Clean Seas Matter

Thousands of us enjoy paddling, swimming, surfing or just splashing around in the sea, yet pollution from overflowing sewers, farmland and city streets means that you have a one in seven chance of getting a sewage related disease each time you swim at almost half of UK bathing beaches[1].

That's why we publish 'MCS Recommended' beaches for excellent water quality in our annual Good Beach Guide (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk), allowing you to find clean beaches for swimming.

People used to think that our vast seas could dilute and cleanse any amount of pollution, including raw sewage (wastewater from our homes and industry). But pollutants change the natural balance of the sea, can make people ill, and they damage the environment. Pollutants are found in sewage or rainwater run-off from roads, pavements and farmland.

In 1957, Tony and Daphne Wakefield tragically lost their six year old daughter Caroline after she contracted Polio swimming at a sewage contaminated beach. Outraged that raw sewage was being pumped into the sea, the Wakefield's published a new 'Golden List' of clean bathing beaches. This, along with other clean sea campaigns, finally led to the introduction of European standards for bathing water quality in 1976 and massive investment by the water industry to clean up raw sewage.

In 1987, comforted by the visible improvement of our beaches, the Wakefield's passed on their 'Golden List' to the Marine Conservation Society. 23 years on, it's still published as MCS Recommended beaches in the Good Beach Guide. It's used by over half a million people and is a core part of our campaign for Clean Seas and Beaches.

The campaign is already a massive success and we are now able to recommend twice the number of beaches we could ten years ago. Illness risks associated with sea swimming are now considerably lower and water quality is regularly tested during the summer at 769 UK beaches.

But there is still work to be done. In 2006 and 2007, MCS recommended 63% of tested beaches which is the highest figure we've ever reached. However over the past three years, water quality has got worse. This year, only just over half (418 out of 769 tested) of UK bathing beaches are MCS Recommended.

Today, poor water quality is often linked with heavy rainfall, which can flush pollution from farmland and streets, and overwhelm sewers so that untreated sewage is discharged into rivers and the sea. Recent wetter summers have made this type of pollution worse.

By 2015, MCS wants to recommend at least 75% of all beaches tested for water quality in the UK. For this to happen, we need to stop sewer overflow pipes discharging sewage under anything except true emergency flood conditions. We also need to dramatically reduce polluting runoff from farmland and roads, with the introduction of better farm management practices and sustainable urban drainage systems.

Marine Conservation Society

Combined sewer overflows are restricted in use, by the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, to periods of unusually heavy rain. Beaches with CSOs that operate properly do not generally have water pollution problems. However, MCS has growing evidence to show that on some parts of the coast CSOs become a regular means of sewage disposal.

Water quality problems

Sewage pollution

Sewage is one of the causes of poor water quality. Every day in the UK, 11 billion litres of it is collected in 347, 000 km of sewers and treated at about 9,000 treatment works, before being put into our rivers and seas[2]. Sewage consists of organic matter (carbohydrates, fats and proteins), bacteria, viruses, chemicals, heavy metals, nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorous) and debris, which without proper treatment can pollute bathing waters and damage the environment.

Swimming in sewage contaminated water can lead to gastroenteritis, acute febrile respiratory illness and ear, nose and throat infections[3]. Evidence suggests that in England and Wales between 1.3 and 2.2 million cases of stomach upsets each year could be related to poor bathing water quality[4].

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In low concentrations sewage can be beneficial to the marine ecosystem, but in large quantities it is damaging, leading to eutrophication (loss of oxygen from the water), smothering, poisoning and disruption of growth and reproduction in marine life. Shellfish grown in sewage contaminated waters can cause food poisoning because filter feeding animals, such as mussels and oysters, concentrate sewage related pathogens and toxins in their tissues as they feed. Not all sewage is treated in the same way before being put back into our rivers and seas. Basic 'primary sewage treatment' only removes solid matter. 'Secondary sewage treatment' breaks down organic matter, removing 75 – 99 % of pathogenic bacteria and viruses, while the highest level, 'tertiary sewage treatment', removes all remaining pathogenic viruses and 99.9% of bacteria in a disinfection process.

In 1991, the European Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) was introduced to ensure that sewage was properly treated before discharge. The directive has been applied to all communities of more than 2,000 people in the UK and, as a result, 95% of the sewage passed to treatment plants is now treated to secondary standard or better.

