

# WaterFit – Our plan for healthy rivers and seas

Annual Update  
July 2024

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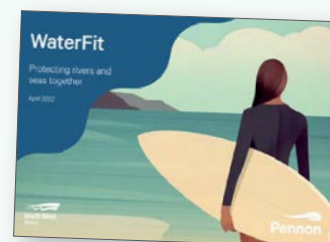
## About this document

In recent years, improving river and sea quality has rightfully taken centre stage as water based recreation has become much more popular, and as our knowledge about our water systems improve through enhanced monitoring.

In April 2022 we launched **WaterFit** as part of our plans to work harder and faster to improve water quality at rivers and beaches in our region. WaterFit is our three-year 2022-2025 plan to protect and enhance the South West's water for future generations. WaterFit sets out how we will work with partners, customers, visitors and local communities to protect and enhance the South West's rivers and seas. This connects with our longer term plans to 2030 and beyond, which we are currently agreeing with our regulators.

Two years on, we have been making good progress, which we summarise in this report.

We are part of Pennon, a FTSE 250 listed company, providing clean water and wastewater services across the South West. In our Bournemouth, Bristol and SES supply zones we are a water only company, therefore this document only applies to our South West zone, where we are also the wastewater provider.



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# Introduction

## Introduction

### **We all want the same thing – to improve water quality.**

Our WaterFit programme targets significant investment to 2025 to further protect river and coastal water quality. Two years into our plan and we continue to make progress against all of our pledges through additional investment in our region.

Everyone who works for, and with, South West Water takes the responsibility for the health of the region's rivers seriously. We continue to increase investment in the region's infrastructure as part of our ongoing commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Two years on we have delivered much, learnt a lot and remain resolute in ensuring that everyone who lives in the South West or visits the South West can have confidence in their rivers and seas.

The South West is home to 860 miles of coastline and nearly four in every 10 coastal bathing waters. It is the premier destination in the UK for beaches, with the population swelling by three times in the summer from visitors and with 80% of those visiting coming specifically to enjoy the coast.

Beaches also provide amenity in the form of fishing and shellfish industries. Economic prosperity and water quality are closely interlinked in our region, perhaps more so than any other.

Today 100% of bathing waters in our region meet tough water quality standards. This hasn't always been the case and it's easy to forget how far we have come over the past 30 years. Sewage from whole towns was once sent untreated to the sea and only 29% of beaches passed the most stringent water quality tests. Today, by investing over £13 billion through upgrades like operation 'clean sweep', c.97% of sewage is treated and our growing list of bathing waters consistently meet high standards.

In consecutive regulatory periods we have continued to invest in improving water quality, with significant investments to reduce phosphorus in our rivers, increasing coverage of UV treatment at sensitive waters and reducing the impact of storm overflows at bathing and shellfish waters. We have reduced pollution incidents significantly over the past decade.

But we need to do more, much more, to keep pace with growing customer expectations and new environmental requirements. There are now over 1,370 storm overflows with spill data monitors installed on our sewage network.

We now have 100% monitoring of our storm overflows, meaning we know more about how it operates than ever before and we can see that many are being used too frequently. We need to invest heavily to modernise our sewer network and respond to the challenge of climate change, which we are already seeing have a major impact on rainfall patterns.



**100%**  
of bathing waters in our  
region meet tough water  
quality standards

**1,370**  
storm overflows with spill  
data monitors installed on  
our sewage network



With an open sewer system where not everything is within our control, improving water quality and preventing pollution is no easy task. We are determined to invest significantly more in our sewer network, join forces with partners and customers and find innovative new ways to rise to the challenge.

**£330 million**  
investment

WaterFit recognised the need to respond quickly to changing customer expectations and better information. It sets out our plans from 2022-2025 to go further and faster to protect and enhance our region for future generations as part of a £330 million investment to deliver our six commitments, over three years. This document provides an update two years into our programme.



**WaterFit**  
Protecting rivers and seas together

**WaterFit** outlines how we will play our part, working with partners, customers, visitors and local communities to protect and enhance the South West's waters for future generations. Our six **WaterFit** enablers are:

- ### 1 Nurturing healthy rivers and seas

We will:

  - reduce our impact on rivers by 2025, by one third and put forward plans to target zero harm by 2030
  - reduce spills from storm overflows to an average of 20 per year by 2025
  - maintain our excellent bathing water quality standards, all year round, so that everyone can enjoy our 800 miles of coastline
  - deliver zero serious pollutions by 2025, and target a year on year reduction in all pollutions
- ### 2 Putting nature on everyone's doorstep

We will:

  - make bathing water accessible, less than an hour's drive, for 100% of our residents and visitors
  - provide access to our 40 inland lakes and reservoirs, so that local communities can continue enjoying them for health and recreation
  - achieve the region's first bathing quality river, using learning from our current pilots on the rivers Dart and Tavy
- ### 3 Creating and restoring habitats

We will:

  - stop pollutants from 120,000 hectares of regional farmland getting into rivers and seas by 2025, working with local partners
  - restore an additional 1,000 hectares of peatlands by 2025, to create new habitats improve river quality and reduce flooding
  - plant a quarter of a million trees by 2025, to help combat climate change, support river health and create new wildlife habitats
- ### 4 Inspiring our local champions

We will:

  - donate 25% of our Community Fund to local groups that share our passion for river and sea health
  - launch our WaterFit Warriors programme, to inspire thousands of water quality champions in schools and communities across the region
  - share Progress with our customers through our unique WaterShare+ scheme at quarterly public meetings and our annual Customer AGM
- ### 5 Creating a sustainable future

We will:

  - work collaboratively on the building of new developments in our region, to help us manage our network
  - back the ban on non-flushable or plastic-containing wet wipes, to help prevent blockages
  - work with our 10 million visitors, and 2.3 million customers, so they understand the important role they play in protecting our region, through our Love Your Loo campaign
- ### 6 Putting people in control

We will:

  - work with partners to provide water quality information for residents and visitors, making it easily accessible on our website by the end of this year
  - help people understand river health, by sharing real-time river water quality information, just as we do for our bathing waters, by 2023
  - provide 100% monitor coverage at our treatment works and on our storm overflows, by 2023



**Business Plan**  
2025-2030

Our plans to improve rivers and seas don't stop in 2025. Through our PR24 business plan we have set out our intention to invest a total of £4.5 billion between 2025 and 2030 – which is almost 1.6 times the level agreed with Ofwat for the current five year regulatory cycle. These plans to 2030 are currently being reviewed by our regulators.

