

Key Lines of Enquiry Responses from Environment Agency

21888 Torbay Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 8 October 2024

Questions:

- 1. Please can you provide the latest statistics on the health of the bathing water and associated water courses for each area within Torbay and details on what action is being taken to improve this.**
- 2. How often do you test the quality of bathing water in Torbay and what action is taken as a result of the testing?**
- 3. How does activity from Torbay impact on the Aller Brook that feeds into the river Teign and how often is that tested and what action is taken as a result?**
- 4. What action is the Environment Agency taking to address poor performing Water Companies? How and when can Torbay residents expect to see the impact of this action?**
- 5. What can Torbay Council, Councillors and our residents do to help improve water quality and reduce pollution?**

Responses:

1. Please can you provide the latest statistics on the health of the water environment for each area within Torbay and details on what action is being taken to improve this.

3. How does activity from Torbay impact on the Aller Brook that feeds into the river Teign and how often is that tested and what action is taken as a result?

Response to questions 1 and 3:

Torbay has one river classified in 2022 under the Water Framework Directive, the Upper Aller Brook. The Upper Aller Brook is designated as having Good Ecological Status.

Outside of Torbay, both the Aller Brook and Lower Aller Brook had classifications in 2022 under the Water Framework Directive, both being designated as having Moderate Ecological Status. The Lower Aller Brook covers the Aller Brook from the Teign to the confluence of the Upper Aller Brook with the Aller Brook. Given the Good Ecological Status of the Upper Aller Brook and the Moderate Status of the Aller Brook upstream of the confluence, it appears that the pressures impacting the ecological status of the Lower Aller Brook are not derived from Torbay and/ or the Upper Aller Brook.

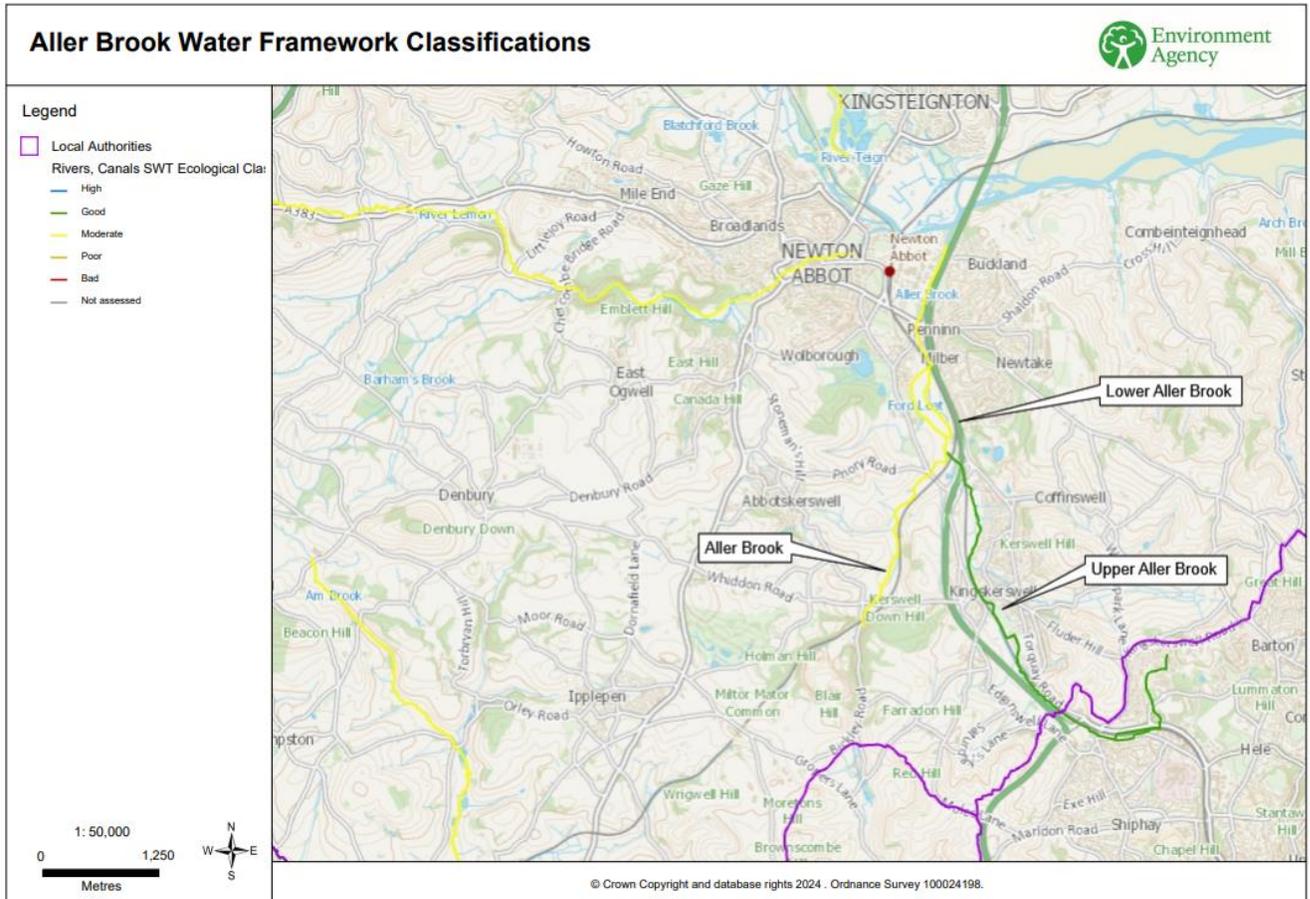
As the Upper Aller Brook has Good Ecological Status, no actions are being taken to improve this. The frequency and sites used to inform this classification are listed below:

Monitoring sites which have been used to classify this water body

Shows which sites were used for classification for which years within each cycle.

| Monitoring Site | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 | Cycle 3 |
|---|------------------------|------------------|---------|
| ALLER BROOK AT ALLER ORCHARD 70611134 | 2012, 2009, 2010, 2011 | 2015, 2016 | |
| 9467 9467 | 2012, 2010, 2011, 2014 | 2015, 2016, 2014 | |

A map of the Aller Brook catchment is shown below:



The two coastal water bodies were also assessed under the Water Environment Regulations (WER) in 2022, Tor Bay as having Good Ecological Status and Lyme Bay West is designated as having Moderate Ecological Status.

