

Bathing Water Newsletter

Welcome back to the bathing water newsletter, with a round-up of developments and events affecting bathing waters and the wider water environment.



Fistral Beach, Cornwall Photo credit: Getty

This edition of the newsletter covers:

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1. Bathing season 2018

Nine beaches have been added to the list of bathing waters this year, eight in Cornwall and one in Bournemouth. There is detailed information in the news release about the start of the bathing season on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bonus-beaches-leads-to-record-number-of-swimming-spots>

Two bathing waters have been removed from the list: Silloth, because usage for bathing is very low, and Instow, where permanent advice against bathing has been introduced.

An assessment by the Environment Agency concluded that water quality at Instow cannot be improved to meet the standard for “Sufficient” classification due to its location on an estuary in an agricultural catchment. Regulation 13(2) of the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 allows bathing waters where achieving “Sufficient” classification is technically infeasible to be de-designated and permanent advice against bathing issued. Instow is the first bathing water where this provision has been applied.

Summaries of the responses to the consultations on this year’s designations and de-designations can be seen on the bathing water page of gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bathing-waters>

We’re now reviewing the list of bathing waters for the 2019 season. Please contact the bathing water team at the address at the end of this newsletter if you are considering applying for a site in your area to be designated or for an existing bathing water to be removed from the list.

2. Bathing Water classifications

The water quality classification system of “Excellent”, “Good”, “Sufficient” or “Poor” has been introduced since our last newsletter and is now in its fourth year. The results to date have been consistent, with a slight drop in 2017 following the wet summer. The statistics reflect the improvements that have been made to bathing water quality since the revised water quality standards were agreed. In 2007 the Environment Agency assessed that 29 bathing waters would have been classified as “Poor” if the tighter standards had been in force then and in 2012, following the extremely wet summer of that year, there would have been 48 “Poor” classifications.

There is still work to do, however, and the recently introduced “farming rules for water” aim to encourage the reduction of water pollution from agriculture, which will benefit bathing waters in rural areas.

	2015		2016		2017	
Classification	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Excellent	264	63.6	287	69.5	271	65.6
Good	110	26.5	98	23.7	109	26.4
Sufficient	29	7	22	5.3	26	6.3
Poor	12	2.9	6	1.5	7	1.7
Total	415		413		413	

3. Signage generator for bathing water sign templates

Local councils have to display public information about water quality at all designated bathing waters throughout the bathing season, from 15 May to 30 September. To help with this task the Environment Agency has developed a new signage generator function for the Bathing Water Data Explorer, which offers a choice of two templates that can be downloaded to create a complete sign or to use for the bathing water section of a larger beach information sign.

The “simple template” shows all the legally required information for the sign, while the “enhanced template” gives the same information with the option to add extra details (e.g. a map of the bathing water, previous classifications, contact details and logos).

You can find the templates on the signage generator or on links from individual profiles on the Data Explorer:

Signage generator:

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/signage>

Bathing Water Data Explorer:

<http://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>

4. Pollution risk forecasting

The Environment Agency’s Pollution Risk Forecasting system has now been running for four years and has become a key component of informing bathers on days when advice against bathing is issued. The system uses the relationship between rainfall, tide and water quality to produce warnings when there is an increased risk of reduced water quality following heavy rain, or at some sites a high tide.

The system produces daily forecasts for 153 bathing waters at 8.30am between May and September, which are displayed each day on the Data Explorer. At 135 of these sites, forecasts are also sent to beach managers via text message or e-mail so that warnings can be displayed on beach signage. Thirty-five have LED matrix signs which automatically show

the daily forecast and change colour in response to a warning. At the remainder of sites, warnings are posted on beach signage whenever a forecast is issued.

The Environment Agency may disregard samples taken during a predicted short term pollution event for the purposes of water quality classification where the public has been warned about the risk of lower water quality. This applies to up to 15% of the total number of samples taken. So in addition to helping to protect the public, the system can help to improve the bathing water's classification.

5. Environment Agency review of bathing water sampling

In 2017 the Environment Agency made a break with the historic convention of taking 20 classification samples per season at all bathing waters, which was required to ensure compliance with the original 1976 Bathing Water Directive. The new assessment criteria do not require a fixed number of samples to be taken. An assessment carried out by the Environment Agency showed that the water quality at around a third of bathing waters is so consistent that a robust classification can be achieved even with a reduced sampling frequency. The Environment Agency therefore made a decision to only take the number of samples actually necessary to make a classification and at bathing waters where 20 samples were not needed a sampling frequency of 15, 10 or five samples was set as appropriate to achieve a robust classification.

