

DEVON RIVERS MANIFESTO

Restoring river health by working together.

updated 27th Jan 2025

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Chair Avon River Champions

Executive Summary

The Devon Rivers Manifesto - A Catchment solution for River Health.

In response to escalating concerns about the pollution of our rivers and estuaries, and the deteriorating ecological status of several valuable designated nature zones, the **Devon Rivers Manifesto** was developed by Avon River Champions (1)

This manifesto addresses the pressing environmental issues affecting our waterways and to advocate for more stringent protection measures. The Aim of the Devon River Manifesto was to empower citizens to advocate for a shift in the way that the Government and therefore the Environment Agency manage and protect our rivers.

By participating in the voting process, people had an opportunity to demand enhanced regulatory measures, improved water quality monitoring, and increased efforts to restore and maintain healthy river ecosystems. The initial voting process for the manifesto took place during the **Devon County Show's "River Discovery Zone,"** a dedicated area focused on educating the public about river conservation and the ecological challenges facing our waterways. Following the in-person voting at the Devon County Show, an online questionnaire was made available.

A catchment-based approach (2) to River Health is essential because it provides a comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable method for managing rivers and estuaries, addressing the complex interactions within the ecosystem, and fostering collaboration among all stakeholders involved.

(1) www.avon-river-champions.org

(2) <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org//>

The Peoples Voice

96% of the many hundreds who voted agreed with the following statements that should inform the Devon Rivers Manifesto. Results can be found on our website www.avon-river-champions.org

1. Devon Rivers to be of overall good Ecological Status by 2027 in line with legally binding targets in the Water Framework Directive.
2. South West Water to ensure sewage treatment and wastewater works have adequate hydraulic capacity as specified in their Discharge Permits before paying dividends & bonuses.
3. Environment Agency budgets restored with powerful mandate to monitor frequently and in detail to ensure Agriculture and South West Water comply with legislation that protects our rivers.
4. Water Companies to be made Public Benefit Corporations to environmentally sensitive corporate social responsibility.
5. Fund farmers to reduce Agricultural Runoff by - installing Nature-based Solutions, adequate covered slurry tanks, slurry soil injectors, slurry processing into energy or less soluble organic fertilisers, transition to regenerative farming, diversification.
6. Planning Authorities empowered and required to control pollution from new developments. South West Water to be made a mandatory consultee and declare spare hydraulic capacity for all treatment works on annual basis.
7. Local budgets for road drainage adequately funded to prevent pollution of rivers and farmland.
8. Environment Agency to produce annual catchment reports of key data in easy-to-read format to restore public confidence in their ability to protect our rivers.

Next Steps

We look forward to your response to the information shared here and hear of your commitment to addressing this cross-party issue in a way that reflects the voice of the people.

Your Commitment

We invite you to pledge to set 2027 as a target date for the water bodies in your Constituency to be of Good Ecological status.

We recognise that our MPs have the most power to affect the scale of the changes needed and the speed with which this is delivered. River health is a cross-party issue and appeared on all your manifestos.

We would like to see the formation of a cross-party **Devon River Assembly** for the Devon MPs to join forces to restore the health of all rivers in Devon by 2027 informed by the Devon Rivers Manifesto.

Further Information

We have summary data for your constituency and the catchments within its boundaries in this booklet.

You will find links to where you can seek further information regarding the ecological status and the pollution from agriculture and South West Water of the water bodies within your Constituency.

River Avon
- from source to sea



Devon MPs 4th July 2024.

PLYMOUTH MOOR VIEW

Fred Thomas LABOUR

Catchments: Plym

PLYMOUTH SUTTON & DEVONPORT

Luke Pollard LABOUR

Catchments: Plym

EXETER

Steve Race LABOUR

Catchments: Exe, Culm, Otter

SOUTH DEVON

Caroline Voaden LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments: Avon, Gara, Slapton Ley, Dart, Erme and Kingsbridge Salcombe Estuary

HONITON & SIDMOUTH

Richard Foord LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments: Axe, Otter

NEWTON ABBOTT

Martin Wrigley LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments: Teign, Bovey

TORBAY

Steve Darling LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments:

TIVERTON & MINEHEAD

Rachel Gilmour LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments: Bray, Exe, Little Dart, Lowman

NORTH DEVON

Ian Roome LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Catchments: Yeo, Caen, Taw, Bray, Mole