The element driving the moderate ecological classification in Lyme Bay West is attributed to Invertebrates.

2. How often do you test the quality of bathing water in Torbay and what action is taken as a result of the testing?

The Environment Agency is required to adhere to the monitoring guidelines outlined in the Bathing Water Regulations. These regulations specify a fixed bathing water season, which runs from 15 May to 30 September.

Monitoring is required to take place within these dates, except for the first sample of the season, which must be taken just before the season starts.

During the bathing season each year, we take between ten and twenty water samples at each of England's designated bathing waters.

In each sample, we test for bacteria that indicate whether faecal matter is present in the water. These are known as faecal indicator organisms (FIOs), and the specific ones we test for are *E. coli* and Intestinal enterococci.

The monitoring results are used to produce a classification scheme, which is set out within the regulations. Each season's samples are combined with up to four years' worth of data from previous seasons to give a bathing water its annual classification.

| BW Reference | Name | Sampling to be taken between May - September |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 23100 | Maidencombe | 10 |
| 23200 | Watcombe | 20 |
| 23300 | Oddicombe | 10 |
| 23400 | Babbacombe | 15 |
| 23501 | Anstey's Cove (Torquay) | 20 |
| 23600 | Meadfoot | 10 |
| 23700 | Beacon Cove | 15 |
| 23800 | Torre Abbey | 20 |
| 23900 | Hollicombe | 20 |
| 24000 | Paignton Preston Sands | 20 |
| 24100 | Paignton Paignton Sands | 20 |
| 24200 | Goodrington | 20 |
| 24300 | Broadsands | 15 |
| 24500 | Breakwater Beach (Shoalstone) | 10 |
| 24600 | St Mary's Bay (Devon) | 10 |

We work together with local partners to improve water quality at Poor or Sufficient bathing waters. In Devon and Cornwall, we have action plans for bathing waters that have deteriorated or have 'at risk' water quality. We use these to investigate sources of pollution and work with partners to rectify problems when possible. In Torbay, the only Sufficient bathing water is Goodrington and we have been working very closely with Torbay Council, South West Water and other stakeholders on this. Please see Goodrington action plan for more information on actions.

4. What action is the Environment Agency taking to address poor performing Water Companies? How and when can Torbay residents expect to see the impact of this action?

The Environment Agency is improving how we regulate water companies. Having secured an additional £55m of funding from government and water company permits, the Environment Agency is investing in a bigger, more specialised workforce and setting aside £15 million for new digital and monitoring systems. As a result, the number of officers regulating South West Water has increased with more compliance checks at water company sites (including unannounced inspections) being made and data specialists being used to translate storm overflow monitoring data into regulatory intelligence.

We are also ensuring all water companies have a Pollution Incident Reduction Plan with thorough root-cause-analysis of incidents informing actions and clear targets for pollution reduction. Our officers meet with South West Water to monitor delivery of these plans, which have been proposed, via the new Water (Special Measures) Bill to become statutory plans.

We assesses and record every pollution incident reported, responding to every incident where there is a significant risk to the environment. We have taken tough action against those companies which are breaking the rules and last year South West Water was fined more than £2 million for a series of environmental offences across Devon and Cornwall spanning a period of four years. We are also conducting the largest ever criminal investigation into potential widespread non-compliance by all of the water and sewerage companies at thousands of sewage treatment works.

Water company business plans also play an important role in ensuring improvements are made at water company assets to improve capacity and treatment, reducing spills to the environment. Draft plans for the current price review 'PR24' propose £26bn of expenditure by water companies to meet statutory environmental obligations. Spending on storm overflows will increase to £10bn which will mean upgrades to 2,500 storm overflows which Ofwat says will reduce spills by 44%.

The Government has introduced the Water (Special Measures) Bill to increase enforcement powers for both the Environment Agency and Ofwat and drive improvements in performance and culture of the water industry. The Bill represents a significant step forward in transforming how we regulate the water industry. The Bill gives us the opportunity to step up our regulation with these additional powers to impose tougher and faster penalties, helping us hold water companies and their bosses to account more easily and fix the broken water system.

We work hard to hold water companies to account and expose poor performance and have set clear performance expectations for water companies since 2013. However, all water companies need to take responsibility to tackle their own specific performance issues and it is their responsibility to comply with the law.

5. What can Torbay Council, Councillors and our residents do to help improve water quality and reduce pollution?

- 1) Report serious pollution by calling 0800 80 70 60 ([Report an environmental incident - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)).
- 2) Don't pour fat, oil or grease (FOG) down sinks/drains or into the sewer network as this can contribute towards sewer blockages: [Protecting the network | South West Water](#).
- 3) Check your household (or business) plumbing is not polluting the environment: [Plumbing and drainage misconnections | Water UK](#) and [Misconnections - check my property 0.pdf \(water.org.uk\)](#)

Residents can follow recommendations from the water company about reducing blockages in the sewer system and reducing excess rainwater into the network.

[Caring for your sewerage | South West Water](#)

Residents can volunteer to become citizen scientists here - [Westcountry CSI - Westcountry Rivers Trust \(wrt.org.uk\)](#)