



To,
Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you as Executive Member for Climate Change, Flood and Coastal Risk Management at Teignbridge District Council.

All elected members of Teignbridge District Council resolved to declare an Ecological Emergency in 2020, and an Oceans and Coastal Recovery Declaration in Summer 2022. Our declarations have recognised the role the ocean, rivers and coastal waters have in contributing to our work to address climate and ecological emergencies, as well as the wider objectives of a resilient and sustainable economy, the health and wellbeing of our residents and protection of our coastal environments.

We are extremely disappointed and concerned to learn that OFWAT has found it necessary to open an enforcement case against SWW as part of its ongoing investigation into how all wastewater management companies manage their sewerage infrastructure and the number and volumes of discharges into our coastal environments.

Our residents wish to see action from the government to ensure South West Water combat threats to the quality of our water. The Government's current Storm Overflows plan to tackle sewage discharges completely fails to acknowledge the urgency needed to address the problem. Targets stretch to 2050 with over half of the storm overflows still set to be releasing a cocktail of chemicals and sewage into our waterways in 2040. This is simply too slow.

We would urge you to provide the necessary ambition to tackle this issue and to,

- Set meaningful targets and deadlines for water companies to end sewage discharges and introduce a Sewage Tax on water companies profits to fund the cleanup of waterways.
- Reduce the number of licences given to water companies permitting them to discharge sewage into rivers.
- Strengthen Ofwat's powers to monitor the annual financial plans and reports of the water companies in order to compel them to achieve a fair and transparent balance between consumer prices, shareholder dividend, staff remuneration and ongoing long-term investment in storm water infrastructure.

- Add local environmental groups onto water companies' boards.
- Promote a public benefit company model for water companies, so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives must be considered explicitly in the running of the companies.
- Work with local authorities to ensure water companies protect our rivers and seas by:
 - Water companies being required to invest upfront in sewerage infrastructure to reflect environmental objectives in Local Plans and planning applications.
 - Identify powers of local authorities under the statutory duty to promote wellbeing of the area and provide councils with the funding to meet this duty.
 - Cease making cuts to Environment Agency funding and ensure that it has enough staff to significantly improve its monitoring of the threats of inadequate storm-water infrastructure and pollution from sewage and agricultural nitrates.

The wider health of our oceans is also in crisis as confirmed by the government's recent Marine Strategy. An ocean in crisis is bad for our climate, local fishing and tourism industries and for the health, well being and prosperity of our coastal communities. Urgent action is needed now to recover the health of our oceans.

Therefore we further call on the Government to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 by,

- a. Ensuring Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities have the resources they need to effectively research and monitor our growing number of marine protected areas, and to set and enforce appropriate fishing levels that support local economies and deliver environmental sustainability.
- b. Incorporating social scientific evidence and lived experience to improve community co-production of policy and develop more effective and equitable solutions.
- c. Listening to marine scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will:
 - i. Enable the recovery of marine ecosystems rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.
 - ii. Consider levelling up, marine conservation, energy, industrial growth, flood and coastal erosion risk management, climate adaptation and fisheries policy holistically rather than as competing interests.
 - iii. Develop a smarter approach to managing the health of the entire ocean that moves beyond Marine Protected Areas and enables links to be made across sectors towards sustainability.

iv. Establish improved processes for understanding the benefits from ocean management, leaving no doubt the links between this and human lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing.

d. Recognising the value of, and contribute resourcing towards, multi-agency Integrated Coastal Management Partnerships which operate at the local geographic level and are able to respond to issues and opportunities which affect the local maritime environment and adjacent communities.

I am aware that you have previously been very proud to state (as the Keynote Speaker in a national Coastal Forum being chaired by one of our Officers) that you are the only Member of Parliament who's constituency (Suffolk Coastal) directly references the coast. Given this position I would assume our concerns are of great interest and importance to yourself and look forward to your detailed response

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Jackie Hook
Executive Member for Climate Change, Coast and Flood Risk Management
Teignbridge District Council