Sewer systems that combine domestic sewage from our homes with the rainwater running off our streets into one collecting system are called 'combined sewers'. These combined sewer systems are prone to flooding during heavy rain. A vast network of sewer overflow pipes called 'combined sewer overflows' (CSO) has therefore been built to handle these flooding emergencies. Combined sewer overflows carry rain water and raw sewage out of a flooded sewer system and discharge it, untreated, into rivers or the sea. There are about 22,000 combined sewer overflows in

the UK. About a quarter of this network is monitored to see how often and for how long these CSOs operate.

Combined sewer overflows are restricted in use, by the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, to periods of unusually heavy rain. Beaches with CSOs that operate properly do not generally have water pollution problems. However, MCS has growing evidence to show that on some parts of the coast CSOs become a regular means of sewage disposal. Effluent from these pipes will sometimes be filtered through a mesh screen before discharge, but debris like cotton bud sticks, tampons, condoms, plastic sanitary waste and even pieces of faeces can be discharged straight from the sewer system into the receiving waters.

During the MCS 2009 Beachwatch litter survey last September, volunteers found 12,961 cotton bud sticks on 397 UK beaches.

MCS' network of thousands of volunteers, cleaning and surveying beaches for our Beachwatch litter programme, has found CSO sewage debris on hundreds of beaches. During the MCS 2009 Beachwatch litter survey, conducted over a weekend last September, volunteers found 12,961 cotton bud sticks on 397 UK beaches.

Consents for combined sewer overflows, issued under the Water Resources Act (1990), generally require that these pipes should be maintained in a fit operating state and should not affect the environment or use of receiving waters. Those near designated bathing sites are limited to three discharges per bathing season (averaged over ten years). Those near commercial shellfish waters are limited to ten spills per year. There is currently no statutory limit on the number of times CSOs elsewhere around the coast can discharge. MCS knows of about 500 beaches with CSOs on them.

Since 1995, the UK water industry has spent more than £10 billion on the coast in order to meet the standards set by the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, improving discharges from sewage treatment works and storm overflows[5]. There are still many improvements needed however.

A planned £12.5 billion investment in sewerage services for England and Wales over the next five years is, says the Environment Agency (2010), 'a recognition of how much more work is needed on these hidden assets'[6]. Scottish Water will invest £2.5 billion between 2010 and 2015, building on the £2.15 billion invested between 2006 and 2010 on the Scottish sewerage infrastructure[7]. Northern Ireland recently invested £614 million in its wastewater collection and treatment systems as part of a three year Strategic Business Plan, and in the longer term Northern Ireland Water expects to spend another £3 billion by 2020[8].

Effluent from CSO's will sometimes be filtered through a mesh screen before discharge, but debris like cotton bud sticks (1), tampons (2), condoms (3), plastic sanitary waste (4&5) and even pieces of faeces can be discharged straight from the sewer system into the receiving waters.

Water quality problems

Diffuse pollution

Sewage pollution is sometimes called 'point source pollution' because it enters the environment from a single point source (e.g. a sewage pipe). On the other hand, 'diffuse pollution' is a term used to describe pollution entering rivers, lakes and the sea over a widely dispersed area, for example polluted rain water running off farm land.

Diffuse pollution can carry excessive quantities of nutrients (often nitrate and phosphate based fertilisers), animal waste from livestock farms, street debris or oil and petro-chemicals running off roads, or air pollutants carried into the sea by rain. With the improvement to point source discharges over the past decade, the impact of diffuse pollution has become more visible and increasingly affects bathing waters.

Diffuse pollution enters rivers, lakes and the sea over a widely dispersed area, for example polluted rain water running off farm land.

In 2000, the European Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) came into force to help protect and enhance the quality of lakes, streams, rivers, groundwater, estuaries and coastal waters, by setting water quality standards which these designated water bodies must reach by 2015. Recent studies by the Environment Agency found that only 27% of estuaries and coasts in England and Wales are at good or better ecological status[9].

