

Our Ref: 20148

Your Ref: N/A

Date: 20 February 2024

Via email: Kelly.Stanley@northdevon.gov.uk

Dear Kelly,

Thank you for your email dated 14/02/2024 regarding the special meeting of the Policy Development Committee. Please see our responses to each question below.

In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?

	2023	2022	2021	2019	2018
Combe Martin	Good	Good	Sufficient	Poor	Poor
Combesgate Beach, Woolacombe	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Croyde Bay	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Good	Excellent
Hartland Quay	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Ifracombe Hele	Sufficient	Good	Good	Good	Good
Ifracombe Tunnels Beach	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Lynmouth	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Putsborough	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Saunton Sands	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Westward Ho!	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Woolacombe Village	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent

	2023	2022	2021	2019	2018
Excellent	82%	88%	72%	72%	82%
Good	9%	18%	19%	19%	0%
Sufficient	9%	0%	9%	0%	9%
Poor	0%	0%	0%	9%	9%

WOOLACOMBE

Classified Excellent. Most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent. There was a slightly raised result on 19/09/2023 of E.coli 82 and Int.ent 55. There were elevated bacteria levels in the stream that day and rainfall that day and earlier in that week.

SAUNTON

Classified Excellent. Some concerns about run off from the car park which will be followed up in 2024.

CROYDE

Classified Excellent. Following deterioration in 2019 classification to Good an extensive catchment walkover, extra freshwater sampling and DNA analysis of the source of faecal bacteria were carried out. Areas of poaching and poorly located livestock drinkers were rectified, plus some farm visits to improve slurry storage and keep sources of pollution away from the stream.

ILFRACOMBE HELE

Multiple additional freshwater sample sites were added when a decline on water quality in the stream and BW was noticed. This helped pinpoint a specific 200m stretch of the Hele stream that has a spike in bacteria levels.

A and R have carried out walkovers of the upper parts of the Hele stream and the affected area of high bacteria, looking at Ammonia, Invertebrates present and sewage fungus.

We have also dyed the foul lines and toilets at the Hele Mill café (which were clear).

We have dyed manholes and foul lines where they cross the stream in this section (which at the time were clear). This may need repeating.

We also installed a continuous water quality sonde, which did not show any trends. This may be due to a seasonal issue having stopped by the time the sonde was installed.

We have put forward several freshwater samples for MST analysis which showed both ruminant and human sources, and have shared other MST prepared sample details with SWW in order to secure funding for future analysis.

There is some occasional increase in bacteria from the main road to beach section culverted stream which may be linked to a misconnection in Beach Road. SWW are helping with our investigation in this location.

South West Water have also agreed to look at the integrity of the storm overflow pipe from the Pumping Station, and may help look at misconnections that may be present in the Hele Bay holiday flats.

EM visited a farm in the upper part of the stream which identified several issues which must be rectified before next BW season.

A and R/EM are planning to visit two business near the top of the catchment before next bathing season.

A and R are hoping to carry out a Citizen Science project in the area with possibly the local swim group involved and using cutting edge rapid bacteria testing equipment and Ammonia testing.

COMBE MARTIN

Classified Good. Extensive improvements to the sewer storage, groundwater infiltration and rebalancing the foul system has been undertaken. Numerous misconnections have been rectified.

Local businesses that may affect the water quality have had improvements recommended. We will visit them before the 2024 BW season.

Extensive farm improvements have been carried out, including fencing and increased slurry storage, relocating manure heaps and livestock drinking areas.

An extensive dog publicity event and Yellow Fish campaign has been carried out, plus water quality monitors and a Citizen Science campaign looking at Tryptophan levels.

A and R met with local businesses and local Waterwatch group in Autumn last year to keep improving water quality and addressing local issues.

Natural Flood Management schemes and tree planting has been undertaken with North Devon Biosphere and South West Water and this continues. There has also been a computer learning model project (SMART) undertaken with North Devon Biosphere which we had input on. This involved numerous small water quality, soil and rain monitors being placed in the catchment.

