Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Rebecca Pow MP
Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Cllr Ann Newton
Leader of the Council
Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development
Wealden District Council, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham
East Sussex, BN27 2AX
Kellie.Eldridge@wealden.gov.uk

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Dear Cllr Newton and Trevor,

Thank you for your letter of 17 March to the Secretary of State about Southern Water's treatment of wastewater. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

The volume of sewage discharged by water companies is unacceptable and I will ensure improving water quality remains a Government priority. No Government has done more to tackle the issue of storm overflow discharges.

On 20 February 2023, the Secretary of State asked water and sewerage companies to set an action plan on every storm overflow in England, prioritising those that are spilling more than a certain number of times a year, and those spilling into bathing waters and high priority nature sites. We have also announced water companies will face higher penalties that are quicker and easier to enforce.

We have increased the number of storm overflows monitored across the network from 7% in 2010 to 91% now monitored, and we will reach 100% cover by end of this year. Through powers in the landmark Environment Act, we will also place duties directly on water companies to monitor the water quality impact up and downstream of all their assets. In the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, we committed to commencing these duties in 2023. Additionally, we will require companies to make discharge data available in near real time to the public and monitor water quality upstream and downstream of their assets. This monitoring will be year-round.

The Environment Agency has instructed water companies to install flow monitors at 2,000 wastewater treatment works. These provide important data on the volume of treated final effluent discharges to the environment.

In April, we launched our consultation on Continuous Water Quality Monitoring and Event Duration Monitoring. This outlines the Government's proposals to enhance the monitoring of storm overflow and final effluent discharges. Event Duration Monitoring data shows how often storm overflows are active and for how long. This data has helped identify and shape the future investment and actions needed to reduce storm overflow discharges. We expect all monitors to be working properly.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact us about this important issue.

REBECCA POW MP

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