



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref TO/JJ/00072/22

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28 January 2022

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 3 January to Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd regarding reports of sewage being discharged into rivers across Wales. Responsibility for water policy falls under the portfolio of Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change. I have been asked to reply.

Welsh Ministers share your concerns about the impact of pollution on the quality of our rivers. Tackling the causes of water quality pollution, irrespective of source, is a priority for the Welsh Government. Additional funding of nearly £10 million for water quality improvement for the current financial year has been allocated. The Programme for Government makes a commitment to begin designation of Wales' inland waters for recreation and strengthening water quality monitoring.

The Welsh Government works closely with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to monitor and improve the water quality of rivers across Wales. The main mechanism for improving water quality in our rivers is through the development and implementation of River Basin Management Plans, which take a holistic approach towards managing the water environment. Improving the status of watercourses is an essential part of reaching our wider goals under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017, NRW is required to monitor surface and ground water quality and collect chemical, physical and biological data in order to classify waterbodies. According to the latest classification, 40% of our waterbodies are at good or better ecological status, which represents an improvement of 3% from 2015. At present, 44% of Wales' rivers are achieving a good status. Data shows a gradual improvement in environmental water quality in Wales since the introduction of the Water Framework Directive requirements in 2003. However, more decisive continuous

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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measures are needed to reduce water pollution and to protect and significantly improve the status of our water bodies.

With reference to sewage discharges, NRW is responsible for regulating Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs) and issues permits to the water companies operating in Wales for their use. The permits require water companies only discharge when the sewer network has reached capacity due to heavy rainfall and there is a risk of sewage backing up into properties. CSOs form an integral part of the network in the UK and without these there is a risk of flooding buildings, streets, highways and open spaces with diluted sewage and rainwater from manholes, drains and toilets. Where water companies fail to comply with their permit conditions, NRW has powers to investigate and where appropriate, take enforcement action.

In terms of modernising sewage systems, between 2020 and 2025 Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) are investing £101 million to upgrade their wastewater management network to reduce discharges into waterways as part of a wider investment package of £765 million to protect the environment.

This includes investing £42m in the Storm Overflow Assessment Framework (SOAF), which will prioritise wastewater assets for improvement, to reduce both the number and volume of storm water discharges to the environment. This will improve both watercourse amenity value and water quality overall. NRW will help ensure this investment is targeted appropriately so that the framework aligns with the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources principles, as set out in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

DCWW have installed event duration monitoring (EDM) on 99% of their storm overflow assets and the remainder will have them installed by 2023. All relevant data is available on its website (www.dwrcymru.com/en/our-services/wastewater/combined-storm-overflow). DCWW and Hafren Dyfrdwy are also required to provide a summary of spill data from their monitors to NRW on an annual basis.

The first non-statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs) will be published by water companies this year. These new Plans will deliver more action to help water companies better address the risks that some sewer assets, such as storm overflows, may pose to the environment.

We expect the DWMPs to set out a long and short term plan to reduce the discharges from CSOs and any environmental harm from them. This will include improved treatment of sewage, improved storage capacity and natural environmentally friendly ways of reducing the volume of water entering the sewage system.

With reference to addressing agricultural pollution, the Welsh Government introduced The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) Wales Regulations 2021 to address the significant effect that agricultural pollution has on the health and quality of our rivers, lakes and streams. The Regulations aim to ensure nutrients are used more efficiently, to meet the crop need and to prevent excessive nutrient applications which lead to pollution.

The Welsh Government has also taken action by making sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mandatory on almost all new building developments. This will relieve pressure on the sewer network by redirecting and slowing down the speed at which surface water enters the sewer system. It will help ensure storm overflows are only used as a last resort.

The Programme for Government also includes a specific commitment to enhance the SuDS legislative framework to provide additional environmental, biodiversity, well-being and economic benefits to our communities.

Yours sincerely,



Water Policy Branch