



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

**Robbie Moore MP**  
**Minister for Water and Rural Growth**

Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
T: +44 (0) 3459 335577  
E: [correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk](mailto:correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk)  
W: [gov.uk/defra](http://gov.uk/defra)

Huw Merriman MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

1 December 2023

## 2023 Bathing Water Classifications

Dear Huw,

The national classifications for the 424 designated bathing waters in England have been published today. Nationally 95.7% of bathing waters have met at least the minimum standard of Sufficient, with 66.4% meeting the highest standard of Excellent.

Each year, the Environment Agency and Defra are mandatorily required under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 to prepare and release the latest bathing water classifications. To achieve this, the Environment Agency uses water samples taken weekly during the bathing season (defined in law as 15 May to 30 September) over a four-year rolling period to make the classifications. As there was no data for 2020 because of a reduction in sampling during the pandemic, this year's classifications will use data from the 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023 bathing seasons. The classification range includes Poor, Sufficient, Good or Excellent.

I write as I have been informed that Bexhill within your constituency has this year been classified as Sufficient.

The bathing water quality at Bexhill is affected by urban diffuse pollution including urban run-off, sewer leakage and misconnections, mainly coming from the Egerton Park Stream, as well as occasional combined sewage overflow discharges.

I would like to assure you that the Environment Agency is working with Southern Water and the local authority to improve the water quality at Bexhill. This includes monitoring and analysing samples from the catchment to identify any trends and provide focus for future work, and investigating potential options for Sustainable Urban Drainage treatment (such as attenuation ponds) in Egerton Park Stream. Rainfall is often an important factor in determining bathing water quality, and, as in 2023 there was higher than average rainfall in much of the country during July and September, this is likely to have affected this year's results. Likewise, I am aware that in some locations bird and dog faeces can have a negative impact on the classification results.

The government is absolutely committed to improving the water quality of our bathing waters at lakes, rivers and coasts around the country for the public to enjoy. Since privatisation, there has been over £2.5 billion invested by English water companies to improve bathing water quality. However, we have been clear that issues with water quality as a result of the current volume of sewage discharges by water companies is unacceptable.

Taking robust action to improve water quality is vital. That is why the government has introduced national policy to specifically improve water quality which will have a beneficial impact on bathing waters. This includes the Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan introduced by the Environment Act 2021, which includes strict targets to drive the largest infrastructure programme in water company history – £60 billion capital investment over 25 years. The targets in the Plan set out that by 2035, water companies will have to improve all storm overflows discharging near designated bathing waters.

The government has also introduced a step change in investment by water companies which is expected between 2025 and 2030 through the next Water Industry Natural Environment Programme (WINEP). This will include significant new investments to improve water quality at bathing waters, ramping up the investment from the last price control to improve hundreds of storm overflows across the country, and investment to install thousands of new state of the art water quality monitors across the country. In addition, the government has also set an ambitious goal to reduce water pollution from farming to help improve the water environment. We have increased the number of inspectors who work with farmers to reduce pollution, resulting in more than 5,000 improvement actions issued in the last financial year to improve farm practices and drive improvements to our environment, of which over 3,000 have been verified as complete.

We are clear that we need to support farmers to make these improvements – recognising the potential costs associated with improvements and their crucial role in our economy and food security. That is why we have also introduced schemes that offer farmers payments and support if they make changes to be more sustainable and improve water quality, like our Environmental Land Management schemes and the Catchment Sensitive Farming advice partnership.

Whilst I am disappointed in the classification of the bathing water within your constituency, I will do all I can to ensure it is improved. It is of course worth noting that of the 424 designated bathing waters in England, 99 have been classified as Good and 281 have been classified as Excellent in 2023. Overall, around 90% of bathing waters are Excellent or Good this year, up from just 76% in 2010 and despite the classification standards becoming stricter in 2015.

Please be assured that this government is committed to improving water quality through more investment, stronger regulation and tougher enforcement to tackle every source of river and sea pollution.

Should you wish to discuss this in more detail, please do contact my office and I would be very happy to meet.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robbie Moore', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**ROBBIE MOORE MP**

Minister for Water and Rural Growth