CENTRAL DEVON

Mel Stride CONSERVATIVE

Headwaters: Taw, Creedy, Bovey, Teign, Dart

EXMOUTH & EXETER EAST

David Reed CONSERVATIVE

Catchments: Exe, Clyst

TORRIDGE & TAVISTOCK

Geoffrey Cox CONSERVATIVE

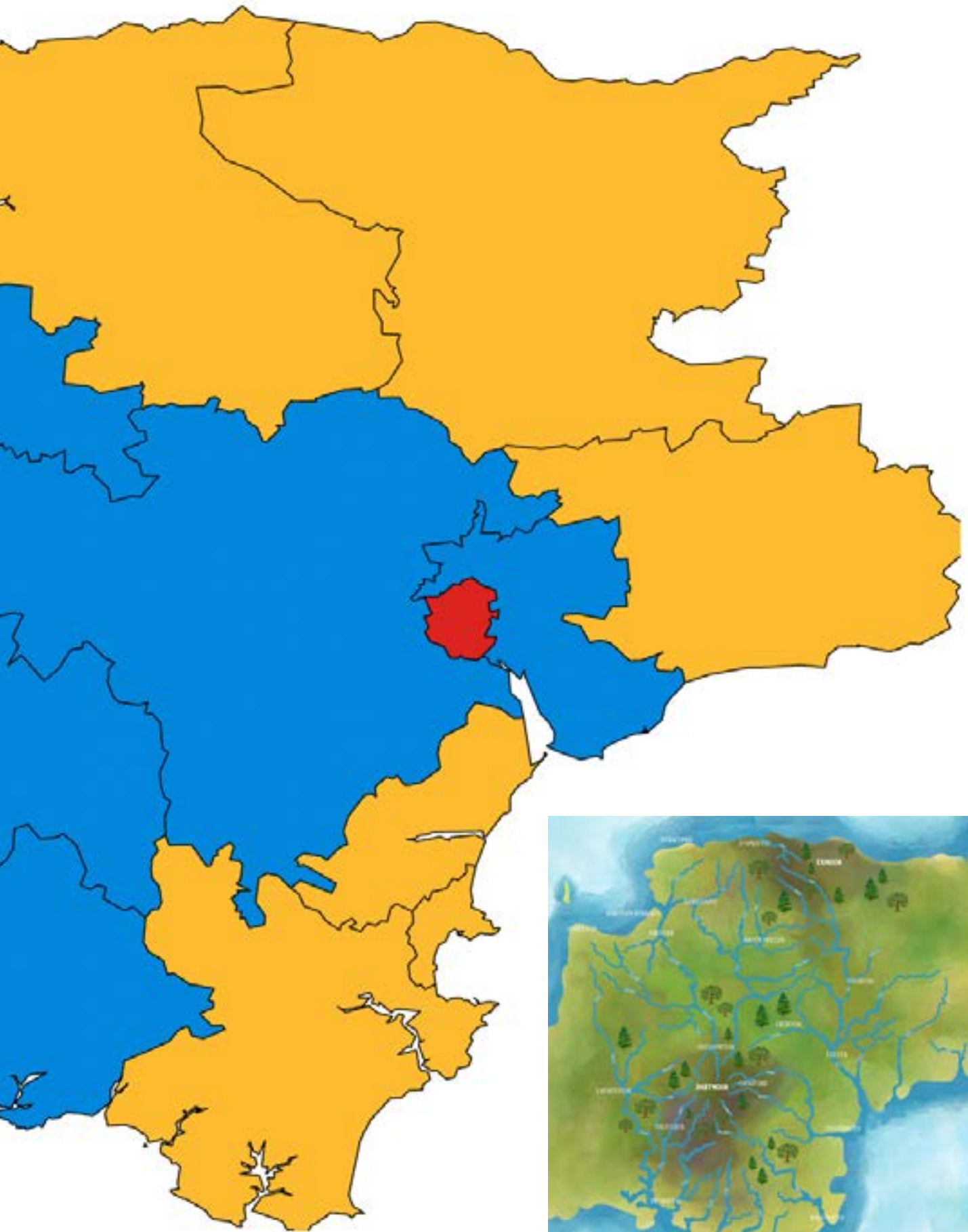
River Torridge, Yeo, Walden, Tamar, Lew, Thistle Brook, Lyd and Tavy

SOUTH WEST DEVON

Rebecca Smith CONSERVATIVE

Catchments: Yealm, Erme







Devon River Manifesto

In response to rising concerns about the pollution of our rivers and estuaries and the poor ecological status of some valuable designated nature zones - the **Devon River Manifesto** was devised.