Diffuse pollution is one of the biggest threats to coastal waters. Nitrate based agricultural fertilisers are the main reason why 49% of estuaries and 33% of coastal waters are set to fail Water Framework Directive standards in 2015 if no remedial action is taken[9]. Other diffuse pollution sources requiring urgent action include run-off from roads, misconnected drains, chemical spills and oil and fuel spills[9].

Recent initiatives, such as 'Catchment Sensitive Farming', have encouraged appropriate management of agricultural land to try and reduce the impact of diffuse pollution from farming on rivers and bathing waters. It includes appropriate management of fertilisers, manures and pesticides, promoting good soil structure to avoid erosion and run-off, and the separation of clean and dirty waters on farms[10].

The 'Flood and Water Management Act 2010' was introduced earlier this year, requiring the Environment Agency to develop national strategies in England and Wales for flood and coastal erosion risk management. The Act will see the introduction of standards for new sustainable drainage systems which mimic natural drainage and water storage processes, and encourage the uptake of these systems by removing the automatic right to connect to sewers. It will also introduce a drainage approval process for new developments [11].

SLE RANGER/MCS

What makes a good bathing beach?

Every summer, seawater from bathing beaches is sampled to make sure it is safe for swimming. This happens as part of the 'European Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EC)', which protects coastal waters and public health from pollutants that end up in the sea. Water quality is tested at 'designated' (ie: officially recognised) bathing waters during the bathing season (mid May to September in England and Wales and June to September in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Samples are usually taken once a week by the agency responsible, tested for bacteria known to cause illness, and measured against two European standards - the legal minimum 'EC Mandatory' standard (beaches failing this are not considered fit for bathing) and the 20 times more stringent 'EC Guideline' standard. 20 samples are usually taken at each bathing site over five months in the summer and the test results aggregated to produce a seasonal grade for each beach.

In the MCS Good Beach Guide, we grade water quality at beaches as follows:

1. MCS Recommended - our standard for excellent water quality - EC Guideline standard was met and ALL samples passed the EC Mandatory standard, including those taken during extreme rainfall where public warnings were not displayed. Local continuous sewage discharges are properly treated (secondary treatment minimum) and we are happy that bathing represents a minimal risk to health.

2. Guideline - EC standard for good water quality - EC Guideline standards were met, those taken during extreme rainfall may not have been included, bacteria may have been found in 5% of samples in numbers known to cause illness.

3. Basic pass - EC legal minimum standard for water quality - EC Mandatory standard was met, those taken during extreme rainfall may not have been included, bacteria were found in numbers known to cause illness.

4. Fail - Bad water quality, swimming not advised - Failed EC Mandatory standard, bacteria were found at unacceptable levels and MCS advises against swimming and other immersion water sports.

MCS prides itself on grading any beach for water quality if we can get the information, whether the beach is 'designated' (ie: an officially recognised bathing site) or not. This extra information often comes from local councils in the UK as well as the Isle of Man Government, States of Guernsey Board of Administration and Jersey Tourism. We do not do our own seawater sampling.

BATHING WATER STANDARDS EXPLAINED

EC Mandatory standard – 95% of samples must not exceed 10,000 total coliforms and 2,000 faecal coliforms (in 100ml samples). EC Mandatory standard beaches present a 12-15% illness risk per swim[1].

EC Guideline standard – EC Mandatory standard was met and 80% of samples must not exceed 500 total coliforms and 100 faecal coliforms and 90% of samples must not exceed 100 faecal streptococci (in 100ml samples). EC Guideline standard beaches present a 5% illness risk (specifically from gastroenteritis) per swim.

'Guideline' is the standard used by the **Blue Flag** award scheme.

✔ **MCS Recommended beaches** are of a slightly better standard for water quality than 'Guideline' and we also take any local sewage discharges into consideration.

GG NICHOLSON

MCS Recommended beaches 2010

UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

This year just over half (418) of UK bathing beaches are MCS Recommended for excellent water quality in the Good Beach Guide. In total 769 beaches were sampled for water quality in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man from May to September 2009.

Of these beaches, 587 are EC designated (ie: officially recognised) and 182 are non-designated beaches. Only 37% of non-designated beaches are MCS recommended this year compared to 59% of designated beaches. This is because designated beaches are subject to statutory standards and therefore prioritised for improvement. This segregation in investment is often news to beach goers for whom the terms 'designated' and 'non-designated' understandably mean nothing at all.