The sampling frequency for each bathing water is shown on its profile on the Data Explorer.



Boscombe Pier, Bournemouth Photo credit: ThinkStock

6. Bathing water conference 2017

The 2017 Bathing Water Conference was held in November at Wrexham Glendwr University and was attended by a wide range of delegates from local authorities, government regulators, the water and farming industries, academia, environmental NGOs and others.

The event began with a visit on Monday 20th November to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, a pioneering example of civil engineering from the early 19th century, now set within a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A workshop on Microbial Source Tracking on the same evening was well attended and the conference officially opened on Tuesday 21st November with a presentation from Gerwyn Evans of Visit Wales, focusing on the “Year of the Sea” and highlighting the importance of the coastline and high-quality bathing waters in promoting sustainable growth in tourism in Wales.

There was a full programme of 24 presentations over one and a half days, with opportunities for discussion at the end of each session. The presentations considered developments in the science of water quality and its relationship to public health, and the practical challenges involved in managing beaches and inland bathing waters. A record number of local authorities sent delegates to the conference and speakers from two councils gave an insight into dealing with the problems affecting their bathing waters: one was managing a beach with a “Poor” classification and the other was using innovative ways of deterring gulls and had also developed a range of information signs to manage the presence of dogs on beaches. Wider context was given by presentations from Hannah Denton of Brighton University on current research into the benefits to mental well-being of open water swimming and JoJo Mains of the RNLI on beach usage and water safety issues.

The presentations from the conference, together with those from the previous two conferences in Edinburgh (2015) and Southport (2013) are available on the website of UK Water Industry Research Ltd. We would like to thank UKWIR for providing this space.

<https://www.ukwir.org/bathing-waters-2017>

7. New farming rules for water

In April 2018, new statutory rules for all farmers in England to tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture came into force. The new “farming rules for water” introduce a risk-based approach, bringing farmers up to a common standard of good practice that should significantly reduce water pollution. Farmers are required to assess the risks and opportunities of their farm and to plan each application of manure or fertilisers to meet, but not exceed, soil and crop needs, so that there is no surplus which might pollute water courses. They must also consider soil and weather conditions. Further rules require farmers to avoid soil erosion and run-off from livestock poaching (soil compaction) and from livestock located close to water courses. The rules are being implemented by the Environment Agency, providing farmers with all the information they need to meet the standard. Enforcement will be proportionate and will include civil sanctions (such as fixed penalty notices) and criminal prosecution.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rules-for-farmers-and-land-managers-to-prevent-water-pollution>



Photo credit: ThinkStock

8. Environmental Principles and Governance Bill consultation

Defra has launched a consultation on the contents of the Environmental Principles and Governance Bill, which will establish a new body to hold government to account for environmental outcomes after the UK leaves the European Union.

The consultation runs until 2 August 2018 and the proposals apply to England and reserved matters¹ only. The consultation documents and an overview of the process can be accessed here:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/eu/environmental-principles-and-governance/>

9. Environment Agency Working Together consultation

On 22 June the Environment Agency launched the Working Together consultation, which seeks to give stakeholders the opportunity to comment on proposals to update the existing river basin management plans, which were published in 2016 and must be updated by the end of 2021. The consultation sets out the steps and consultation measures to be taken in connection with updating these plans. It seeks stakeholder views on:

- how people can get involved in the review and update of the plans;
- the proposed timetable and content of the work programme to review and update the plans;
- how other plans and strategies affect, or are affected by, river basin management plans;
- whether all relevant stakeholders have been identified.

The consultation closes on 22 December 2018 and can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/river-basin-planning-working-together>

¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/devolved-and-reserved-matters/>

10. European Environment Agency bathing water report 2017

The European Environment Agency's annual bathing water report was published on 29 May, giving detailed information about bathing water quality across Europe in 2017. There is a report for each EU country on the Agency's website, with an interactive map and data viewer to find information about individual bathing waters:

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/good-news-for-holiday-makers>

If you have any comments or enquiries about bathing waters, we can be contacted at:

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