# Background

## Our wastewater network

Our wastewater network is large and complex and has developed over many years. We take wastewater from homes and businesses, as well as rainwater from rooftops, driveways, roads and fields. We transport this through 23,000 km of sewers (enough to stretch from Land's End to Australia) and over 1,200 pumping stations to our 655 wastewater treatment works. We treat this wastewater to a high standard before returning it to rivers and the sea – this is an important part of the water cycle.

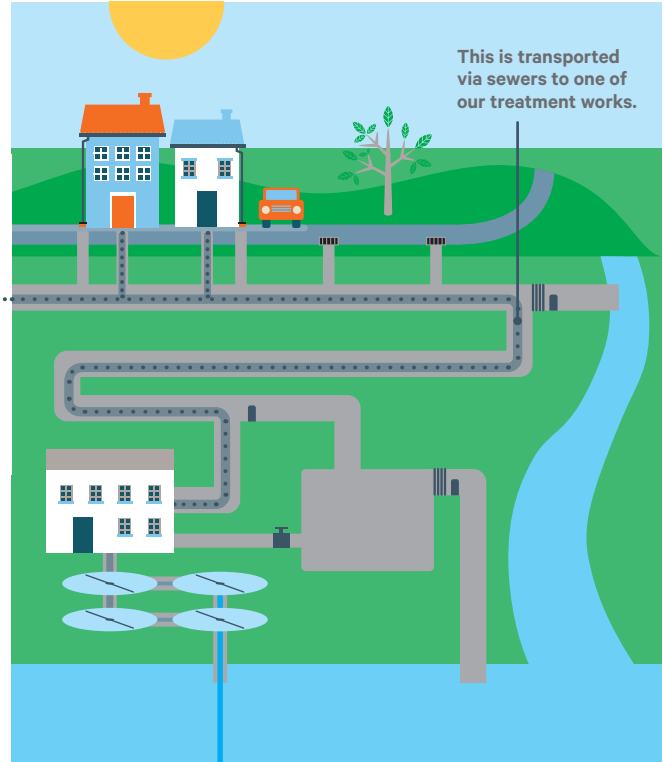
We treat c.625 million litres of wastewater a day – this is enough to fill the equivalent of 250 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Since Clean Sweep we have seen flows in the network increase by 25% as businesses, developers, highways and local authorities have the automatic right to connect to our networks, and increase the amount of road and surface run-off entering our system.

Installing monitors across our network means that we can see when and for how long overflows are operating. We can see the impact of rainfall, housing growth, visitors, wet wipes and other unflushables on the network – and we can put in place plans to address the impact on overflows. Whilst water quality in seas and rivers has been steadily improving over the last thirty years as a result of this investment, there is still much to do.

It's not just about building new assets, we're also building on our strong relationships developed through our Upstream Thinking catchment management initiative as we look to protect rivers and boost biodiversity.

Whether it's the surface water that runs off roofs, roads and driveways, to the wastewater that comes from your toilets, sinks, showers and pools – whatever comes into our network needs to be treated.



This is transported via sewers to one of our treatment works.

The quality of treated wastewater is closely monitored throughout the process and we have strict environmental consents to comply with.

### Spotlight

#### Impact of rainfall and climate change

Here in the UK, we're famed for talking about the weather – but recently we've been talking about it more than usual.

Across the South West Region, 2023 was the fifth wettest year on record, with a 34% increase in rainfall from 2022 and we experienced 50% more rainfall than the long-term average in the second half-of the year, peaking at 130% in July. This also reflected the impact of ten named storms, and the South West Region experienced further days of precipitation-related yellow weather warnings.

Climate change is unfolding before our eyes: it's a sobering statistic that five of the 10 warmest Februarys have been within the last six years.



### Our role in improving water quality

River health is determined by many different factors and sectors – private drainage, highways drainage, rural run-off and river flooding all contribute to overloading our network and systems.

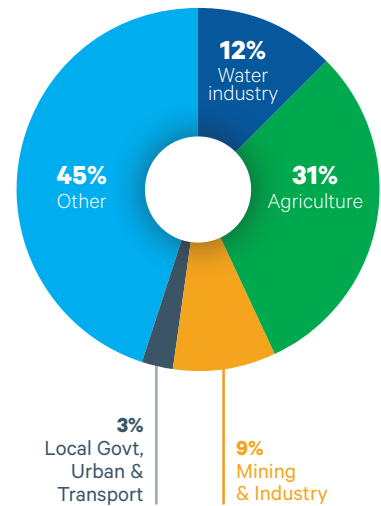
One of the tools that we use to understand the impact that we have on rivers is the Environment Agency’s measurement of river health, known as the ‘Reasons for Not Achieving Good Ecological Status’ (RNAGS). All rivers are assessed for their ecological status, and all of those that do not achieve at least ‘Good’ status, must have a reason why, attributed back to the industry or activity responsible.

Our operations as a whole, across water supply and treatment, as well as wastewater collection, treatment and disposal, accounts for 12.6% of the RNAGS listed by the Environment Agency. We set ourselves the target to reduce our impact to less than 12% by the end of 2025 – and we are on track to meet this target having started at 19% in 2019.

We know that an effective way to protect river health is to reduce the number and frequency of storm overflow discharges, whilst also delivering catchment management with the farming community to manage soil erosion in the catchment and to improve land drainage.

### Reasons for not achieving ‘Good’ status in the South West Water area

Cycle 3 (August 2022)  
RNAG summary



Source: Environment Agency



## Storm overflows

Storm overflows, also known as Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), are built into the sewerage network to allow excess rainwater to escape when sewers become full during wet weather. They do this to protect properties from flooding from the mixture of sewage and rainwater backing up to homes. Storm overflows have not been routinely built into sewers since the 1960s, but over 1,600 exist on our network and over 14,000 remain in England.

They are much less environmentally harmful than many other sources of pollution like sewage from treatment works or agricultural run-off, but can still cause harm and affect the enjoyment of many rivers and beaches. The complete removal and replacement of storm overflows would require an entire new sewer network at a cost of up to £600 billion across England, adding up to £1,000 to the annual household bill. The work required would also be hugely disruptive, requiring extensive roadworks and construction sites over many decades.

