

FEARS OVER FILTHY WATER

Pictures: ADAM GERRARD; GETTY.

Alarm...outlet pipe Right, spill in Southwick, West Sussex, in 2022, and young surfers.



Seaside sewage spills Send tourists packing

By **Steph Spyro**
Environment Editor

SURF SCHOOL'S BEACH POLLUTION WORRY

COMMENT

SELAINE SAXBY

Conservative MP for North Devon



TRYING to find a good news story about water quality may be difficult in many parts of the country.

Despite the perceived shortcomings of water companies in general, we should, where things have gone well, highlight them.

This is especially true as tourist locations may rely on their bathing water status to support recreational activities.

Anyone from North Devon familiar with the work of the Water Watch group in Combe Martin cannot fail to be impressed at what the community has achieved over the past 10 years to improve the bathing water quality and indeed retain their bathing water status.

They have recognised that a full catchment approach is needed to tackle water pollution.

It is working with both the Environment Agency and South West Water that achieves results, as, despite the prevailing social media narrative, it is not storm overflows that are always to blame for poor water quality.

There is some confusion over the alert system and when things sadly do go wrong they are not consistently reported.

Serious

There was a significant fault within a sewage treatment plant in North Devon...

By **Steph Spyro**
Environment Editor

SEVEN in 10 coastal areas have reported a drop in tourism due to fears about dirty sea water.

Holidaymakers are concerned about sewage spills, farming run-offs and waste, the Local Government Association said.

Almost 90% of the councils it surveyed felt the Environment Agency should do more testing.

Many coastal areas rely on clean water for their economies to thrive through tourism and activities like fishing and surfing.

Urgent

Councillor Sandra Squire, of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council, said: "This report highlights that poor bathing water quality affects councils around the country and shows how it is now critical that water pollution is taken seriously as a national problem."

She called for measures to improve coastal water to be made an "urgent priority".

South Tyneside councillor Ernest Gibson echoed her views and said: "Councils want to see declining water quality being tackled collaboratively so that a solution can be agreed and progressed, and for an

Pledge...Alan Lovell of agency

SURF SCHOOL'S BEACH POLLUTION WORRY

By **Steph Spyro**

SURFING school director Michelle Harding has told of her fears about the impact of sewage pollution on her business.

She said holidaymakers and locals increasingly ask about the state of Westward Ho! beach in Devon.

Asked if she was concerned, Michelle, 46, said: "Yes, absolutely. I'm really worried about it."

"It would be a shame if people stopped using the beach because of the sewage."

"Something does need to be sorted - whether that's communication and clarification or whether it's sewage pipes themselves, I don't know because I don't know what the actual issue is."



Wave of concern...Michelle Harding

She said there is greater concern about pollution among over-55s who use mobile apps to monitor sewage alerts daily.

Regular customers often email ahead to check whether classes are going ahead on the

blue-flagged beach which is cared for by an army of volunteers who collect litter.

Michelle, who does not know of anyone getting ill from the water, wanted more clarity to clear confusion over alerts.

independent review of water companies to be delivered."

Bodies of water popular for swimming or paddling can be given Designated Bathing Water Status. The Environment Agency classifies such spots as excellent, good, sufficient or poor based on annual tests carried during the summer.

North Devon Tory MP Selaine

Saxby said many tourist spots rely on their bathing water rating to support recreational activities.

Writing in the Daily Express today, she added: "I am pushing for improved data about water quality to ensure we all know when it is safe to swim, surf or paddle board all year round.

Water companies are permitted to discharge excess sewage into rivers and seas when heavy rain threatens to overwhelm the system.

But some have been accused of spilling sewage on dry days in

breach of their permits. The Government announced this week that inspections of water companies will quadruple over the next year in a bid to crack down on pollution.

Measures include up to 500 additional Environment Agency workers to carry out inspections and enforcement.

Environment Agency chairman Alan Lovell said: "Proposals to get extra boots on the ground to increase inspection visits will help further strengthen our regulation of the industry."

Serious

There was a significant fault within a sewage treatment plant in North Devon recently - a power failure in which raw or only partially treated sewage was discharged.

This is completely different to a combined storm overflow which is at least 95% rainwater.

This was a serious pollution incident and in a situation like this the Environment Agency tests the water and advises against bathing on beaches that may be impacted.

Their information may differ from that of the water companies and the Surfers Against Sewage group, who only monitor when a storm overflow discharges, with no data at all about what is in the pipe or the water quality.

I am pushing for improved data about water quality to ensure we all know when it is safe to swim, surf or paddle board all year round, alongside working with all relevant bodies and groups to try to reduce run-off and overflows which may impact beach water quality.

But it is important to note, that when it rains there is run-off and we do not know what is in that. Most beaches have a river running on to them, which is often dirtier than storm overflow water. If you are planning a beach holiday, the best source of accurate information about the bathing waters is the Environment Agency's Swimfo website.