

# New Environment Bill provisions to tackle storm overflows

The Environment Bill will include new legal duties to tackle sewage discharges into rivers and help protect our waterways.

Three new measures on storm overflows, [announced last month by Defra](#), will be added by government amendment to the Environment Bill later this year. The Bill will return to Parliament shortly after the Queen's Speech, with the new legal duties due to be on the statute book by the Autumn.

During wet weather storm overflows release diluted wastewater into rivers, preventing a combination of sewage and rain from overloading the sewers. However, their use has increased in recent years as climate change has led to greater rainfall and water infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth.

The legal duties added to the Environment Bill will drive the changes needed to improve our water environment. The three duties are:

- a duty on government to publish a plan by September 2022 to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows;
- a duty on government to report to Parliament on progress on implementing the plan; and
- a duty on water companies to publish data on storm overflow operation on an annual basis.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The concerning issue of untreated sewage in our rivers demands urgent action. The inclusion of these measures in the Environment Bill will ensure steps are taken to tackle unacceptable levels of pollution.

While we cannot get rid of storm overflows overnight, we are working hard to accelerate progress in this area to protect our precious water environment and wildlife.

In addition to new legislation, the recently established Storm Overflows Taskforce has agreed to set a long term goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows and has already taken steps to improve monitoring and transparency, which is crucial.

The Storm Overflows Taskforce was set up in August 2020 to bring the government, water industry, regulators and environmental groups together to drive improvements in this area.

Through the Taskforce, water companies have committed to increase the number

of overflows they will improve over the next five years and earlier this year the Taskforce committed to a new long-term goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows.

Over 800 overflows will be investigated and nearly 800 improved between 2020 and 2025.

The government expects to consult on potential options for ways to eliminate harm from storm overflows to take forward later this year.