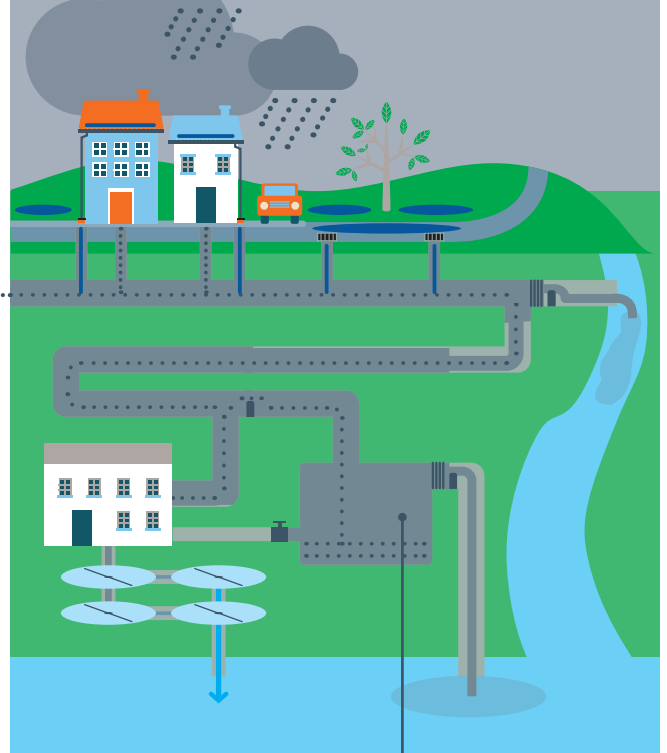
However we agree that the current level of usage of storm overflows is unacceptable and customers and communities are rightly concerned and disappointed. We are too – but we will fix this as quickly as we can, with the help of our investors.

Over three years, 49 overflows are being addressed as part of WaterFit plans.

A short video about storm overflows can be found [here](#)



During wet weather rainfall runoff from buildings and roads enters the network and mixes with household waste in a combined sewer.



Storm overflows release automatically if the capacity of the system is exceeded due to heavy rainfall, relieving pressure on the network. These releases are more than 95% water.

Treatment works can become full with extra rainwater. This excess wastewater is stored in a storm tank.

## Pollution incidents

A pollution incident occurs when contaminants flow into the water environment from pipes, sewers and equipment. These incidents are defined as Category 1 to 3 by the Environment Agency:

- Category 1 have a serious, extensive or persistent impact on the environment, people or property
- Category 2 have a lesser, yet significant, impact
- Category 3 have a minor or minimal impact on the environment, people or property with only a limited or localised effect on water quality.

We have made significant progress in reducing the number of pollution events since 2020 and continue to drive this activity, as we know we need to go further. The whole of the South West Water team are focused on achieving these improvements to the environment that we all love and share.

# Progress – two years on

Two years ago, we launched WaterFit, our plan for healthy rivers and seas as part of c.£100 million of annual investment up to 2025 focused on the protection of our 860 miles of coastline and rivers in the South West.

Our continued investment in our WaterFit programme is delivering on reducing storm overflow releases (excluding wet weather-related incidents) and improving river and coastal water quality, creating and restoring habitats, and inspiring local champions to improve water quality through schools and communities. We are maintaining serious pollutions at their lowest level, providing access to high standard bathing water across our region's coasts and inland waters and our catchment management programme is tackling raw water quality to increase resource availability in 80% of our drinking water catchments.

With 100% monitoring of storm overflows now in place, a highlight has been the launch of WaterFit Live last year, giving customers and visitors live information about the region's bathing beaches, storm overflows as well as the detailed investments we are making to reduce overflow spills across the region's coastline by 2025, with 49 beaches prioritised. Through #YourBeachYourSayOurInvestment, we are empowering customers and communities in working together to plan our next phase of improvements.

Despite significant investment, performance improvements were masked by extreme wet weather, which heavily challenged our network. Across the South West Region 2023 was the fifth wettest year on record, with a 34% increase in rainfall from 2022 and we experienced 50% more rainfall than the long-term average in the second half-of the year, peaking at 130% in July. This also reflected the impact of ten named storms, and the South West Region experienced further days of precipitation-related yellow weather warnings.

This extraordinary weather has triggered an increase in the use of storm overflows, operating to protect thousands of homes and businesses from flooding. Regrettably, the number of pollution incidents also increased.

Despite the challenging weather conditions, two years on we have made good progress on the six pledges underpinning WaterFit, whilst accepting there is more to do.



**c.£100 million**  
annual investment  
up to 2025



“

**I have a young son and there are concerns with climate change and how that's going to affect our future generations and how the impact we are having on the environment now is going to affect them.**

SWW customer, Cornwall, 20-45

”



# WaterFit pledges – two years on

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## Nurturing healthy rivers and seas

Our region is known for its long coastline and bodies of water. We need to take care over the quality of water within our rivers and seas and take steps to improve it. Tackling the root causes of the remaining incidents helps reduce the number of spills and pollution incidents into our rivers and seas for the long-term.

### Monitoring our commitments



**Reduce our impact on rivers by 2025, by one third as part of putting forward plans to target zero harm**



**Maintain our excellent bathing water quality standards, all year round, so that everyone can enjoy our 860 miles of coastline, whatever the time of year**



**Reduce spills from storm overflows to an average of 20 per year per overflow by 2025**

**Deliver zero serious pollutions by 2025 and target a year-on-year reduction in all pollutions**

We are seeing **tangible benefits** from our interventions

### What have we done so far?

Over the past year we have invested in a number of schemes to improve the quality of our rivers and seas. We focused on improving 49 of 151 beaches through our WaterFit programme.

To tackle pollution incidents, our key initiatives included acceleration of additional telemetry on our sewer network (including 12,000 sewer level monitors and deployment of AI technology), continuation of our 'hotspot' investment programme at problematic locations and completion of a proactive rising mains replacement programme.

There were c.80 interventions delivered in 2023 to address storm overflow spills and these actions will continue to support reductions into 2024. We are seeing tangible benefits from our interventions which are focused on not only increasing storage but reducing the water entering our systems through groundwater infiltration and surface water separation.

