

**Selaine Saxby MP
North Devon**

PRESS RELEASE

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SELAINE SAXBY WELCOMES BEACH QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

Selaine Saxby MP for North Devon has welcomed the news that Croyde Beach has been uprated from Good to Excellent and improvements have been made at Combe Martin.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has announced today that 100% of the classified bathing waters in the South West have passed their stringent standards for the second year running, with 99% rated as or 'Good' or 'Excellent'. With 860 miles of coastline and over 30% of England's designated bathing waters, the South West achieved 100% bathing water quality for the first time in 2021.

Defra's announcement shows improvement in classification for nine designated bathing beaches, including Combe Martin, where South West Waters investment and interventions have helped achieve a 'Good' rating up from a 'Poor' rating in 2020. This has been delivered through enhanced and targeted investments in the local wastewater infrastructure, as well as wider interventions across the catchment.

Selaine Saxby MP for North Devon, said:

"We are all aware that there are unwanted storm overflow discharges. We have all seen the videos but what we do not always see is that outside of these events which almost always occur after heavy rain, when bathing is not advised, our water quality has slowly improved over many years.

It is good to see that Croyde has been uprated to Excellent and I am so pleased for the people of Combe Martin who have worked so hard over many years to improve their beach's water quality. For those who have not been aware, Combe Martin is an exceptionally difficult catchment area. Combe Martin Water Watch, working with South West Water and the Environment Agency have worked tirelessly to make a difference and I know this rating will mean the world to them."

Pennon the owner of South West Water is also delivering over £78 million benefits to customers, which includes a number of customer affordability schemes and a second share issuance through its unique WaterShare+ scheme next month.

As the region's largest employer of over 3,000 people, Pennon has also announced plans to double its apprenticeship and graduate schemes to 2030 and will offer 5,000 work placements to school children over the same period.

The announcements and record-level investment were made in the company Half Year Results 2022/23 today.

Susan Davy, Chief Executive of Pennon Group, said:

"In the first half of this year we've made record levels of investment to support a step change in environmental performance and build resilience for the longer term, having experienced the hottest,

driest year since records began. Today we are announcing an increase in investment in water resilience schemes of c.£45 million, bringing the total reinvestment in these initiatives to c.£75 million to repurpose ex-quarries and mines and introduce desalination units to ensure our resilience to 2050 is in place now.

“Our investments aren’t just in places and infrastructure, they’re in people and communities too. Given this cost of living crisis, at Penon, we believe every customer should benefit from what we do.

“We are delivering over £78 million of benefits to customers, at a time when customers need it most, through a second issuance of our unique WaterShare+ scheme, with £40 million funded so far to give customers the option of a stake and a say in their water company, or money off their bill.

“We are also announcing plans to build and double our award-winning apprenticeship and graduate schemes to 2030, and will offer 5,000 work placements to school children over the same period, supporting those in our region to live local and prosper.”

Government also announced today that Water company fines will be ring-fenced for work to improve water quality and channelled into environmental improvements.

Selaine Saxby MP for North Devon, said:

“I am also delighted that the Government has announced that they are adopting the first policy listed within the Changing Course manifesto that water company fines will now be channelled into environmental improvements, rather than going back to the Treasury.”

Money from fines handed out to water companies that pollute our rivers and seas will be re-invested in schemes that benefit our natural environment, under new government plans.

Water companies were handed a record amount in fines for pollution incidents last year as part of ongoing action to hold rule-breakers to account.

Since 2015, the Environment Agency has concluded 56 prosecutions against water and sewerage companies, securing fines of over £141m.

At present, money from fines imposed by Ofwat and those arising from Environment Agency prosecutions is returned to the Treasury. Under the new plans, ringfenced funds will go to Defra and will be invested directly back into environmental and water quality improvement projects.

This could include initiatives to restore our water environments by creating wetlands, re-vegetating river banks and reconnecting meanders to the main channel of rivers.

Water Minister Rebecca Pow MP said:

“The volume of sewage being discharged into our waters is unacceptable, and can cause significant harm to our wildlife and sensitive habitats .

“It is right that water companies are made to pay when they break the rules, but it is also right that this money is then channelled back into improving water quality.

“Water company fines reached a record level last year, and moving forward these plans will significantly increase funding that will be used to recover, protect and enhance our natural environment.

“This is on top of the £56 billion investment we’re requiring water companies to invest in improving our water infrastructure, as well as holding them to account through tough new targets.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/water-company-fines-to-be-channelled-into-environmental-improvements>

<https://www.selainesaxby.org.uk/storm-overflows-and-beach-quality>