Over the past three years there's been a shift in the water quality trend on UK beaches. For several years from 2001 there was a steady improvement, which peaked in 2006, when we recommended 62.5% of Britain's beaches for excellent bathing water quality. Since then bathing water quality has declined.

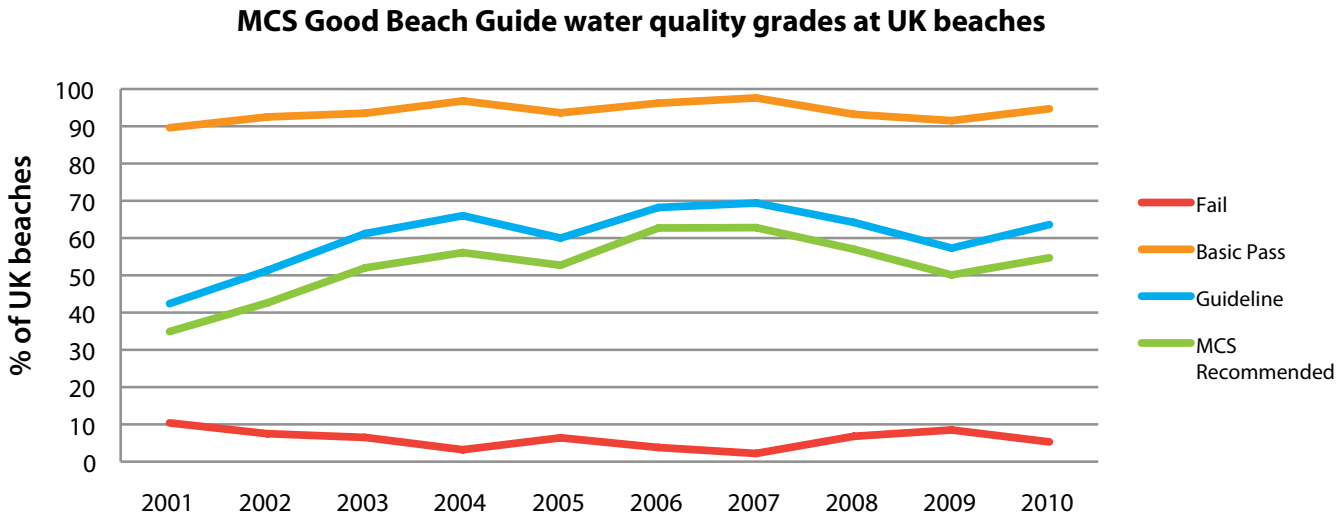
According to climate data from the Met Office, the summers of 2007, 2008 and 2009 combined were the wettest period since 1914 (in terms of UK rainfall amount) [12]. The rain increased pollution from combined sewer overflows and swept pollutants like farm fertiliser, livestock waste, street debris and petro-chemicals from the land into rivers and the sea.

This year just over half (54%) of the UK bathing beaches met our 'MCS Recommended' standard for excellent bathing water quality. It represents a slight improvement (4.3%) on the previous year but is still well down on the peak years.

The key questions for MCS are: why this decline in water quality? And why have we never been able to recommend more than 60 or so per cent of Britain's beaches? The answers lie in CSO operations, diffuse pollution and climate change.

Year	No. Sampled	MCS Recommended	Guideline	Basic Pass	Fail
2010	769	418 (54.4%)	489 (63.6%)	728 (94.7%)	41 (05.3%)
2009	775	388 (50.1%)	444 (57.3%)	709 (91.5%)	66 (08.5%)
2008	779	444 (57.0%)	500 (64.2%)	726 (93.2%)	53 (06.8%)
2007	787	494 (62.8%)	546 (69.4%)	768 (97.6%)	17 (02.2%)
2006	806	505 (62.7%)	550 (68.2%)	775 (96.2%)	31 (03.8%)
2001	785	274 (34.9%)	333 (42.4%)	703 (89.6%)	82 (10.4%)

Table 1: *Good Beach Guide water quality grades for the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man for designated and non-designated bathing beaches (based on the previous year's sampling data).*



Graph 1: *10 Year trend in water quality at UK beaches (including Channel Islands and the Isle of Man). Data Source: Marine Conservation Society's Good Beach Guide, water quality grades are based on the previous year's water quality monitoring data.*

MCS Good Beach Guide: Overview of results

Total beaches sampled		✔ MCS Recommended			✘ Failed	
2010	2009	2010	2009	% change	2010	2009
769	775	418 (54.4%)	388 (50.1%)	4.3%	41 (5.3%)	66 (08.5%)

N Ireland

Beaches sampled

2010 24 **2009** 23

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
8 *(33.3%)*	7 *(30.4%)*	2.9%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
2 *(08.3%)*	1 *(04.3%)*

Scotland

Beaches sampled

2010 105 **2009** 109

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
39 *(37.1%)*	41 *(37.6%)*	-0.5%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
13 *(12.4%)*	17 *(15.6%)*

Isle of Man

Beaches sampled

2010 19 **2009** 18

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
1 *(5.3%)*	1 *(05.6%)*	-0.3%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
5 *(26.3%)*	3 *(16.7%)*

England

Beaches sampled

2010 423 **2009** 415

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
258 *(61.0%)*	236 *(56.9%)*	4.1%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
9 *(2.1%)*	24 *(05.8%)*

Wales

Beaches sampled

2010 169 **2009** 181

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
94 *(55.6%)*	92 *(50.8%)*	4.8%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
10 *(05.9%)*	20 *(11%)*

Channel Isles

Beaches sampled

2010 29 **2009** 29

✔ **MCS Recommended**

2010	2009	change
18 *(62.1%)*	11 *(37.9%)*	24.1%

✘ **Failed**

2010	2009
2 *(06.9%)*	1 *(03.4%)*

Country and Regional breakdown of Good Beach Guide water quality grades for 2010 and 2009 for designated and non-designated beaches (based on the previous year's sampling data).

Country and Regional Breakdown

Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the North West of England have below the UK average water quality, with almost a quarter of the beaches tested in the Isle of Man failing to meet the minimum European water quality standard.

These regional results correlate with the areas that received the wettest weather in August, namely Northern Ireland, Western Scotland and Cumbria[12], and shows the increasing impact that storm pollution is having on our bathing waters.

The North East, South East and South West of England, Wales and the Channel Islands were above the UK average for water quality and the Channel Islands and the North East of England had the largest increase in MCS Recommended beaches.

England

61% of the beaches in England are MCS Recommended (258 out of 423 tested) compared to 57% of beaches last year. Nine beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to 24 in last year's guide. Changes in water quality varied across the country due to regional differences in rainfall (see regional results for further information).

North East England – The North East is one of the most improved regions with 72% of beaches MCS Recommended (45 out of 63 tested), compared to 54% last year. This year no beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to five in last year's guide. MCS believes this increase in bathing water quality is due to the marginally lower rainfall experienced in the region during summer 2009, compared to the previous summer. Despite recent wet summers, long stretches of coastline in Lincolnshire and Northumberland are now notable for consistently high water quality. However, MCS remains highly concerned about the officially designated bathing site of Staithes in North Yorkshire which has consistently poor water quality.

North West England – 13% of beaches in the North West are MCS Recommended (five out of 38 tested) compared to 18% last year. This is two beaches less than was recommended in last year's guide. Four beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to six in last year's guide. This decline in MCS Recommended beaches coincides with more rainfall in the region during summer 2009 compared to the previous year. Heavy rain brings sewage pollution from combined sewer overflows and a mix of fertilisers, animal waste and refuse from farm land and city streets. The majority of continuous sewage outfalls are now treated to tertiary standard however, and only the Ravenglass outfall continues to pump badly treated sewage.

South East England – 64% of the beaches in the South East are MCS Recommended (83 out of 129 tested) compared to 61% last year. The South East is one of only two regions where no beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard.

MCS believes this increase in bathing water quality is due to the marginally lower rainfall experienced in the region through summer 2009, compared to the previous year. However, around a third of the beaches did not meet our standards for bathing water quality.

Poor water quality is principally due to the South East's high population density and extensive housing developments, leading to storm pollution from city streets and combined sewer overflows. Last summer, construction finally began on Southern Water's new £300m wastewater treatment works at Peacehaven in East Sussex, which will provide treatment for Brighton Portobello - one of the few remaining sewage outfalls still pumping poorly treated sewage into the sea from a large town. The works, which will treat domestic wastewater for around 335,000 people, will benefit local bathing water quality when it's completed in 2013.

