

Our ref: EC18087

Your ref: CL37422

Date: 9 June 2023

Dear Mr Loder,

Clean Rivers of West Dorset (CROWD) questions

Thank you for your email of the 25 May to Ian Withers and Emma Baker. Ian and Emma have passed this across to me as the water quality monitoring and bathing water lead for Wessex Area.

I have answered each of the questions posed by CROWD below using the same numbering.

- 1. Overview:** We carry out water quality monitoring for a range of statutory and operational reasons, looking at water quality trends across the whole of England as well as specific issues in individual river catchments. Our monitoring does change from year to year subject to funding and the development of new programmes to assess national water and ecological quality. We are not able to monitor every stretch of river, but we do undertake monitoring to assess specific issues as we become aware of them. All results from our monitoring are available on the DEFRA Data Services Platform -[EA Ecology & Fish Data Explorer](#) and [Defra Data Services Platform](#)
Bathing Water monitoring is prescribed by the UK Bathing Water Regulations. We collect bathing water samples throughout the bathing season which is set in the regulations as being from the 1 May to the end of September. We look for the faecal indicator organisms, *Ecoli* and Intestinal Enterococci which can be used to assess the underlying public health risk of swimming in these waters. The frequency of sampling is based on risk posed to the water quality at the site and past performance. Lyme Regis and Charmouth are sampled 20 times per season, the other sites in West Dorset are sampled 10 times.
- 2. Forecast errors:** I am sorry, but I am not able to answer this question as our specialist who leads on our forecasting work is on leave until mid-June. I will come back to you as soon as they return.
- 3. River testing:** Monitoring water quality is essential to keeping our rivers clean, and the Environment Agency has been collecting data from waterways since the late 1980s. In recent years the annual funding from government for monitoring activity has reduced, therefore we have had to reduce our monitoring in several areas. However, in the last government Spending Review we have received additional funding which will now allow us to invest more in monitoring over the next few years.

Current regulations for rivers in England (except those designated as bathing waters) protect wildlife and are not designed to assess health implications of bathing – with

bacteria found in pollution from sewage and animal waste posing the two biggest risks. We continue to monitor the designated bathing water at Charmouth West.

4. **CSI monitoring:** We are very keen to monitor and assess the health of our rivers, but we only have a finite resource to do this. As such we welcome the various emerging citizen science initiatives that contribute valuable information on water quality to help everyone involved to identify issues. We are a key partner in the Riverfly Partnership, and we are committed to working with Dorset Wildlife Trust and volunteers in Dorset to respond to and investigate any pollution incidents identified through this valuable work. We would be very happy to work with CROWD on any such initiative.
5. **Microbial contamination:** We do not routinely monitor rivers for bacterial quality as this is only a requirement at designated bathing waters and bacteriological monitoring does not form part of our normal river water quality monitoring under the Water Framework Directive. As such we do not routinely use microbial source tracking (MST) unless the work is associated with bathing water compliance.
6. **Viral contamination:** We do not monitor bathing waters for viruses. As set out in the bathing water regulations we monitor for two types of faecal indicator bacterial. Work by the world health organisation has identified that these can be used as clear indicators of faecal contamination which will include the presence of viruses.
7. **Chemical monitoring:** We do look at relationships between our chemical monitoring results and factors such as rainfall. We also use computer modelling to understand possible sources of nutrient pollution and the likely loading, i.e., the amount entering the water and where it has come from.
8. **Sewage debris:** Our sampling officers are asked to make observations at the time of sampling, the recording system for the presence of sewage debris is a scale of 0-3 as detailed below.
 - 0 - none present
 - 1 - trace present (odd trace around of 1 or 2 items)
 - 2 - some at intervals (spread across the beach in intervals – 3 to 6 items)
 - 3 - sufficient to be objectionable (whole beach covered and unable to walk to the sea without coming into contact with it).

Sewage debris on a bathing water beach is not acceptable, which is why we record any signs of material that could have come from the sewerage system. However, some items like cotton buds can come from other sources. We collect the information and then cross check it with our sample results to help identify any possible sources of poorer water quality.

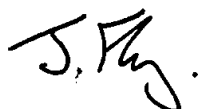
9. **The beach at Seatown:** We are not responsible for designating new bathing waters. This is overseen by the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Information on applying for a bathing site to become a designated bathing waters can be found here: [Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/bathing-waters).

Local authorities usually apply for designation, but anyone can apply, however the Local Authority must support the application, as they will have a view in relation to safety, amenity, and access. Landowners must support applications for privately owned sites. If you're considering applying, you should contact the Defra bathing water team at an early stage to discuss the process. Email bathingwater@defra.gov.uk.

- 10. Upper River Brit:** Ecological status is based on the latest available data, as outlined previously. Reductions in funding for monitoring has meant that monitoring in some rivers has reduced over the last 10 years.
Recent additional funding has meant that we are now updating our evidence base for the Upper Brit, starting this year we are collecting macroinvertebrate samples from 2 additional sites, we are also planning fish surveys in 2024 and an update to our water quality monitoring. The next round of classification in 2025 will be based on this updated evidence.
- 11. Signage:** The beach controller is responsible for signage at designated bathing waters using a set template provided by Defra. In most cases the beach owner or controller is the local authority.
- 12. Signage:** There is no legal requirement for storm overflows to have signs. At designated bathing waters the information available to the public through the sign at the beach and on the Swimfo website will identify the location of any storm overflows that may affect water quality.
- 13. Pollution Risk forecast process:** Pollution risk forecasts are shared with the beach owner and or controller. It is their responsibility to put up signage at the beach. The information is also posted on the Swimfo website.
- 14. Unlicensed SOs:** Combined sewer overflows require a permit from the EA. If we identify any unlicensed overflows or issues with a known overflow, we will take action to ensure that it is regulated. This will either be through issuing a permit which will set conditions on how it is operated, or by enforcing its removal. If you are aware of any illegal overflows, please report these to us so that we can take the appropriate follow up action.
- 15. Sewerage performance:** No, we are not currently extending this review to other beaches. The review was targeted at those beaches not achieving Good and/or Excellent bathing water quality.
- 16. Catchment thinking:** We are supportive of the CaSTCo pilot schemes.

I hope the information answers the questions posed by the group. I would also be happy to attend the meeting on the 23 June at 11:00 at Wootton Fitzpane Village Hall to discuss any of these points in more detail.

Yours sincerely



JIM FLORY
Area Environment Manager, Wessex