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speaking at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.**

“Water has to be a human right.” according to Fred Pearce, speaking today with journalist Sheena McDonald at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. “Basic water for basic needs has to be a human right”, he added. The author and journalist was delivering a talk on his re-released and revised book *When The Rivers Run Dry*, which covers the global crisis facing our natural water resources.

“Nothing is more precious to us, more essential than water.” He said. “We treat it with disdain and an astonishing lack of care for such a vital resource. But now there are more than seven billion of us on the planet, we have to change.”

The effects of over extraction of water are already very evident, Pearce explained: “There are very few truly wild rivers left in the world, undammed, unbanked, untapped rivers still with their rapids and their tangled deltas and their unruly floods... And they’re a living lesson of what most of the world’s rivers have lost.”

The majority of global water extraction, around two-thirds, is used by farms for irrigation, Pearce said. He attempted to calculate his own water footprint, or how much water he uses per day. Drinking and bathing water each day accounts for around 150 litres, but if you take into consideration food irrigation, that figure rises dramatically. Over the course of a year, a typical person in the West will use over half an Olympic swimming pool. If we split water resources equitably around the world, that’s more than twice the average.

In order to address that gap between supply and demand, Pearce added, globally more people are turning to underground water reserves. “We pump more and more water from underground, that’s a global change going on.” And we’re using up underground resources faster than they’re being replenished, he explained.

“Large areas of the planet have been dried up, not because of climate change but because of the over extraction of water. Deserts have been created.”

But this isn’t an irreversible change, he argued;

“I’ve seen time and time again, the passion, the power of people to prevent construction projects on rivers. Passions that can bring down governments.

Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh

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## MEDIA RELEASE



“There have been movements to remove [dams], sometimes they’re simply not being used anymore, sometimes there are fishery lobbies saying, ‘take down the dam’. Sometimes they have quite a lot of political power. It is perfectly possible to tear down the dams, it can and is happening, and I think it’s going to happen more and more.”

We need to start using local water better, Pearce said. He pointed to the revival of traditional techniques for sourcing water as a potential alternative to ecologically disruptive projects such as dams.

“Folk knowledge about water is still very sophisticated and very useful. It doesn’t just warn you against bad water, it also finds water. I’m not saying let’s all go back to ancient technologies, but ancient technologies can tell us quite a lot. We do need that water ethic... There are more of us but there will never be more water, but there will never be less either. So to water a planet of seven billion, we will simply have to use it more sensibly.”