



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref TO/JJ/01567/23

[REDACTED]

20 June 2023

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 30 May 2023 to Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change, regarding sewage pollution in Welsh waterways. I have been asked to respond.

Improving water quality is a key priority for the Welsh Government. High water quality is important for supporting valuable outdoor water recreation opportunities and helps contribute to the objectives set out in the Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: A healthier Wales.

Under the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is required to monitor the surface and ground water quality and collect chemical, physical and biological data in order to classify waterbodies across Wales. The latest data shows that 40% of Wales' waterbodies achieved 'good' or 'better' ecological status, and this rises to 44% for our rivers. This demonstrates an 8% improvement in water quality since the first classification released in 2009, but we do need to do more.

Tackling sewerage spills into our rivers is a key component of the wider, holistic approach the Welsh Government is taking to improve water quality. We are working closely with Wales' water companies, regulators and the relevant sectors to identify and implement sustainable solutions which not only deliver on desired water quality for improvement outcomes, but also support climate change adaptation, improved biodiversity and deliver against our net zero target.

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.

Combined storm overflows (CSOs) provide a controlled point of relief at times of heavy rainfall. With more extreme weather events occurring, they perform a crucial role in reducing the risk of sewers flooding homes and public spaces, preventing sewage from flooding homes and businesses. NRW regulates CSOs and there are strict controls for their use. CSOs are only allowed to discharge when the sewer network has reached capacity due to heavy rainfall and where there is a risk of sewage backing-up into properties. The water companies must report all assets which over spill to NRW.

Both Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and Hafren Dyfrdwy (HD) have installed event duration monitoring (EDM) on over 99.5% of their relevant storm overflow assets. This EDM data shows the length, duration and location of storm overflow discharges and is publicly available on their respective websites. This monitoring will provide the most comprehensive set of data to date, and will help to drive our overall approach to improving water quality.

As DCWW has highlighted in their letter to the Member of Parliament for Ynys Môn, Virginia Crosbie AS/MP, removing all existing storm overflows would be a long-term, multi-billion pound carbon intensive project and would not be the most effective way of improving water quality or be resilient to the increasing pressures from climate change.

However, the Welsh Government recognises that more needs to be done to reduce the impacts from CSOs. We have been working with NRW to assist DCWW and HD in developing their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, which will look at ways to address existing and future pressures on the sewer system, including population growth and climate change, and to build a more resilient wastewater and drainage infrastructure. These measures will relieve pressure on the sewer network by slowing down the speed at which surface water enters the sewer system, further minimising discharges from CSOs. The draft plans are available here:

[Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan | Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water \(dwrcymru.com\)](#)  
[Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan | Plan and strategy | About Us | HD Cymru](#)

Between 2020 and 2025, DCWW is 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.

The Better River Quality Taskforce has also been established to evaluate the current approach to the management and regulation of overflows in Wales and to set out detailed actions plans to drive rapid change and improvement. The Taskforce is made up of representatives from Welsh Government, NRW, water companies, and industry stakeholders, providing independent advice to the Taskforce and offering insight and challenge from a stakeholder and consumer perspective. Further information on this is available [here](#).

The Welsh Government has also taken steps by making Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) mandatory on almost all new building developments. This will help relieve pressure on the 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.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Water Policy Officer.

Water Policy Officer  
Climate Change & Rural Affairs