

Selaine Saxby MP  
The Strand  
Barnstaple  
EX31 1EU

Our Ref: 20881

Date: 15 February 2024

Via email: [david.hoare@parliament.uk](mailto:david.hoare@parliament.uk)

Dear Selaine,

Thank you for your office's email dated 01 February 2024, regarding the monitoring of bathing waters and results in relation to the recent Channel 4 documentary.

The Environment Agency was commissioned for advice by the then Environment Secretary on potential options for the delivery of pollution risk warnings to bathers. This advice, underpinned by legal requirements and scientific good practice, recommended that no changes were made to the current warning system.

The Environment Agency takes more than 7,000 samples at 424 bathing waters to provide an accurate and transparent picture of bathing water quality. This regime complies fully with legal requirements, follows the World Health Organisation recommendations on management and classification, and is in line with the approach taken by the EU and other countries around the world.

As a science led organisation, we are aware of other testing methods undertaken by eNGOs, and we welcome robust conversation about how we best ensure the public remains fully informed. We will continue to work closely with government, the agriculture sector, water companies, local communities and eNGO's to ensure the safest bathing waters for the public.

As it stands, 96% of bathing waters meet minimum standards and we are taking targeted action at all 'poor' bathing waters which may be affected by sewage discharges, agriculture and urban run-off. Over the last 30 years, we have directed £30 billion of water company investment in sewerage improvements and £2.5 billion of investment into bathing waters to improve and protect water quality.

It is clearly set out in law ([Bathing Water Regs 2013](#) – see **clause 14.5**) that samples taken on days when short-term pollution forecasts are issued data may be disregarded and not contribute to overall classification results. This is not specific to England - the provisions originate in EU law and were adopted by the UK in its Regulations. This follows WHO recommendations on the management and classification of bathing waters.

There are also provisions to make sure disregarded samples do not skew the overall results. For example, in most cases bathing waters cannot be rated "sufficient", "good" or "excellent" unless the samples disregarded are a very small percent of the overall number of samples.

Our short-term pollution forecasts predict where water quality may be temporarily reduced due to factors like heavy rainfall, winds or tides. As a result, bathers are warned via the Environment Agency's website (Swimfo) and signs on the beach.

Our pollution risk forecasts and our enactment of the Directive's Short Term Pollution provisions have been cited by the EU as an example of good practice, a fact noted by the High Court when Anglian Water challenged this in a Judicial Review.

Please find our recently published blog providing information on how bathing waters are monitored, warnings issued and results published - <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/01/explaining-how-bathing-waters-are-monitored-warnings-issued-and-results-published/>.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact our Customers and Engagement Team, who will be happy to help you. You can contact the team at [DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Mark Rice**  
**Area Director – Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**



[DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)



Environment Agency, Manley House, Kestrel Way, Exeter EX2 7LQ