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Case study

Storm overflows and pollutions

We have been increasing storm storage capacity at sites across our region to continue to reduce the number of spills each year.

**Hatherleigh**

New storage tank

Prior to the project being completed the site had no existing storm storage. Following agreement with the Environment Agency, a below-ground storm tank with a capacity of 120m<sup>3</sup> was installed at the end of Q1 2023; this was a year ahead of the original regulatory deadline. As part of the programme a new inlet pumping station control kiosk and instrumentation for the storm tank were also installed.

The investment has led to a c.90% year-on-year reduction in spills in calendar year 2023, with this trend continuing into Q1 2024. This is set against a backdrop of increasing frequency and volume of rainfall since installation.



**Chittlehamholt**

New balancing tank

Completed at the end of Q4 2023, the project comprised the installation of a balancing tank with a capacity of 62m<sup>3</sup> to reduce flows during periods of high rainfall, and an intervention to remove an unpermitted connection to the sewer network which materially increased flow into the system.

The combination of the investment made and action taken by South West Water has led to a c.70% year-on-year reduction in spills in Q1 2024.



**Beals Mill**

New rising main control infrastructure

Beals Mill has historically been a site where we have experienced our highest number of spills; hence it was at the top of our list of engineering priorities this year.

A number of interventions to reduce infiltration of groundwater into the sewer network have been completed in the year. These include the replacement of the rising main on the network, the rehabilitation of 31 manholes within the area and 600 million metres of new sewer lining.

Attention now moves to ancillary works, to ensure the full spill reduction benefits are achieved.



**Bere Alston**

Bere Alston Wastewater Treatment Works

The investment at Bere Alston has focused on reducing groundwater infiltration into the sewer network and removing the flow of surface water from the combined drainage and sewer network in the area.

Works included the installation of 1,640 million metres of new sewer lining, the rehabilitation of 60 manholes, 245 dig-down repairs to pipework and the separation of three areas of surface water from the combined system.



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Case study

Water infiltration

Water infiltration into our sewers means that our sewers have to cope with increased flows and we also need to treat more through our treatment works. These flows can overwhelm our sewers and cause damage to our assets.

To help tackle the issue, we have undertaken an extensive programme of CCTV surveys of our sewers to check the condition of the sewers and whether water is getting in from outside.

Our teams use CCTV equipment and specialist drones also manually inspect sewers where possible. Teams need to be specially trained as this is complex work in confined spaces between 2m and 15m deep underground.

If water infiltration is found to occur, engineers have multiple methods to repair or replace sections of the sewer – including specialist resin injection, render coating and relining of pipes.

Over the past 12 months we've surveyed over 150,000km of sewers, with targeted repairs to over 36km.

Operators inflating the sewer liner



Blue-light (UV) curing the liner

# 100% bathing water quality

for the 3rd consecutive year



On meeting water quality requirements for discharges from our wastewater treatment works, we experienced some challenges at individual sites over the summer of 2023/24, however we took immediate action to contain issues with activities including reedbed surveys and remediation, enhanced targeted maintenance and enhanced monitoring and review of Critical Asset Plans. We have enhanced our action plans across our treatment works, including regular reviews with the Environment Agency taking place. We are focused on delivering our 2024 target, with no wastewater failures in the first four months of the year.

Despite the exceptional rainfall over the summer, we maintained 100% bathing water quality for the third consecutive year. Water is regularly tested for bacteria by the Environment Agency between May and September in England and Wales. These periods are when most bathers will use the water and therefore represent 'the bathing season'. Bacteria can get into the water from a number of sources including; animal manure, road run off, sewage and wildlife. Bathing Waters are categorised as 'excellent', 'good', 'sufficient' or 'poor' based on bacteria levels. In 2023 there were 151 Environment Agency designated bathing waters in our region including one new bathing water at Plymouth Firestone Bay, which was designated in March 2023. A further six bathing waters (one in Dorset and five in Devon) have been designated for 2024.

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**Spotlight**

**‘Green First’ storm overflow investment**

In the development of our storm overflow investment programme, we have adopted the principle of ‘Green First’, which is to adopt nature-based solutions and natural flood management solutions wherever possible and practicable to do so. These types of approaches work alongside natural processes to reduce the amount of rainwater entering our sewers and slowing the flow of water through the environment. We know this approach is important to our customers and we’ll be working alongside many of our stakeholders to use their expertise to help us deliver these solutions.

This is in contrast to ‘grey’ solutions. These are more traditional engineering solutions which will either increase the capacity of the system by ensuring sewers and works can hold and process more load or by building storage in the network and at works that can hold rainwater and sewage until we can return it back to the environment safely. This is a solution that to some extent treats the symptom only, rather than the cause, and is not a long term sustainable solution to changing weather – but it can provide a quick and certain step change.



“  
**Traditional engineered solutions should be used for high impact/urgent solutions, but nature-based solutions should be prioritised for all others, where feasible.**  
”  
Stakeholder at DWMP workshop

**Spotlight**

**Our Storm Overflow Action Plan**



National Storm Overflows Plan



Click here to see the National Storm Overflows Plan [interactive map](#)

In March 2024, we were one of the nine water companies in England that published a National Storm Overflows Plan setting out how the sector will meet or exceed all Government targets – this is the most expansive programme for overflows in the world.

The National Storm Overflows Plan is an interactive map, which shows the current plan for every single storm overflow in England. Whilst companies can have different ways of reporting spills, the map allows users to look at overflows across the whole sector, as well as filtering by company, catchment, river basin and type of water body, among others. This also provides a high-level view of planned investment, forecast impact, and expected solution.

The data should be considered as a snapshot in time, and investment and projects will continue to evolve as we all work through our proposals with regulators and government ahead of our plans coming into effect from next year.

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# Putting nature on everyone's doorstep

Our customers and visitors regularly use the water environment (beaches, lakes, rivers or reservoirs) for recreational purposes and support the protection of the local environment and measures to improve biodiversity. Steps to improve water quality, boost nature, and provide readily accessible recreation spaces is important for customers' physical and mental wellbeing.

