

Surfers Against Sewage:	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>1. 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?</p>	<p>In the North Devon Management Catchment, there are a total of 98 individual water bodies in the river basin district. Most recent assessments of Ecological Status indicate that 0 are Bad, 17 are Poor, 66 are Moderate, 15 are Good, and 0 are High. All fail Chemical Status assessments.</p> <p>In water bodies which failed to achieve Good Ecological Status, the issues cited as contributing to this include many incidents of pollution from rural areas due to agriculture and rural land management, as well as pollution from wastewater on account of water industry activity.</p> <p>The North Devon constituency was ranked at number 28 out of 543 total entries, with 1,983 sewage discharges in total lasting a duration of 18,363 hours in 2022.</p>
<p>2. 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?</p>	<p>At present, there are various sources of information on both water quality and sewage spills in UK waterways. This differs based on nation (i.e. the devolved regulator), water company, and information type. An important source of water quality information is storm overflow discharge data, which is provided directly from water companies.</p> <p>There is, however, a lack of nationalised standards in the way in which this data is reported from water companies, meaning that much of this data is not comparable across UK regions.</p> <p>At Surfers Against Sewage, we strive to provide water users with vital information regarding water quality, however the lack of standardised framework for data processing and format means</p>

that of the dozen data feeds we receive, not all are directly comparable. This information can indeed be confusing to water users and make data interpretation difficult.

The soon to be published map, led by Water UK, will feature live discharge data from all storm overflows in the UK. SAS believes that this is an opportunity, and responsibility, for water companies to develop an easy to use interface with simple and clear messaging to inform water users of risks associated with accessing water, with a data framework which provides continuity between datasets.

Other data sources relating to water quality in England include the Environment Agency Swimfo website, which publishes data from water quality testing, and associated bathing water classifications, at designated bathing sites throughout the UK.

This is also where pollution risk forecasts (PRFs) are issued, advising against bathing. Due to a lack of nationalised standard for alerts, however, real-time storm overflow alerts are not considered for PRFs, which instead use a modelling approach.

As an independent charity, we at SAS strive to communicate water quality data and information in a clear and accessible format. It is, however, the responsibility of water companies, the regulator and the government to ensure that there are required frameworks for publishing, displaying and communicating water quality information and the associated risks to water users in an accessible and understandable format.

Furthermore, the limitations to some of these data (e.g testing frequency, reliability of models etc) should be communicated so

	the public can make informed decisions with the information that is available.
3. 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?	Yes, we believe that there should be transparent information on sewage disposal capacity available to developers and planning authorities to ensure capacity does not become overloaded.

<p>4. Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?</p>	<p>Many organisations either undertake their own testing or support citizen scientist in collecting data for their waterways. In order for this to be most effective, communication and clarity between these organisations is key. This should include consistency with methodologies to ensure comparable data, consistency in data reporting platforms with open access to data to both other organisations and the public, and consistent messaging to volunteers and the public on how to interpret water quality data and best utilise it as part of a local campaign, to engage stakeholders, or to inform communities. As a part of this, a key element will be transparency with signposting any member of the public who is interested in water quality data to the appropriate organisation for their need or interest.</p> <p>At SAS, we are gathering and mobilising various organisations as part of our End Sewage Pollution Coalition, of which citizen science will be a sub-group.</p> <p>In addition, it is also the responsibility of the regulator to consider citizen-collected data generated through volunteer-led programmes in official assessments of waterways. This will aid in the development of a centralised location to store data and consistency with the messaging about water quality data across</p>
<p>5. When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?</p>	<p>The main impediment to talking the current state of WQ in the UK is the failure of the Government to enforce existing law. The water industry in England is governed by the 1991 Water Industry Act and the 1994 Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations. This legislation requires water companies to treat water ‘effectively’ and only permit sewage discharges from storm overflows in ‘exceptional circumstances’. However, the government has admitted sewage overflows “are being used significantly beyond their original purpose”. Since the last</p>

UK general election, water companies discharged sewage into waterways over 1 million times. Surfers Against Sewage's 2022 Water Quality Report uncovered 143 'dry spills' pouring raw sewage into our most popular surf and swim spots between 1st October 2021 and 30th September 2022.

<https://www.sas.org.uk/waterquality2022/dry-spills/dumping-sewage-when-its-dry/>

These dry spills on top of the systemic use of overflows during normal weather events has also led the Office of the Environment Protection to conclude that the Government as well the Environment Agency and OFWAT may have failed to comply with environmental law when dealing with untreated sewage discharges and permitting discharges outside exceptional circumstances. To try and set out the policies needed to End Sewage Pollution, SAS has come together with ENGOs, Community Groups and Water User Governing bodies to create the End Sewage Pollution Manifesto. The Manifesto sets out the ambitious policies water users want to see the next government adopt to End Sewage Pollution to restore thriving coastlines and inland waterways:

1. **Enforce the Law:** Government and Regulators have let water companies get away with dumping untreated sewage even in dry weather. Government can stop this by enforcing current law and funding regulators
2. **Stop Pollution for Profit:** Water companies have been rewarding shareholders and executives with huge bonus and dividends whilst the companies continue to pollute. Companies and individuals should only be rewarded

when they are complaint with the law and environmental performance is improving.

3. **Prioritise High Risk Pollution:** We need to protect the massive number of people using the water as well and nature from the harm and damage caused by sewage pollution. We want to End Sewage Pollution into bathing waters and protected natures sites by 2030.
4. **Empower a Nature-led Approach:** We want government and regulators to incentivise and support the adoption of effective Nature Based Solutions to end sewage pollution, increase biodiversity & tackle climate change.
5. **Reveal the Truth:** We want to see a clear picture of the state of sewage pollution around the UK. England and Wales have made massive steps forward but in Scotland and NI there is very little information about what's going into our water and when.