South West England – 65% of the beaches in the South West are MCS Recommended (125 out of 193 tested) compared to 62% last year. Five beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to 12 in last year's guide. MCS believes this slight increase in bathing water quality is due to the marginally lower rainfall experienced by the region in summer 2009 compared to the previous year.

English Regions

	Beaches sampled		✔ MCS Recommended			✘ Failed	
	2010	2009	2010	2009	% change	2010	2009
North East	63	63	45 *(71.4%)*	34 *(54%)*	17.4%	0	5 *(07.9%)*
North West	38	33	5 *(13.2%)*	6 *(18.2%)*	-7.5%	4 *(10.8%)*	6 *(18.2%)*
South East	129	124	83 *(64.3%)*	75 *(60.5%)*	3.8%	0	1 *(00.8%)*
South West	193	195	125 *(64.8%)*	121 *(62.1%)*	2.7%	5 *(02.6%)*	12 *(06.2%)*

Although bathing water quality in the South West is better than the UK average, around a third of the beaches did not meet our standards for bathing water quality. Many beaches in the South West continue to suffer from poor water quality, caused by a mixture of storm pollution from combined sewer overflows and animal waste from livestock washing off farmland during heavy rain.

Wales

56% of beaches in Wales are MCS Recommended (94 out of 169 tested) compared to 51% last year. 10 beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to 20 in last year's guide. Welsh beaches can suffer from storm pollution run-off from farm land which carries material like fertilisers and animal waste into the sea. There are also a high number of combined sewer overflows intermittently discharging raw sewage to the coasts of north and south Wales, which need upgrading if water quality is to further improve. MCS fully supports Welsh Water's investment programme and hopes that plans by the Welsh Assembly Government, the Environment Agency and the Green Sea initiative will lead to future improvements in bathing water quality.

Scotland

37% of beaches in Scotland are MCS Recommended (39 out of 105 tested) compared to 38% last year. 13 beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to 17 in last year's guide. Water quality in Scotland is below the UK average and MCS blames this poor water quality on increased storm pollution caused by heavy rainfall. During August, Scotland received more rainfall than most areas in Britain.

MCS hopes that planned investment programmes by Scottish Water over the next five years to extend sewage systems and reduce raw discharges, coupled with a reduction in the 830 'Unsatisfactory Intermittent Discharges' (which include combined sewer overflows and emergency overflows from sewage treatment works) to 539 by March 2015[7], will benefit bathing waters in the future.

MCS continues to support the success of electronic live forecasting signs advising swimmers about bathing water quality at 11 beaches around the Scottish Coast and welcomes plans by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to expand the programme to other beaches.

Northern Ireland

33% of beaches in Northern Ireland are MCS Recommended (8 out of 24 tested) compared to 30% last year. Two beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to one in last year's guide.

Northern Ireland continues to suffer from a combination of storm run-off carrying material like fertilisers and animal waste from farmland into the sea, and years of under investment in the sewage infrastructure. MCS hopes that with recent investments by Northern Ireland Water in sewerage systems we will start to see an improvement. For example, the new £45 million North Coast Waste Water Treatment Scheme should benefit bathing water quality. Wastewater from the urban areas of Coleraine, Portrush, Portstewart, Castlerock and Articlave will be collected and transferred to a new two-stage treatment works where the wastewater will be treated to a better standard before being discharged offshore through a new long sea outfall pipe[13].

Channel Islands

The Channel Islands had the biggest increase in MCS Recommended Beaches in this year's Good Beach Guide. 62% of beaches are MCS Recommended (18 out of 29 tested) compared to 38% last year. Two beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to one in last year's guide.

Jersey has 13 MCS Recommended Beaches compared to nine last year, and Guernsey has five MCS Recommended Beaches compared to two in the previous year's guide. The Channel Islands is also the only region where water quality has improved compared to peak UK water quality in the Good Beach guide 2007.