## Monitoring our commitments



- ✓ **Make bathing water accessible, less than an hour's drive, for 100% of our residents and visitors**
- ✓ **Provide access to our 40 inland lakes and reservoirs, so that local communities can continue enjoying them for health and recreation**
- ✓ **Achieve the region's first bathing quality river, using learnings from our current pilots on the rivers Dart and Tavy**

Customers & visitors **never more than an hour away** from a bathing water

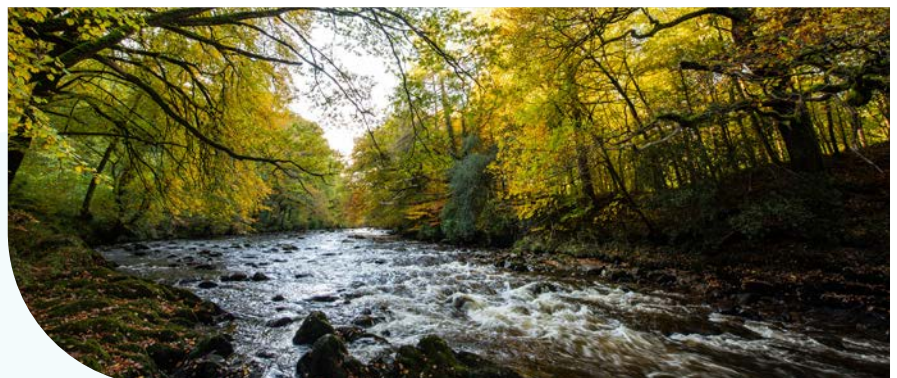
## What have we done so far?

Our region has over a third of the nation's bathing waters and it is important that we protect these vital recreational areas.

We continue to progress rivers into bathing waters, with our River Dart and Tavy pilot studies complete, allowing communities to successfully seek designation on four stretches of river.

We provide access to our 40 inland lakes and reservoirs so that local communities can continue enjoying them for health and recreation – used by two million visitors a year.

All of this means that any customer or visitor is never more than an hour away from a bathing water, with nature and recreation on everyone's doorsteps.



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# Investigating river water quality



River Dart,  
Devon

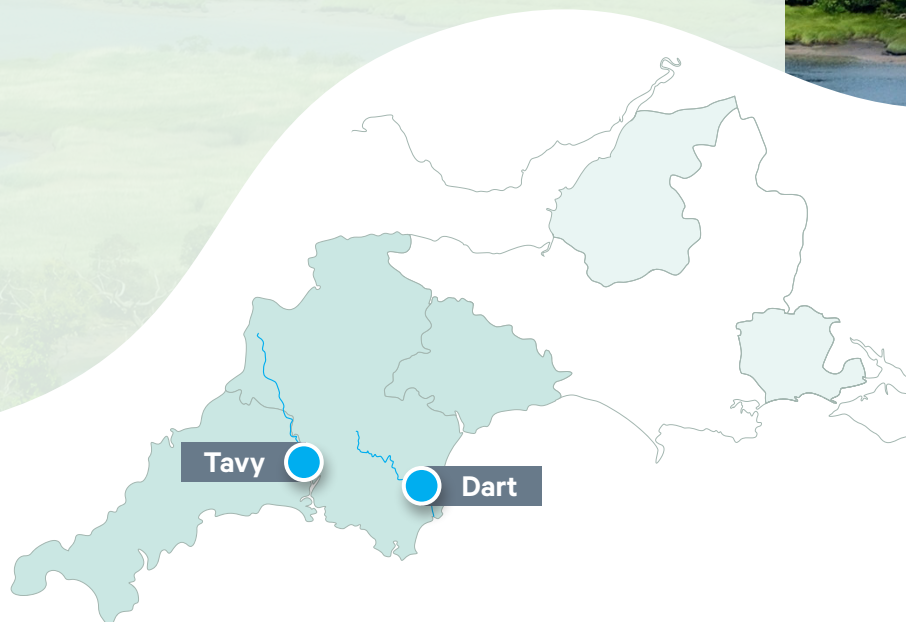
## Spotlight

### The Dart and Tavy pilot in a snapshot

In recognition of the significant value of our rivers and inland waters to communities across the region, as part of our Green Recovery Programme, South West Water are embarking on a £3.9 million, three-year pilot project on the Rivers Dart and Tavy.

The focus of the pilot is on investigating river water quality within both river catchments, with an emphasis on understanding what factors are driving that quality. It looks to reflect the interactions of South West Water assets along with farming, industrial/commercial discharges and other land run-off. Data from extensive water quality monitoring, coupled with storm overflow monitors throughout both rivers is being combined with information we gather from the communities of the Dart and Tavy about recreational water activity. This will inform our approach to inland bathing water designation in both rivers and across the region, into the future.

This pilot also gives us the opportunity to develop how we provide water quality information direct to the public, and how we make sure it is timely and useful.



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# Creating & restoring habitats

We continue to work with our local farmers and landowners to help create more sustainable farming practices and reduce nutrient run-off and pollutions into our rivers and streams. We use a variety of methods on a catchment-by-catchment basis to achieve our collective goals, including nature-based plans such as peatland restoration which has wide benefits on the local area and society as a whole.

## Monitoring our commitments



**Stop pollutants from 120,000 hectares of regional farmland getting into rivers and seas by 2025, working with local partners**



**Plant a quarter of a million trees by 2025, to help combat climate change, support river health and create new wildlife habitats**

## What have we done so far?

Upstream thinking: Since 2010, we have been working with local farmers and landowners to deliver our award-winning Upstream Thinking programme. To date, this approach has improved the management of 127,000 hectares of land across 80% of our drinking water catchments, outperforming our target of 123,000 hectares by March 2025; this has been achieved through working with partners to deliver initiatives across the region including Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. This approach delivers benefits for water quality, wildlife, water resources and peatland restoration.

### Peatland restoration

We have been restoring peatland on Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin moor, making a significant difference to the quality of water in rivers. We have restored 1,550 hectares of peatland since 2020.

A large-scale project in partnership with South West Peatland Partnership has recently been initiated at South West Water's Burrator Reservoir. A number of interventions will be introduced at the 208-acre site to slow down the flow of water and create the right conditions for peat to form once again.



### Tree planting

Last year we planted over 80,000 trees. Over 250,000 trees have been planted since 2020 and we have reached our target of 250,000 trees one year ahead of schedule.

More than 40,000 native trees are also being planted for farms and landowners to help reduce land run-off and improve natural water quality as part of South West Water's pioneering catchment management programme, Upstream Thinking. The trees, which were provided by the Woodland Trust, will be delivered and planted by Upstream Thinking partners Devon Wildlife Trust, and will see a range of native tree species like blackthorn, hazel and oak delivered to farms across Devon.