LYNMOUTH

Classified Excellent. Two high bacteria results in 2023: 02/08/2023 E.coli 1300 Int.ent 2400 following rainfall and a small spill of 30 minutes from Basketshop CSO on 30/07/2023. 18/09/2023 E.coli 160 and Int.ent 130 after days of moderate rainfall. Some concerns about safe access to the sampling point. Detailed spill data will be reviewed for this BW.

WESTWARD HO!

Classified Excellent. One high result on 20/09/2023 of E.coli 770 Int.ent 340. This was rainfall related as there was heavy rainfall 19/09/2023 and on the day of testing 20/09/2023.

HARTLAND QUAY

Classified Excellent, most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent.

PUTTSBOROUGH

Classified Excellent. No bacteria results over 45 in 2023, most <10.

COMBESGATE

Classified Excellent. Most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent.

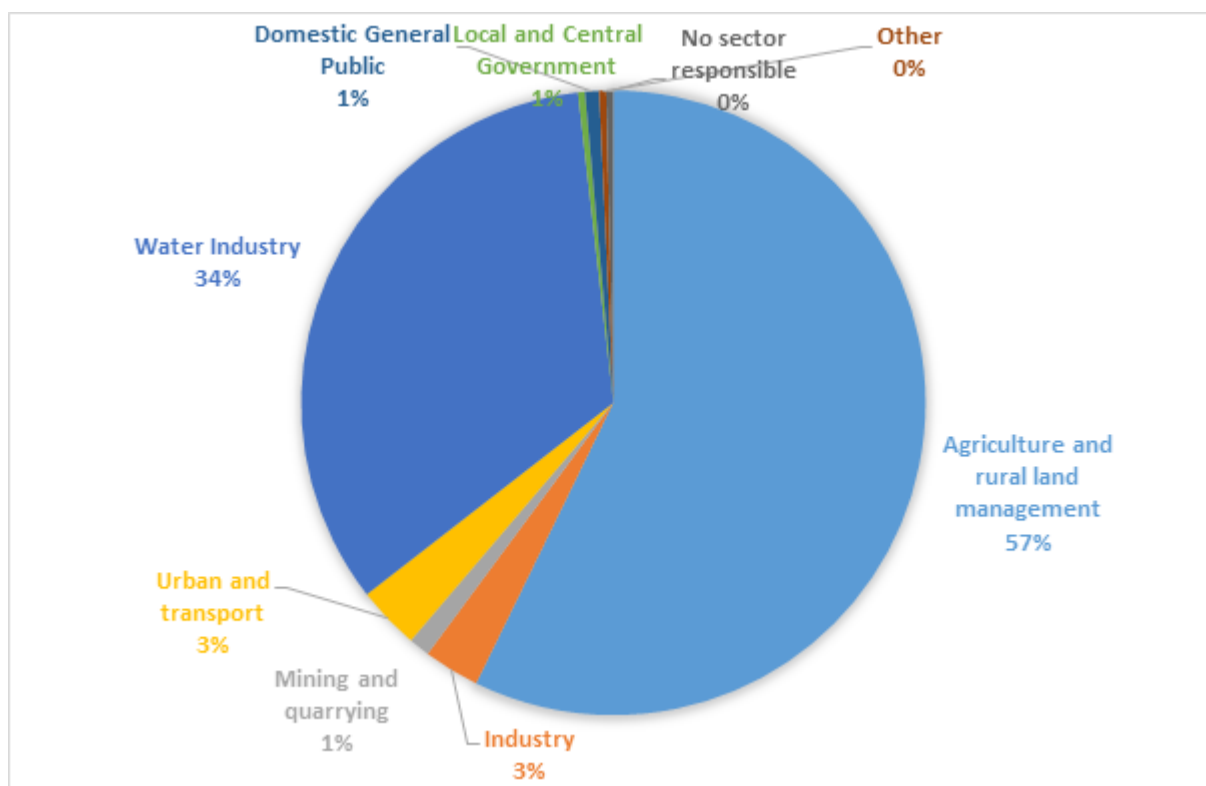
ILFRACOMBE TUNNELS

Classified Excellent. No results over 100 for E.coli or Int.ent in 2023.

