

**David Harvey of the Thames Anglers Conservancy** said: “The Thames Anglers Conservancy was formed on the basis of Anglers dedicated to protecting and improving the river Thames. Our core message from the very start was stopping the huge amounts of raw sewage entering the river each year. The summer of 2011 despite being one of the driest, has seen millions of tonnes of sewage enter the river and the worst devastation of all aquatic life in nearly a decade, leaving many areas devoid of life. The raw sewage not only kills the species in the river but is a severe health hazard to all recreational users. The Tunnel is a solution that has been agreed by successive governments, mayoral offices and experts in this field. The sight of dead fish floating next to human faeces, condoms and sanitary towels is something that should be unacceptable to all Londoners in the heart of our modern capital city. We needed to act many years ago, so urge everyone to support this solution and clean the river up once and for all. To do nothing is simply not an option.”

**Debbie Leach, Chief Executive, Thames21** said: “The state of the river is shameful and Thames21 calls for fast, effective action. Caring for the river is a labour of love for thousands of Thames21 volunteers, and the River Thames should be London’s pride and joy. But increasingly frequently people are driven away by disgusting and abhorrent levels of sewage. Research has shown clearly that the Thames Tunnel is the best solution, and we need it delivered without delay.”

**Peter Finch, Chairman of the River Society** said: “The tidal reaches of the Thames are regularly polluted by the discharge of sewage. In modern Britain this is scandalous and the River Thames

Society fully supports the building of a storage tunnel to intercept the overflows. This will benefit all Londoners, as we will have a much cleaner river and a healthier environment.”

**Rob Oates, Director of Thames Rivers Restoration Trust** said: “Without the Tideway Tunnel to clean up the mouth of Thames, none of its many tributary rivers in towns and countryside throughout the region will ever fully get to their best for people and nature.”

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