Peatland restoration on Dartmoor, Devon

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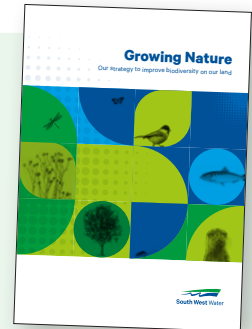
**Spotlight**

**Our Biodiversity Strategy**

Our Biodiversity Strategy sets out the key activities we will undertake to support nature recovery and biodiversity on our land, in our everyday operations and beyond.

As part of our Biodiversity Strategy we will:

- 1. Protect the best** – take action to protect the valuable biodiversity that we have on our landholdings
- 2. Restore and enhance the rest** – take action across our landholdings and assets to enhance biodiversity in the everyday management of our sites
- 3. Beyond our landholdings** – work in partnership with others across the region, taking a catchment approach, to deliver biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery.



Find out more on our biodiversity strategy [here](#)

**Case study**

**Replacing conifers with native trees**

Our teams have been working at two of our treatment works in recent months to remove large conifer trees as part of biodiversity improvements. The trees that have been removed will be replaced with native broadleaf species such as oak, hazel and rowan that offer much greater benefits to birds and other species. The logs from the cut conifer trees will be recycled for use in peatland restoration work at two South West Water sites – Burrator Reservoir in Devon and Park Pit in Cornwall. In total, over 3,000 trees have been planted at Park Pit, creating new woodland in the process.

**Over 3,000 trees**  
planted at Park Pit

The logs from the conifer trees will be used in peatland restoration work





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# Inspiring our local champions

We support local communities who aim to increase the health of our rivers and bodies of water. We believe it is important to educate people on how we can be more environmentally friendly with our water use, so we will support outreach programmes that target schools and the local communities.

## Monitoring our commitments



**Donate 25% of our Community Fund to local groups that protect river and sea health**



**Launch our WaterFit Warriors programme, to inspire thousands of water quality champions in schools and communities across the region**



**Share progress with our customers through our unique WaterShare+ scheme at quarterly public meetings and our annual Customer AGM**



## What have we done so far?

### Community fund

Overall, we donate to a range of environmental organisations and charities each year. This year, we have hit our target of donating 25% to local groups that share our passion for river and sea health. We gave out £32,965 to 18 charities within the environmental field, which represents 33% of our overall spend. These are an important source of funds for communities that are looking to:

- Protect nature and the environment for the benefit of community health and well-being
- Save water to protect our rivers and reservoirs
- Provide new opportunities for people to learn and develop
- Support the upkeep of local neighbourhood centres and facilities to keep communities strong.

### WaterFit Warriors

The programme helps to educate communities across the region on the importance of water usage and how we can all take steps to become more environmentally friendly and reduce our water consumption. We have taught in over 100 schools just this year, engaging with over 4,000 students (in addition to over 4,000 students we engaged with the previous year).

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### WaterShare+ meetings

These meetings across the region are an important part of listening to the views of our customers, to learn first hand about what matters most. We know that a range of issues are important – our impact on rivers and seas, but also bills, priority support for vulnerable customers, and doing our bit to combat and prepare for climate change. We continue to directly engage with our customers and stakeholders at the public meetings, giving customers the opportunity to tell us what matters most to them. For example, we sought customer feedback on the WaterFit programme through the “Your Beach, Your Say, Our Investment” interactive sessions with local communities and stakeholder groups, and responses received from our interactive map “WaterFit Live”. This ensured that valuable feedback was provided to the Board, which assisted in ensuring that significant investments are made in order to protect our rivers, seas and wider environment.



**WaterShare+**

### Spotlight

#### Schools outreach education programme

We’re inspiring the next generation on the importance of water, the role they play, and ways they can look after water environments. It’s interesting, interactive and a lot of fun.

We’re going to schools across Devon and Cornwall to help students understand the importance and value of water through a range of water activities. Our Community Education Officer has visited over 116 schools in the last year.

Our education programme is divided into five topics – water efficiency, drinking water, wastewater, environment, and wellbeing. It tends to last an hour and 15 minutes, depending on the year group and the questions.



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# Creating a sustainable future

We are campaigning for measures to ensure that the only things that go down the drains are the three Ps – paper, poo and pee. When plastic-based wet wipes are flushed down the toilet or cooking fats and oils are put down the sink, these build-up in the sewers causing blockages, flooding and pollution – and this is particularly acute in tourist areas. So we are looking to educate visitors and customers alike on how to avoid blockages and alleviate stress on our sewer systems, working with local partners.

## Monitoring our commitments



- ✓ **Work collaboratively on the building of new developments in our region, to help us manage our network**
- ✓ **Back the ban on non-flushable or plastic-containing wet wipes, to help prevent blockages**
- ✓ **Work with our 10 million visitors, and 2.3 million customers, so they understand the important role they play in protecting our region, through our Love Your Loo campaign**

## What have we done so far?

### New developments

Our engagement has focused on environmental destination, the 25-year environment plan and catchment and nature-based solutions. These events are looking at multiple drivers and have started our thinking about how we can deliver solutions with our stakeholders at a catchment level.

### Wet wipe ban

We have long supported a ban on non-flushable or plastic containing wet wipes being flushed down the loo, so it was great news when the government announced their plans in April 2024 to ban the supply and sale of wet wipes containing plastic.

We continue to advise our customers against putting any wipes into the system, regardless of whether they are labelled flushable or not. We have a “Bag it and Bin it, Don’t Flush It” campaign aimed at encouraging our customers to use sewers responsibly

### Spotlight

#### Customer views on wet wipes

We commissioned independent research with a representative survey of 1,000 UK households, and focus groups with customers across our region to inform our position where a range of wet wipes were inspected and tested in practice.

In our national survey, the UK public showed strong support for the government’s proposed ban, with approaching nine in ten UK adults saying they agree or strongly agree with a ban on the supply or sale (85%) and manufacture (84%) of wet wipes containing plastic. Nine in ten (88%) also say the use, production and disposal of single use plastics is a serious issue.



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### Love your Loo campaign

Over the last year we introduced a campaign focused on keeping our network free of blockages and helping stop excess water getting into the system.

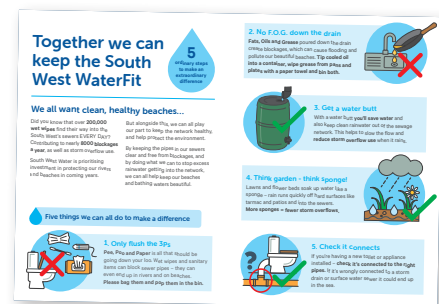
We introduced five ordinary steps to make an extraordinary difference:

- Only flush the 3Ps
- No FOG down the drain
- Get a water butt
- Think garden – think sponge
- Check it connects.

We promoted this with local councils and provided a suite of tools for councils to use locally, such as beach posters, social media assets and flyers.

### Work collaboratively on the building of new developments in our region, to help us manage our network

We have a highly diverse range of stakeholders – from local authorities to charities, environmental groups to investors, and businesses to household customers. We have revolutionised our approach to stakeholder engagement and are delivering a coherent, robust and consistent approach which has seen the volume of involvement significantly increase.



“  
**We need to ensure solutions are whole system, nexus-focused and institutionally integrated, as well as co-developed with communities where possible.**  
 Stakeholder at Regional Water Resources Workshop  
 ”



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# Putting people in control

We know how important it is to be forthcoming about our impact on the environment. This means providing our customers with real-time information on river quality, our treatment works and storm overflows, so they can see the change we are delivering and make the right recreational choices.

## Monitoring our commitments



**Work with partners to provide water quality information for residents and visitors, making it easily accessible on our website by the end of this year**



**Help people understand river health, by sharing real-time river water quality information, just as we do for our bathing waters, by 2023**



**Provide 100% monitor coverage at our treatment works and on our storm overflows, by 2023**

## 75% of customers

consider the site important to view before visiting their local beach



### What have we done so far?

#### Providing real time water quality information

We launched WaterFit Live in March 2023, our interactive map with real-time storm overflow, and investment information for coastal communities.

We know 75% of customers consider the site important to view before visiting their local beach.

WaterFit Live is evolving to share the near-real-time status of all 1,600 overflows including rivers and is supported by face-to-face roadshows in coastal communities to respond to customer concerns.

#### Providing 100% monitoring coverage

We have installed monitors on 100% of our storm overflows. We can now monitor and act on activity across hundreds of storm overflows across our region.



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**Spotlight**  
**WaterFit Live**

In March 2023 we launched our WaterFit Live interactive map. WaterFit Live is our way of giving customers and visitors the information they need when they want to visit their favourite beach. It is an important step on our journey to demonstrating transparency and providing easily accessible information to a wide audience.

Our WaterFit Live tool demonstrates our commitment to increased transparency, empowering customers and stakeholders to hold us to account on our performance and allow them to make informed decisions on water-based recreation. It includes various sources of information such as:

- **Beach information** – including the local amenities and whether or not the beach has a Blue Flag
- **Location data** – the locations of any EDMs and outlets, and verified annual overflow release data for overflows
- **Data on bathing water quality** – and whether or not a bathing beach is temporarily affected by a release from an overflow
- **Information about investment** – on the investment we are making under WaterFit at our bathing waters.
- **Answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs).**

Our community engagement programme has responded to interest around the near-real-time information we have been sharing on storm overflows, by holding both online and face-to-face events with local communities such as Exmouth, Harlyn Bay and Lyme Regis.

As well as giving customers the opportunity to challenge us, these roadshows have allowed us to explain our short- and long-term plans, provide data on sampling in the local area and explain how we manage the impact of new developments on our network. We also gathered feedback from local communities that will help shape investment priorities and the way in which we continue to engage with them in the future.

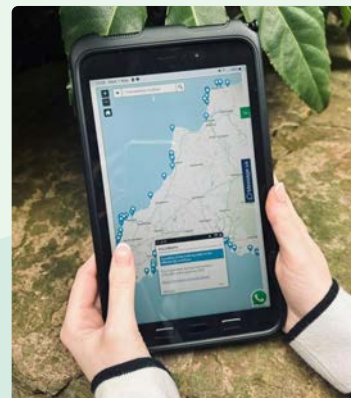
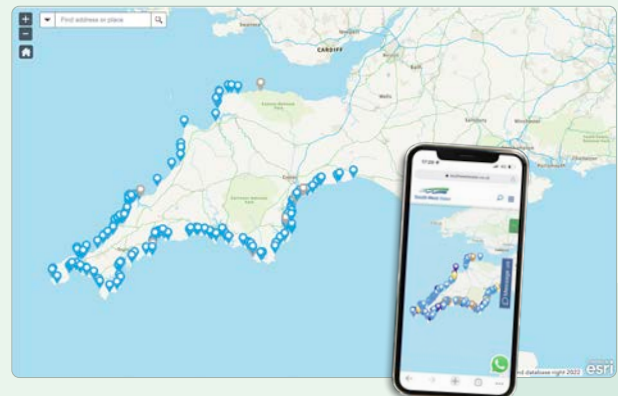


We are currently delivering WaterFit Live in a three phase arrangement to progressively deliver the requirements whilst maintaining data integrity and providing key contextual information for each overflow.

**Phase 1** of the WaterFit Live delivery was completed in March 2023 and included a near real time view on each of the 95 bathing waters where storm overflows discharge (with 150 Bathing Waters in the region at the time, 55 of which do not have any storm overflows discharging to them). This triggers a warning based upon the Bathing Water alone.

**Phase 2** was completed in May 2023 and included near real time views on each of the 96 bathing waters (including newly added Firestone Bay) and each of the individual storm overflows which discharge to these bathing waters.

**Phase 3** will be delivered in July 2024 and will include all the remaining storm overflows, providing near real time information on all of the remaining 1,000+ inland storm overflows across the region.



# WaterFit outcomes – two years on

## WaterFit outcomes at a glance

We made good progress in delivery of environmental improvements over the past year, investing c.£100 million annually over a three-year period for our WaterFit programme.

Due to the exceptionally wet weather we have seen a deterioration in our performance against some of our key outcomes, particularly on the total number of pollutions and the average spills per storm overflow. We have proactive action plans in place to address these areas of performance.

	Unit	2021/22	WaterFit investment	
			2022/23	2023/24
<b>Inputs</b>				
Storm overflows with spill data	No.	1,093	1,323	1,342
Total storm overflow monitored spills	No.	42,484	37,649	58,249
Storm overflow monitoring	%	79	99.3	100
Restore 1,000 hectares of peatlands by 2025	Hectares	500	303	493
School outreach visits (WaterFit Warriors)	No.	-	83	116
Plant of 50,000 trees each year towards target of 250,000 by 2025	No.	100,000	72,000	80,000
<b>Outcomes</b>				
Quality of bathing waters meeting national standards	%	100	100	100 <sup>2</sup>
River water quality – Reasons for Not Achieving Good Ecological Status (RNAGs)	%	19.0	12.0	12.4
Catchment management and habitat creation	Hectares	95,000	112,000	127,000
Discharge permit compliance at wastewater treatment works and water treatment works	%	97.5	99.4	96.2
Total number of pollution incidents	No.	151	108	194
Total number of serious pollution incidents	No.	8	2	2
Storm overflows	Average no. spills per overflow	38.9	28.5	43.4

<sup>2</sup> 100% of our bathing beaches where South West Water assets would have an impact on the bathing beach (one bathing water (Porthluney) was classed as poor but we do not have any assets impacting this bathing water).

## Our plans to improve performance

We have plans in place to improve performance across a range of measures, to deliver on the outcomes that our customers and stakeholders rightly expect of us.

### Pollutions

2023 saw an increase in pollution incidents compared to 2022 following the winter weather, which was the fifth wettest on record with a significant increase in the number of storms and intense periods of rain. The rain also led to exceptionally high groundwater, which also provides challenging operating conditions and tends to result in less time to respond to issues that arise at our treatment works pumping stations, as the issues escalate more rapidly.

We have set out how we plan to improve performance in our Pollution Incident Reduction Plan. Actions include:

- Pump Station Maintenance, Sump Cleansing, Zero Pump Out
- Target Operating Parameters that are used to drive effective control of processes and response to site
- Alarm Rationalisation, Telemetry Visibility, and proactive tools (Meniscus, Ovarro for example as tools to help turn data into information for action)
- Completion of the Hotspots 2 investment programme at 55 sites
- Rising main replacement and refurbishment at 36 rising main locations. 20 are already complete and will have a material impact on pollution events, with a further 6 being targeted by the end of March 2024
- Accelerated deployment of 9,000 new sewer level monitors (SLM) and alarm configuration – this will drive early warning of intervention requirements. Circa 9,000 monitors have been installed as at the end of December 2023
- Further investment in storm overflows.

### Permit compliance

For permit compliance, we experienced some challenges at individual sites in the first half of 2023, however we took immediate action to contain issues with activities including reedbed surveys and remediation, enhanced targeted maintenance and enhanced monitoring and review of Critical Asset Plans. We have also enhanced our action plans across our treatment works, including regular reviews with the Environment Agency taking place. Our completed improvements plans include:

- Increased support centre staffing levels (responsible for triage of all alarms)
- Undertaking proactive assessments through extensive deployment of data and telemetry
- Increased sampling and trial ‘real-time’ water quality monitoring at sites with higher risk third-party discharges
- Alarm monitoring review and implementation of early warning regime.

### Storm overflows

The exceptional rainfall over the summer triggered an increase in the use of storm overflows, operating to protect thousands of homes and businesses from flooding. New monitors installed during the year also added to the total in comparison to the previous year. Our customers and stakeholders can access our WaterFit Live webpages which give near real time information about storm overflow operations and the investments we are making. In addition, the Water UK national dashboard presents the national storm overflows plan for England, setting out how the sector will meet or exceed all Government targets. This is the most expansive programme for overflows in the world. South West Water has the most ambitious plan for the sector, which, if approved by regulators, meets legal requirements by 2040, a decade earlier than required.


**You can find out more about our plans here:**



Pollution incident reduction plan



Report on our use of storm overflows



PR24 business plan: storm overflows and pollutions



WaterFit website



# Working together to make a difference

We want everyone in the South West to feel confident about the water at their favourite beach, or river. We want them to know we are serious about reducing pollution incidents, our impact on water quality and the use of storm overflows, which have become a striking symbol of unacceptable practices in the water industry.

WaterFit is our three year programme to protect rivers and seas to 2025. But this is also part of a longer-term, multi-generational, plan. We are working in partnership and our plans are going further and faster to allow customers to feel confident in the water at their favourite beach, river or lake. We know that it is critical to get this right.

Improving river and coastal water quality requires change from a range of actors across the catchments in the areas which we serve. The challenge goes well beyond the remit of the water industry. In our role, we can and do act as a coordinator of interested parties. Our upstream thinking programme for example, brings together a range of stakeholders to drive a combined focus on improving water quality.

We have made significant progress to date. But there is still more to do and our ambitions and commitments do not end in 2025. We will work in partnership with those that have a shared vision and are delivering shared outcomes. We have mobilised our supply chain and we specifically recognise that we need to improve our capability to deliver green and blue solutions. We have built on the success of our Upstream Thinking catchment management programme and are engaging partners with extensive experience in these types of solutions.

Alongside the delivery of WaterFit, we have continued to develop our future plans. In October 2023 we submitted our Business Plan for 2025-2030 to Ofwat. The plan includes our priorities for the next 25 years. We engaged with more than 250,000 customers to inform the strategic priorities, reflecting the views of households, visitors, retailers and housing developers. Our 2025-2030 business plan is a plan building on the momentum we have today, and which goes further in tackling the biggest challenges in our region, as we invest to protect water quality and resilience, tackle storm overflows at our beaches, eradicate pollutions and protect the environment from climate change.

By 2030 we will have tackled all storm overflows at our bathing beaches, shellfish waters and high-spilling sites given the importance of tourism to our region. We will be implementing our “Green First” approach to investment, working with nature to improve drainage and reduce storm overflows. We will be expanding our catchment management programme, planting 300,000 trees and transforming sludge treatment processes to protect rivers.

As part of our WaterFit programme up to 2025 and our business plan to 2030 and beyond, we’ll continue to work with others to develop our approaches and to deliver sustainable solutions to deliver long-term benefits for all.



**Business Plan  
2025-2030**

## Find out more

You can find more detailed information about our plans and keep track of our progress by clicking [here](#)



**South West  
Water**

[southwestwater.co.uk](https://southwestwater.co.uk)

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