

P-06-1281 Urgently stop raw sewage discharges into Barry's Old Harbour and Watchtower Bays

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Gorffennaf 2022
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Reference: SR22/2946-3

Petition Number: P-06-1281

Petition title: Urgently stop raw sewage discharges into Barry's Old Harbour and Watchtower Bays

Text of petition:

We call on the Welsh Government to help stop raw sewage discharges into Barry's Old Harbour and Watchtower Bays. These discharges originate from combined sewer overflows and are discharging increasing amounts of sewage due to the increasing number of heavy rainfall events due to climate change.

This bay has recently been identified as an area which is supporting important wildlife and watchtower bay is regularly used by many cold water swimming groups and paddle-boarders and kayakers.

Additional information:

We fully realise that untreated waste being released from combined sewer overflows is a national issue and will require large amounts of money to be invested into our struggling sewage network.

But we also believe that the Welsh public are increasingly becoming aware of this appalling pollution and want action to resolve this issue.



Alas vast amounts of untreated sewage is being increasingly released into the sea and frustratingly, there are no monitoring points in the bay (yet there are monitoring points at Jacksons, Whitmore and the Knap bays).

We therefore call for it to be urgently added to Natural Resources Wales list of bathing water quality sampling points.

The Old Harbour and Watchtower bays are supporting both wildlife and people so should become a priority for Welsh Water investment.

1. Background

A recent [Senedd Research briefing](#) provides the legislative context for storm overflows in Wales. It also looks at how storm overflows are being managed, how well they're understood, and how they're impacting water quality.

In short, combined sewers collect **both sewage and run-off** from drains and gutters. This wastewater is taken to a treatment works where it is cleaned and returned to the environment.

Each sewer system has a maximum amount of wastewater it can accept. During heavy rainfall, if there is more water than the system can cope with, it is released at points called '[Storm Overflows](#)' often referred to as 'Combined Sewer Overflows' or 'Combined Storm Overflows' (CSO).

A [2021 Water Quality Report](#) (UK wide) from [Surfers Against Sewage](#) found:

In 2020 sewage was pumped into rivers and seas nationwide over 400,000 times, totalling over **3.1 million hours of pollution**.

CSOs in Wales are [permitted by NRW](#). These require CSOs to comply with design and water quality standards and cause no deterioration to the existing quality of the receiving water.

[Dŵr Cymru states](#) it's invested £10.5 million in improving the monitoring of CSOs since 2015, and has Event Duration Monitors (EDM) on almost 99% of CSOs to record the number and duration of spills.

EDM data is shared annually with NRW and is publicly available from [Dŵr Cymru](#). It's unclear which particular CSOs the petitioner is referring to. However

the [EDM data for the Valleys and South East Wales](#) shows a number of releases in and around the Barry area.

[Dŵr Cymru says](#) it's investing £42m across Wales in the Storm Overflow Assessment Framework (SOAF):

Over the next 5 years (2020-2025) this programme will use data from the EDM sites to prioritise wastewater assets for investigation, with the aim 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. Using data from the EDM sites a further £15m is being spent around Wales on reducing the number of coastal discharges near to bathing and shellfish waters.

Bathing water quality sampling

There are [105 bathing waters in Wales](#), designated under the [Bathing Water Regulations 2013](#). NRW is responsible for monitoring designated bathing waters and communicating the results to the public.

In response to this petition, the Welsh Government clarifies:

In Barry, Cold Knapp, Whitmore Bay and Jackson's Bay are designated as bathing waters, and the water quality at these beaches is classified as Excellent, Good and Sufficient respectively. However, Watch House Bay or Barry Old Harbour is not a designated bathing waters and is not monitored by NRW.

It is open to anyone to suggest a beach or inland site for designation as a bathing water. For example [Lantwit Major beach](#) has recently become a designated bathing location following an application and [Welsh Government consultation](#). It is now subject to routine monitoring and sampling by NRW.

The formal application should normally come from the local authority for the area or should have its support, as it will have specific responsibilities to fulfil under the Bathing Water Regulations.

[Welsh Government guidance](#) sets out how to apply for designation of bathing waters.

2. Welsh Government action

In her response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change says she has met with Dŵr Cymru to discuss “concerns raised by some members of the local community regarding pollution in Watchtower Bay”:

My officials have since contacted DCWW and I understand local residents accepted DCWW’s explanation that the brown ‘slick’ is a naturally occurring marine algae bloom known as Phaeocystis. Nevertheless, DCWW agreed with the group to explore the possibility of making real-time alerts of discharges from two emergency overflows (Cold Knapp and Barry Town) available via the ‘Surfers Against Sewage’ app.

The Minister also highlights the Better River Quality Taskforce, “established to drive a rapid change and improvement” to CSO management and regulation. Representatives include NRW, the Welsh Government, Ofwat, Dŵr Cymru, Hafren Dyfrdwy, Afonydd Cymru and Consumer Council for Water.

The taskforce has identified a number of areas for change and improvement, and will publish a ‘storm overflows roadmap for Wales’ in July.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee recently undertook a short piece of work on water quality and sewage discharges.

The Committee published its Report on storm overflows in Wales on 15 March 2022, which made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government and NRW. The Welsh Government responded on 9 May 2022.

A debate was held in Plenary on 15 June 2022 on the Committee’s report.

A previous Plenary debate took place in March 2022 on a Member’s legislative proposal on the impact of storm overflows. The motion was agreed.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.