



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

Rebecca Pow MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577  
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk  
[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

Cllr Jo Robb  
Thames Champion  
Woodcote & Rotherfield Ward  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
135 Eastern Avenue  
Milton Park  
Oxon  
OX14 4SB

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09 December 2020

Dear Jo,

Thank you for your letter of 10 November about sewage discharges.

Storm overflows are a last resort in modern sewer design, but the age of our sewerage systems means their elimination is not practicable or affordable. They are designed to allow excess waste water to discharge to local waters to avoid streets, premises or sewage treatment plants from being flooded during periods of significant rainfall. Water companies are committed in the 5-year business planning period (2020-2025) to a significant programme of improvements to the monitoring and management of storm overflows at a cost of around £1.2 billion. This includes over 700 schemes to provide environmental improvements by reducing spills from frequently spilling overflows. As part of this work, 'Event Duration Monitoring' is currently being installed on most storm overflows to improve data and trigger investigations and improvements by water companies. Water companies will be required to provide reports of performance to the Environment Agency (EA).

We recognise that there is more to do with regards to the management of sewage pollution and we are considering several initiatives to address this issue. I previously met water company CEOs and made clear that the volumes of sewage discharged into rivers and other waterways in extreme weather must be reduced. Our new Storm Overflows Taskforce comprising of the Government, the water industry, regulators and environmental NGOs will meet regularly and set out clear proposals to reduce the frequency and volumes of spills. In addition to exploring further short-term actions water companies can take to accelerate progress on storm overflows, I can reassure you that we are also looking at long term options to address this issue.

The Government remains committed to bringing at least three quarters of our waters to as close as possible to their natural state as soon as is practicable. In support of this, we will be bringing forward a further legally binding target as part of the targets setting processes set out in the Environment Bill. Our forthcoming Environment Bill will place a statutory requirement on water companies to produce drainage and sewerage management plans, and we will continue to press water companies to protect both people and the environment.

Thank you also for the kind offer to meet and hear your concerns. Unfortunately, I am unable to accept this invitation currently, but I will bear this in mind for the future and thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

Making progress on the issue of storm overflows is one of this Government's priorities and I thank you for helping to raise the profile of this issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow', written in a cursive style.

**REBECCA POW MP**