



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Selaine Saxby MP
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Our ref: MC2023/25368/JA

19 February 2024

Dear Selaine,

Thank you for your letter of 13 December to the Secretary of State about concerns about water quality issues in North Devon. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Firstly, may I thank you for kindly hosting me for a visit earlier in the month to your constituency, specifically to look at the great work which is going on in both Comb Martin and Croyde Bay regarding improving water quality. It was brilliant to meet many of your constituents who like you, are passionate about ensuring our coastal environments and bathing water designations are as good as they can be.

I now address some of the main issues which you kindly wrote to the Secretary of State about. As you will know, the Government directed water companies to increase their storm overflow monitoring in 2013 and 100% event duration monitoring (EDM) coverage was achieved before the end of 2023. Reaching 100% was a significant achievement in creating positive environmental change and holding water companies to account.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced new requirements for water companies to publish this information annually and for the Environment Agency (EA) to publish an annual summary report of this data for each company. All companies must publish data captured by EDMs in near real time and make this available to the public no later than 2025.

Furthermore, the consultation on continuous water quality monitoring set out the Government's proposals to further enhance the monitoring of watercourses. The response to this consultation was published on 14 September 2023 and is available at: [Summary of responses and Government response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/summary-of-responses-and-government-response-to-the-consultation-on-continuous-water-quality-monitoring). This new water quality monitoring programme will directly measure the impact sewage discharges have on the receiving watercourse. It will show not just whether an overflow is discharging but also its impact on the watercourse. This data will allow water companies to better target their investments in infrastructure and will allow the Government and regulators to hold them to account.

In 2023, 96% of bathing waters in England met minimum standards, with almost 90% of bathing waters in England being rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. This compares with just 28% being rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent' in the 1990s and 76% in 2010. While bathing water quality has improved over the past few decades, standards have fallen slightly in the last year, likely in part due to an unseasonably wet summer. Other complex factors which influence bathing water quality can include tides, and physical or environmental changes at a site, with every catchment affected differently. Although substantial improvements have been made to bathing water quality in the last few decades, we want and expect to see better.

Across the South West, the EA is taking action to improve bathing water quality at sites classified as 'Poor'. This includes work to investigate and identify sources of pollution, undertaking compliance visits to farms and water company assets and following up on actions.

South West Water has undertaken various improvement measures through their Water Industry National Environment Programme in the catchment to improve water quality. This includes improvements to sewerage infrastructure that will reduce overflows to the environment including reducing surface water connections and increasing storm overflow storage. South West Water plans to continue to deliver environmental outcomes through its environmental strategy programme, [Waterfit](#), which includes refurbishing and relining old sewers to prevent groundwater intrusion.

The EA's online tool [Swimfo](#) provides more information on all its designated bathing waters, including up to date information on water quality to help people choose where and when to swim, or surf.

Although the Secretary of State's diary unfortunately cannot accommodate a visit at this time, please be assured that the Government is committed to improving water quality through more investment, stronger regulation and tougher enforcement to tackle every source of river and sea pollution. We will be stepping up efforts to drive bathing water quality improvements in 2024 and I would be happy to keep you updated on our progress.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robbie Moore', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

ROBBIE MOORE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs