

# SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE PRIORITIES FOR THE WATER (SPECIAL MEASURES) BILL

---

## Desired Outcome

Transformational reform of the water industry to deliver an equitable and transparent system that prioritises public health, improvement of the environment, value for customer money and ultimately results in healthy rivers, lakes and seas. The reformed system should deliver the following outcomes:

- Ends Pollution for profit
- Guaranteed enforcement of new and existing law and regulations.
- Ensures action is taken to immediately tackle the highest risk pollution events into recreation waters and high priority nature sites.
- Unleashes the potential of nature-based solutions to end pollution.
- Reveals the truth about the extent of pollution in the UK.

## How do we get there?

The Water (Special Measures) Bill should ironclad the government's commitment to undertake a *'full review to shape further legislation that will fundamentally transform how our entire water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good'* by mandating the **launch of an independent statutory root and branch review of the water system.**

To be effective the review and resulting recommendations must be;

- **Independent**, the chair must be independent of government.
- **Timebound**, the review should be launched immediately with recommendations implemented through legislation within 12 months of the Water (Special Measures) Bill gaining royal assent.
- **Cross sectoral**, the review must address the role of all departments, agencies and stakeholders with a role in regulating the water industry.
- **Ambitious**, the review must be aimed at initiating the long-term transformation of the water industry and prioritise rapid, dramatic environmental improvement.
- **Progressive**, the review must only enhance, and not weaken, existing environmental protections.

The scope of the review should include, but not be limited to:

- How water companies are set up, owned, operated and financed, including how capital is raised and who benefits from the proceeds of company activities.
- The clear failures of the existing regulatory environment and the ineffective enforcement of current regulations.

- Take account of other policy areas which have direct impact on the water system such as planning and land use.

To ensure the review does not ‘kick the can down the road’ provision and flexibility must also be built into the PR24 determinations to enable the recommendations of the review to be implemented immediately, not delayed into the next investment cycle.

The review must also not preclude the government taking immediate action whilst the review takes place.

### **Immediate Reform through the Bill:**

To deliver immediate improvements the Bill must also:

1. Reaffirm existing legal requirements to only discharge untreated sewage in exceptional circumstances.
2. Increase funding of the regulators to carry out the monitoring, enforcement and prosecution required to deliver on the Bill’s requirements and existing legislation.
3. Apply a legal duty on water industry regulators to improve the Environment and protect Public Health, in place of the requirement to make profit.
4. Make clear the conditions a Water Company would be taken into Special Administration.
5. Remove provisions within the Bill that make customers, and or tax payers liable for bailing out water company debt.

### **Background Briefing**

#### **Why do we need reform?**

The UK water system is broken. Across the UK, there were at least 604,833 discharges in 2023. In England alone, untreated sewage was discharged for 3.6 million hours. Hospital admissions due to waterborne diseases such as dysentery and Weil’s disease have increased 60% since 2010. All water companies in England are under investigation for criminal wrongdoing, as a result of their illegal discharges. And even if current investment plans proposed by the water company are delivered in full by 2030 we can still expect 200,000 sewage discharges to be occurring each year.

#### **Why a review through the Water Bill?**

Whilst the government has committed to launching a review into the water system the scope, format and timescale of the review is yet to be confirmed. The bill provides an opportunity to iron clad their commitment to a review and set out clearly the content for the review and the level of ambition.