

By Email - Llyr Gruffydd MS
Elizabeth.Wilkinson@senedd.wales

20 December 2021

Dear Llŷr,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November regarding unpermitted sewage discharges.

The recent announcement from Environment Agency and Ofwat to analyse and investigate relation to breaches of permit compliance from wastewater treatment works in England relates to information submitted by Water Companies to Environment Agency highlighting permit breaches.

NRW does not propose to undertake a similar investigation as already have a compliance response in place. Information has been shared by the companies since 2014 and we are working with both companies to identify causes, rectify those where possible, and set out plans to bring those sites back into compliance at the earliest opportunity. Currently 32 sites have been rectified and 37 more will be worked on in the current period of water company investment (2020-25). Where NRW feels action is not progressing as required, and as further data is collected by the company and shared with NRW, we will take the necessary action to ensure non-compliance with permit is dealt with appropriately.

NRW recognises the high public interest in relation to water and water quality over the last few years and has taken several steps across the sector to tackle concerns. With regard to Water Companies, we have been proactive in Wales since 2012 in tackling the impact of storm overflows, water company performance and impacts on our SAC rivers in recent times.

In 2012 NRW instructed Water Companies in Wales to install event duration monitors on all its storm overflows to gain a greater level of understanding of their impact and the status of the sewerage network, work in England has progressed at a slower rate due to a later start date. This work has led to greater scrutiny and public interest which NRW has responded to, on top of its current work programme.

I have instigated joint working with Welsh Government, Ofwat, and both Water Companies, with oversight from the Chairs of each organisation to agree an ambitious water company improvement programme for their storm overflows. An overflow taskforce is now in operation in Wales, firstly to develop recommendations aimed at tackling the impacts of Storm Discharges on Welsh rivers, then to instigate an action plan to drive the required work forward. We will maintain our effort on this alongside other priority work to tackle and maintain water company performance.

I will continue to oversee this Overflow 'Roadmap' alongside Ofwat with active management groups in place to drive the work forward. NRW would be happy to share this work with you as it approaches its final stages of agreement.

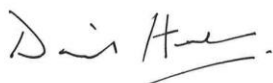
NRW has also invested in driving the overall performance of Water Companies environmental performance forward. 2020 saw Dwr Cymru achieve 4-star compliance (highest standard) across a range of permitted activities monitored by NRW. We annually hold Companies and their board to account via our Performance management meetings.

We are also ensuring that Dwr Cymru and Hafren are investigating and providing solutions relating to both overflows and sewage treatment works where discharges are impacting on the SAC phosphate issues on Welsh rivers.

May I assure you that we are monitoring closely the recently announced commitment by Environment Agency and Ofwat in England to analyse and investigate breaches of permit compliance from wastewater treatment works, and are working with the Environment Agency and Ofwat Wales to determine what action is proposed in light of their findings. Should this require a review to our approach as the investigations in England progress, we will take the required action.

I understand that NRW has been invited to give evidence on this issue to the Committee in February. In the meantime, should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,



Sir David Henshaw
Cadeirydd, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Chair, Natural Resources Wales