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Cornwall Council backs calls for Government water companies to take action on sewage discharges

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The leader of the council will now write to the Secretary of State, South West Water and Environment Agency urging them to do more to end the dumping of sewage into the sea

Cornwall Council has agreed to call on the Government and South West Water (SWW) to address the issue of sewage being discharged into water in Cornwall. The council debated the issue at its full meeting this morning following a number of reports and [a rise in concerns about sewage being discharged into the sea](#) and into rivers.

Liberal Democrat councillors Dominic Fairman and Leigh Frost put forward a motion for the council to take action and urge the Government and SWW to do more to address the problems. There has been an increase in concerns about the issue with [high-profile incidents in Cornwall](#) as show in the picture above and groups such as Surfers Against Sewage have been regularly calling for the Government to do more to take action against water companies when they allow raw sewage to be discharged into the sea.

Cllr Fairman said that he had tabled the motion to give councillors the chance to debate publicly an issue which was key for many people in [Cornwall](#). He said that the Government's response to recent issues had been "woefully inadequate" and said that timescales for improvements were "meaningless" for the public.

Read more: [Government being sued for allowing sewage to be discharged into sea](#)

Cllr Frost said that the council should use its voice to put pressure on water companies and the government to make improvements and "fulfil their obligations to the people of Cornwall".

Labour councillor Jayne Kirkham also supported the motion and said that the River Fal had been one of the most polluted areas with 7,500 hours of discharges being made. She said: "The Conservatives have presided over a doubling of water companies dumping sewage into our waters."

She said that whilst it would take time to fix "broken systems" it was likely that things might happen more quickly if the council put pressure on the Government and water companies.

Pete Mitchell, Cornwall councillor for St Agnes, said that [videos of sewage being discharged into the sea in the village](#) had gone worldwide last month. He said that he knew people who were contacted by people in New York who had seen the footage and were concerned.

He said that there should be concern that people who might have been thinking of coming to Cornwall on holiday might have second thoughts if they saw sewage being discharged into the sea.

The motion called on the government to end all untreated sewage discharges into bathing waters, high priority nature sites and shellfish harvesting waters by 2030. It also called for budgets to be restored to the Environment Agency so that it can carry out an effective testing and monitoring regime.

It was agreed on a vote of all councillors and requires council leader Linda Taylor to write to the Secretary of State, South West Water and the Environment Agency urging action on all the points raised.

A spokesperson for South West Water, said: "We know reducing the use of storm overflows is an important issue for customers, as is the health of our rivers and seas – and it is one of our key priorities too. We are underway with our largest environmental investment programme in 15 years and in April we launched WaterFit to go further and faster. We have been working hard to reduce the impact of storm overflows and in this year's bathing season across 860 miles of coastline, we have reduced spills by 50% on last year. Importantly the duration of those spills has reduced by 75%.

"However, we recognise there is more to do and through WaterFit, we will reduce our use of storm overflows and reduce our impact on rivers by one-third by 2025. WaterFit builds on the progress we have already made. Earlier this year, we achieved 100% coastal bathing water quality for the first time across 860 miles of coastline. Over the next three years to 2025, South West Water is investing over £330 million in its wastewater network, which includes upgrades and improvements to hundreds of overflows across the region.

"As the Council stated today, there is a wide range of influences which affect river and sea quality, including agricultural and urban pollution, and we recognise that to improve the quality of our rivers, we all need to play our part. We continue to work closely with partners across the region, including Cornwall Council, and look forward to hearing from them soon."

They added: "We know our customers were understandably concerned about the discharge on 30 October, but we want to reassure them that the discharge, which led to the discolouration of the bathing water, was not caused by our activity or one of our assets.

"Our teams were in St Agnes on the day and after to investigate the cause of the discharge, as well as to test the impact it had on the water quality. The pipe seen in the video is not a storm overflow, nor is it owned or managed by South West Water. This is an outlet pipe, likely owned by the landowner or the local river authority, that

pulls in multiple sources including from nearby waterways, run-off from agricultural land, as well as from the storm overflow.

“Our investigation showed that the discoloured water was caused by flows of muddy water from a nearby stream, which entered the pipework following a period of heavy rainfall that weekend. While there was a short period of storm overflow activity on 30 October, there was a significant flow of water from the stream, containing mud and dirt from surrounding fields, entering the system upstream of the South West Water pumping station. This resulted in the brown water discharge on 30 October and other discharges the week after at times when the storm overflow was not triggered. We took water quality samples on the day of the discharge and the day after, and the bathing water met its normal, ‘excellent’ quality.

“In St Agnes, we are already speaking with local partners, including the Parish Council, and wildlife trusts to look at potential solutions in the wider catchment to prevent run-off entering the system.”

End of Report

Cornwall Council