

Stop pollution at Watchtower Bay and Ogmore by Sea

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 8 Gorffennaf 2024
Petitions Committee | 8 July 2024

Reference: SR24/8973-1

Petition Number: P-05-1448

Petition title: Stop pollution at Watchtower Bay and Ogmore by Sea

Text of petition: Watch House Bay [also known locally as Watchtower Bay] and Ogmore by Sea were both classified as new designated bathing waters in 2023.

Now both beaches have not met the minimum requirements for bathing water quality and were the only two bathing sites in Wales to be classified as 'poor' in what the Welsh Government has described as "disappointing". Rather than putting up signs warning people not to swim at these beaches, the Council, Welsh Water and Welsh Government should be taking action to prevent this pollution.

We have been campaigning for a number of years about the sewage pollution entering the Old Harbour and Watchtower Bay in Barry. We have identified human sewage outfall pipes and the outfall pipe from the Knap lake, which has a large resident population of swans and geese, as probably being the main cause of this pollution.

This water needs to be treated in retention tanks before releasing into the marine environment.

We need action to stop the pollution on both Watchtower Bay and Ogmore by Sea... just stop the crap!



We will be ending this petition on World Oceans Day on Saturday 8th June 2024...we desperately need to protect our Oceans!

1. Background

Two Senedd Research briefings provide a comprehensive background to this topic:

- [A guide to water quality in Wales](#) outlines how water quality standards are implemented, monitored and upheld, and who's responsible. It also discusses some of the main challenges to water quality in Wales, and what the Welsh Government has been doing to tackle them.
- [Storm overflows in Wales](#) looks at how water company storm overflows are being managed, how well they're understood, and how they're impacting water quality.

Bathing water quality sampling and 2023 results

There are [109 bathing waters in Wales](#), designated under the [Bathing Water Regulations 2013](#). Further information on bathing water designation and classification can be found in this [Senedd Research article](#).

In response to this petition, the Welsh Government says the aim of a designation is to “protect bathers’ health against pollution and provide information to the public to enable them to make informed decisions about where and when they bathe”.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is responsible for monitoring designated bathing waters and communicating the results to the public. NRW’s [2023 Wales bathing water report](#) shows that 107 out of the 109 designated waters met the standards set by the Regulations, with Watch House Bay and Ogmore by Sea the non-compliant bathing waters. Both beaches were newly designated by the Welsh Government for 2023, and the NRW report explains that classifications are typically based on four years of bathing water quality data, however 2023 data only is used. The data showed:

At Watch House Bay four out of twenty samples had elevated bacteria levels, these were all taken during or following periods of wet weather.

...

At Ogmore by Sea six out of twenty samples had elevated levels of bacteria. Rainfall and river level data for the River Ogmore and River Ewenny catchments was assessed against the bathing water sample results. This showed poorer water quality following rainfall and elevated river levels.

The effect of this sampling meant that the bathing waters were classified as ‘poor’. In reply to this petition, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, says that “significant increase in rainfall over the 2023 bathing season has meant an increase in pollution incidents from a variety of sources”.

NRW says there are many likely sources of pollutants in both catchments, “from diffuse pollution from urban drainage, misconnections, rural land use and wildlife”. It highlights that further monitoring in future bathing water seasons will give a better understanding, and that it will:

... work with the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Shared Regulatory Services and Dŵr Cymru to investigate the reasons behind these failures and to work towards improving the results in future years.

Welsh Government action

In response to the increasing pressure on Wales’s aquatic environments, the Welsh Government set up the Better River Quality Taskforce (the taskforce), to evaluate the current approach to managing and regulating overflows. The taskforce identified five areas for change and improvement requiring action.

In October 2023 the Taskforce published the Storm Overflow Evidence for Wales (SOEfw) Report under its Environmental Regulation of Overflows Action Plan. The report compares the costs and benefits of different policy options for the regulation of Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs). The then Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, said the taskforce will “consider carefully the report and identify next steps”.

In his reply to this petition, the Cabinet Secretary says it’s “disappointing” that Watch House Bay and Ogmore by Sea received ‘poor’ classifications in 2023. He highlights investigative work being undertaken by NRW to understand the reasons for the failures, and says:

... these investigations are progressing well but are complex and require significant time and expense to fully work through, and often rely on supporting action from wider sectors.

2. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee undertook an investigation into [sewage discharges, and their impact on water quality](#) in early 2022. The Committee's findings are discussed in this [Senedd Research article](#). It has since undertaken [scrutiny of Dwr Cymru's environmental performance](#) and "illegal spillages of untreated sewage" from several of its Wastewater Treatment Works. It published its [Report on performance of Dŵr Cymru](#) in February 2024.

Prior to this, a [Plenary debate took place in March 2022](#) on a Member's legislative proposal for a Bill to reduce the adverse impact of storm overflows. The motion was agreed.

In December 2023, the then Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, delivered a [statement to Plenary on water quality](#), where storm overflows and bathing water quality were discussed.

The Petitions Committee has considered the following recent petitions within this subject area:

- [P-06-1281 Urgently stop raw sewage discharges into Barry's Old Harbour and Watchtower Bays](#) (closed petition); and
- [P-06-1398: To act to increase the effectiveness of Natural Resources Wales in halting pollution on the Teifi](#) (under consideration).

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.