

Response to questions received from South West Water

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?

The Environment Agency hold the one version of the truth on the state of the environment for England for land, air and water. It would be appropriate for them to comment on the wider impacts as part of their River Basin Management Plan analysis. South West Water's Water Industry National Environment Programme is driven by the analysis undertaken by the Environment Agency using their River Basin Management Plans. This programme is monitored by the Environment Agency and forms part of the Environmental Performance Assessment (EPA) Star Rating that is reported on by the Environment Agency in June.

Other sources of pollution occur e.g. from urban areas, quarrying, agriculture, other industries. The Environment Agency will be able to provide a wider perspective on all pollutions for North Devon and Torridge area. Our WaterFit Strategy (1 Year On) indicates South West Water contributed c. 12% towards the reasons for not achieving good ecological status. A link to this report is here: [waterfit-one-year-on-2023.pdf \(southwestwater.co.uk\)](https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/waterfit-one-year-on-2023.pdf) – see page NB. This percentage contribution can change with time as new data is included within the assessments undertaken by the Environment Agency.

South West Water's WaterFit Programme also identifies where we will be investing in the period up to 2025. Our plans for further investment are currently with OFWAT as part of our PR24 submission. This Plan includes a £2.8bn investment and will address issues including storm overflow reduction. The Storm Overflow Action Plan (SOAP) is currently awaiting the Secretary of State's approval for publishing. This will show where we plan to invest in our storm overflows and what planning period we plan to invest. Our storm overflow improvement have been informed by feedback from customers and stakeholders who have asked that we focus on storm overflows near bathing waters and shellfish waters in the first instance. Our Storm Overflow Action Plan will be reduce the operation of storm overflows 10 years ahead of the Government target.

Water pollutions recorded by the Environment Agency that were attributed to South West Water show there was a reduction in pollution incidents between 2020 and 2022 from 225 to 108 across the South West Water Region. In North Devon / Torridge the numbers were as follows: 16 in 2020, 14 in 2021 and 7 in 2022 across both districts. Figures for 2023 have yet to be verified and validated by the Environment Agency, but we do expect to see an uptick in pollutions for 2023. There was only one serious pollution incident across North Devon / Torridge for the period 2020 to 2023. Our target is to achieve zero pollution incidents across the whole of the South West Region by 2025.

Bathing water quality is monitored by the Environment Agency and the data and classification is provided on gov.uk. Bathing water quality has improved significantly since 1990 as a result of investment. Where bathing water quality

isn't as expected the Environment Agency will review these location as part of their priority programme.

Bathing water classification can be found here: [Bathing water quality \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk)

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?

The Environment Agency own the state of the environment for air, land and water. They are responsible for the Bating Water Classification which covers the period 1 May to 30 September. However, both the Environment Agency and South West Water are undertaking sampling outside of the bathing season to understand how bathing water quality may change. Currently, the Environment Agency are monitoring at a limited number of location and they can provide more details on this. South West Water propose to sample daily at up to c.30 bathing beaches for a whole year to understand how water quality changes through the year, use the data to inform pollution risk forecasting and better understand the potential impacts / causes. This proposal and the logistics associated with sampling and analysis are currently being worked up. To put the sampling into perspective, the Environment Agency take up to 20 samples (as a maximum) during the bathing season, South West Water proposed to take 365 samples at each beach for up to c.30 beaches. This will support our ambitions within our WaterFit Strategy to ensure continue to protect and where we can improve bathing water quality.

SAS alerts are based on data provided to them from South West Water. They choose to hold their alert for a longer period of time then South West Water's WaterFit alerts. The Environment Agency's pollution risk forecast (prf) is primarily driven by the requirements of the Bathing Water Directive as transcribed into UK Law. The Environment Agency are best placed to respond to the purpose of the PRF as it is their system. Further information and explanation can be provided on the date of the meeting if required.

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?

I understand this question has been previously answered at a joint North Devon and Torridge DC Full Committee. Further discussions are planned at joint meeting of Torridge and North Devon DC on Friday 1 March 2024. A copy of the slides that were previously discussed are attached for information.

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?

South West Water undertake sampling for a variety of reasons driven either by the need to collect environment impact information to inform new schemes or to ascertain whether an pollution may have occurred. The Environment Agency primarily collect information to inform the state of the environment and to help inform longer term investment plans and interventions. Further information and explanation can be provided on the date of the meeting if required.

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

appThis question would need to be directed to a number of organisations as there are specific issues that would need to be address. Further information and explanation can be provided on the date of the meeting following further clarity surrounding this question.