Also EA data is publicly available on our website [Defra Data services platform - App gallery](#)

Water Body Categories	No. WB	Ecological Status or Potential				
		H	G	M	P	B
River, canals and surface water transfers	92	0	13	63	15	1
Lake	6	0	0	3	1	0
TraC	4	0	0	3	0	0
Total	102	0	13	69	16	1

Reasons for not achieving good in North Devon



The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?

The Environment Agency's online tool Swimfo provides information on all our designated bathing waters. Throughout the bathing water season (May to September), the Environment Agency issues warnings of any forecasted pollution risk on Swimfo. The Environment Agency works with local authorities to ensure signs are posted at these swimming locations to inform bathers about any possible dips in water quality.

The Environment Agency does not warn and inform the public when permitted spills are happening. However, the local water company, SWW, does (here). Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) uses the same data to do the same (here) - The SAS app keeps spills live for much longer than SWW. In most cases on large beaches, sewage discharges will dissipate within 2 tidal cycles – 12.5 hours after the pollution has stopped, which is reflected on Swimfo & the SWW app.

In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?

There is nothing to say sewerage undertakers **should** do anything at planning application stage. They are not statutory consultees for any type of planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 80, part e.) does say that development should not cause or be affected by unacceptable levels of pollution (including of water).

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) is clear that connection to the mains sewer is the 'first presumption' for new development and that this should be done in consultation with the sewerage company when the plans are being drawn up. The onus here appears to be on developers to do this. The PPG (Ref. ID 34-016-20140306) says that water quality can be a concern for planning where a proposal would indirectly affect waterbodies through (among other things) lack of adequate infrastructure to deal with wastewater. The PPG also says (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) that timescales do not always fit with development needs and that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should consider how new development can be phased so that it is not occupied until any necessary improvements to the public sewer system have been carried out.

Whilst this suggests that it is appropriate for lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure to be addressed at planning application stage, as there is no statutory consultation role for sewerage undertakers (and a limited statutory consultation role for the Environment Agency) at this stage, **consideration of the impacts of new development of sewerage infrastructure and water quality are best addressed at the strategic planning level.**

Under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 water companies/sewerage undertakers, along with the Environment Agency are 'specific consultation bodies' which must be consulted by LPAs. **The PPG (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) confirms that plan preparation should be the focus for ensuring investment plans of sewerage undertakers align with development needs.**

Information on sewage disposal capacity should be front loaded into the strategic planning system to inform the selection process after the call for sites. The evidence (from both South West Water and the Environment Agency) on sewage capacity and water quality issues related to discharges from wastewater infrastructure must be built into a strategy for dealing with foul water, setting out alternative approaches and timelines for capacity to be built in to support the proposed housing projection.

Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?

There is a national project lead by the Rivers Trusts called CaSTCo which is looking to 'enable a national framework to standardise and share integrated data and build the much-needed evidence base for improved decision-making about our water environments'. The EA is

involved and the Tamar is one of the pilot catchments. Further info can be found on their website.

[CaSTCo – Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative | The Rivers Trust](#)

- The Environment Agency welcomes the valuable contribution of citizen science to help understand, and raise awareness, of water quality in our rivers and streams; to inform the most effective actions that can be taken to improve it.
- The Environment Agency only has the resources to undertake broadscale water quality monitoring that supports river classifications for the Water Framework Directive. A link to our data for North Devon is provided here [Open WIMS data](#)
- The increase in both density and frequency of citizen science monitoring can help understand and manage local water quality impacts.
- Citizen science is most effectively coordinated through local partnerships rather than the Environment Agency
- The Environment Agency must focus its resources on our core funded roles and does not have capacity for an officer to attend this meeting. We can of course respond to any specific requests for information to our customer enquiries team at DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?



To be advised at meeting.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact our Customers and Engagement Team, who will be happy to help you. You can contact the team at DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Rice
Area Director – Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

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