Isle of Man

Only one beach is MCS Recommended on the Isle of Man this year out of 19 tested. Five beaches failed the minimum legal water quality standard compared to three in last year's guide – around a quarter of the beaches tested. The IRIS sewage treatment plant, which came online in April 2004, is still not delivering the bathing water quality improvements that MCS expected from a facility costing an estimated £170 million - about £2,300 per person. With the approval of the IRIS Regional Sewage Treatment Strategy in July 2009, which will see the construction of new sewage treatment plants at Ramsey, Peel and Laxey and a new replacement sewage treatment plant at Kirk Michael, we hope to see improvement in bathing water quality in the future.

A cleaner future?

By 2015, beaches will be classified under the 'revised Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC)' introduced in 2006 to update current standards with new, stricter indicator bacteria levels, based on scientific knowledge of protecting health and the environment. Bathing waters will be classified as 'Poor', 'Sufficient', 'Good', or 'Excellent' (using four years of monitoring data) and the classification will be displayed on the beach, to provide the public with better information on water quality. All bathing waters will be required to achieve at least 'sufficient' quality by 2015.

The new 'Excellent' standard will be roughly twice as stringent as the current EC Guideline standard[14]. If a bathing water is classified as 'Poor' for five years running then permanent advice against bathing will have to be introduced at the beach. Although the new directive became part of UK domestic law in 2008, it will be phased in slowly and the UK will not need to publish bathing water classifications until 2015 (although monitoring will begin in 2012).

In the Environment Agency's 'Corporate Strategy 2010 – 2015 Evidence: water and the water environment', bathing water quality in England and Wales is described as getting worse and in need of additional urgent action to meet or maintain target levels set in their previous corporate strategy[9].

The Agency has used monitoring data from 2006 to 2009 to predict what the revised classifications will be (assuming no action is taken to improve water quality and with no discounting). In England 48 (11%) of designated bathing waters are predicted to be 'Poor' with just over half reaching the 'Excellent' standard. In Wales, 5% of designated bathing beaches are predicted to be 'Poor' with 65% reaching 'Excellent'[15]. Half of the designated bathing waters in the North West are predicted to be 'Poor'[15]. In Northern Ireland around 13% of beaches are predicted to be 'Poor'[16] and in Scotland over one third of beaches are predicted to be 'Poor', with only a quarter reaching the 'Excellent' standard.

By 2015, MCS wants to be able to recommend at least 75% of all beaches tested for water quality in the UK.

Water quality solutions – What we want

MCS wants bathing water quality to continue to improve. This year we are recommending 55% of tested beaches. By 2015, we want to be able to recommend at least 75% of all beaches tested for water quality in the UK. For this to happen, we need to stop storm sewage from CSOs and rainwater runoff from farm land and cities polluting our beaches.

To stop pollutants being washed from farm land and city streets into the sea, we want to see more initiatives, such as Catchment Sensitive farming, to reduce agricultural pollution. We want more sustainable drainage schemes to be introduced under the 'Flood and Water Management Act 2010' to manage rainwater run-off and improve water quality, by providing natural filtration processes before rainwater enters the sea.

There are an estimated 22,000 combined sewer overflows around the UK coast and only a quarter of these are monitored to see how much sewage they are putting into the sea. At least 500 UK beaches have one or more CSOs on them.

We want to see these pipes systematically monitored to make sure that their use is restricted to periods of genuine flooding emergency, and that they are fulfilling the conditions set on discharge consents. This should apply to the entire coastline, not just designated bathing water and shellfish water sites.

Where a CSO is discharging more than 30 times per year, we want water companies to improve the capacity and design of these pipes, including bigger and better storm water holding tanks, to stop them polluting our bathing waters. We also want to see better public information provided at all beaches on health risks associated with storm pollution from these pipes.

TAKE ACTION

Report pipes.
Help us find sewer overflow pipes which are regularly putting sewage into the sea at our beaches by reporting your sightings to us on our website www.goodbeachguide.co.uk.

Use the MCS Good Beach Guide.
Use beaches that MCS recommends for water quality and stay out of the sea for at least 48 hours after a storm to avoid exposure to storm pollution.

Keep our beaches unspoilt.
Don't leave your rubbish on the beach, always clean up after your dog, help reduce the amount of sewage related litter on our beaches by not flushing rubbish down toilets, and find out how you can take part in our Beachwatch beach litter campaigns at www.mcsuk.org.

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