

# SOLAR

SAVE OUR LANDS  
AND RIVER

**Richard James**

Chair, Save Our Lands & River (SOLAR)

15th September 2025

**The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP**

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Dear Secretary of State,

I would like to extend my warmest congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Your new role comes at a critical juncture for the stewardship of our natural environment, we look to you and your leadership to bring renewed energy and focus to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. In particular, on behalf of Save Our Lands and River (SOLAR), I welcome your commitment to safeguarding the nation's landscapes and waterways, and it is in that spirit that I write to you regarding a matter of urgent concern

SOLAR was established to represent the concerns of local communities, environmental groups, and river users in relation to Thames Water's proposed Teddington Direct River Abstraction (TDRA) scheme. Under this proposal, up to 75 million litres of freshwater per day would be abstracted from the Thames above Teddington Weir, to be replaced with treated effluent transferred from Mogden Sewage Treatment Works. While presented as a measure to secure London's water supply, we regard this scheme as environmentally unsound, socially damaging, and counter to the principles of sustainable water management.

Our objections fall into several categories. First, there are serious risks to water quality. Even after advanced treatment, the introduction of effluent into this stretch of the Thames raises the likelihood of elevated concentrations of contaminants such as pharmaceuticals, PFAS, microplastics, and faecal bacteria. Thermal changes associated with effluent discharge also present dangers to aquatic ecosystems. This section of the river is widely used by rowers, swimmers, anglers, and conservation groups, and its degradation would carry profound ecological and public health consequences.

Second, the proposed scheme is terrible value for money. Spending £1 billion on something designed to operate on average 6 weeks a year and sit idle for 46 weeks providing the paying customer with a solution that gives them value.

Third, the construction phase across all locations would impose unacceptable risk as well as environmental costs across sensitive and much-valued green spaces, including Ham Lands and Burnell Open Space. These areas provide vital habitats for wildlife and are central to the health and wellbeing of thousands of residents. Disruption through heavy construction traffic, noise, and loss of public access would undermine community life and inflict long-lasting environmental damage.

Fourth, there is a significant question of trust. Thames Water's record on pollution and leakage reduction has already eroded public confidence. For such a controversial scheme to proceed without first addressing these systemic shortcomings risks exacerbating an already fragile relationship between the company, local communities, and wider society.

We submit that more sustainable alternatives are available. Reducing leakage—currently responsible for hundreds of millions of litres of wasted water every day—alongside accelerating the roll-out of smart meters and strengthening demand-management measures, offers a more responsible and cost-effective path. These steps would improve resilience without placing the ecological integrity of the Thames at risk.

Your predecessor said he would come and visit Teddington to see all this for himself subject to diary commitments. In light of the seriousness of these concerns, I would be honoured to extend this invite to you. Such a visit would allow you to fully appreciate what stands to be affected, and to hear first-hand the breadth of public and expert opposition to the scheme. We would greatly welcome the opportunity to discuss how DEFRA might support a more sustainable approach to securing London's long-term water needs.

I am grateful for your attention to this matter and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you to Teddington.



Yours sincerely,

**Richard James**

Chair, Save Our Lands and River (SOLAR)

[www.saveourlandsandriver.org.uk](http://www.saveourlandsandriver.org.uk)

cc Munira Wilson MP (Twickenham), Ruth Cadbury MP (Brentford & Isleworth), Sarah Olney MP (Richmond Park), Rt Hon Ed Davey MP (Kingston)