Voting took place at the **Devon County Show's "River Discovery Zone"** and afterwards through an on-line questionnaire. It gave people the chance to vote for change in the way that Government and the Environment Agency protected our rivers.

Left

Michael Caines MBE voting as President of the 2024 Devon County Show.

Below

Liberal Democrat prospective MPs in Devon visit the River Discovery Zone to vote on the Devon River Manifesto





The State of our Rivers in Devon*

HIGH (none)

GOOD 64 water bodies (21%)

MODERATE 191 water bodies (63%)

POOR 45 water bodies (15%)

* Ecological status designated by Environment Agency 2023
ref: Catchment Explorer

Rivers of Change

We all want change and recognise that our MPs have the most power to effect the scale of the changes needed and the speed with which this is delivered.

River health is a cross party issue and appeared on all your manifestos. We hope you will work on this together as our **Devon Catchment Ambassadors**.

Avon River Champions would like to showcase your endeavours on their **Devon River Action** platform. We warmly invite you to inform us of your initiatives and outcomes as you take up your seats in Parliament and give your **Maiden Speeches**.

Your Commitment

Will you pledge to set **2027 as a target date** for the water bodies in your Constituency Catchment to be of Good Ecological status?

Would you lead a cross party **Devon River Assembly** for the Devon MPs to join forces to restore the health of all rivers in Devon by 2027?

Our Support

We have provided you with summary data for your **Catchment Constituency**.

Links enable you to continue to **update yourself** on the ecological status and the pollution from agriculture and South West Water of the water bodies within your Catchment Constituency.

Devon River Action Plan

- ✓ **Devon Rivers to be of overall GOOD Ecological Status by 2027**
- ✓ **South West Water to ensure SEWAGE TREATMENT & WASTE WATER works have adequate hydraulic capacity as specified in their Discharge Permits before paying dividends & bonuses.**
- ✓ **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY budgets restored with powerful mandate to monitor frequently and in detail to ensure Agriculture and South West Water comply with legislation that protects our rivers.**
- ✓ **WATER COMPANIES to be made Public Benefit Corporations to environmentally sensitive corporate social responsibility.**
- ✓ **Fund farmers to reduce AGRICULTURAL RUN-OFF by - installing nature-based solutions, adequate covered slurry tanks, slurry soil injectors, slurry processing into energy or less soluble organic fertilisers, transition to regenerative farming, diversification.**
- ✓ **PLANNING AUTHORITIES empowered and required to control pollution from new developments. South West Water to be made a mandatory consultees.**
- ✓ **Local budgets for ROAD DRAINAGE adequately funded to prevent pollution of rivers and farmland.**
- ✓ **EA to produce ANNUAL CATCHMENT REPORTS of key data in easy-to-read format to restore public confidence in their ability to protect our rivers.**

Did you know?

- The **Water Framework Directive** states a legally binding target for 77% of water bodies to be of Good Ecological Status by 2027. The Office of Environmental Protection reports that the Government will miss this target by a very wide margin
- OFWAT was ordered to consider water company profitability before imposing fines for pollution
- EA budgets have been reduced by 50% in past decade, making them no longer capable of regulating and ensuring compliance with existing legislation.
- B Corp – allowed to make a profit but the Environment comes first
- Nationally - 40% river pollution from agriculture, 36% from water companies. Post Brexit two fifths of farmers earn less than £25,000 income each year and 15 per cent of all farms make a profit
- Lords defeated attempts to scrap the Nutrient Neutrality Scheme that controls sewage pollution from new developments that will pollute Sites of Special Scientific Interest SSSIs.
- National Highways and Local Authorities need adequate budgets for road drainage to prevent urban diffuse pollution causing 18% of the failure to achieve Good Ecological status of rivers in England.
- Catchment groups are funding analysis of EA data on rivers from complex spreadsheets that are difficult to navigate and need a statistician to interpret.

River Water Quality Groups

Catchment based approach is already being pursued by parishes

Catchment community groups for the River Yealm (**Yealm Estuary to Moor**) and River Erme (**Wild About the Erme River**) have challenged catchments throughout Devon to cooperate and focus as a catchment on restoring our rivers to Good Ecological status.

River Yealm Water Quality Group:
Wembury, Brixton, Yealmpton, Newton and Noss, Cornwood and Sparkwell.

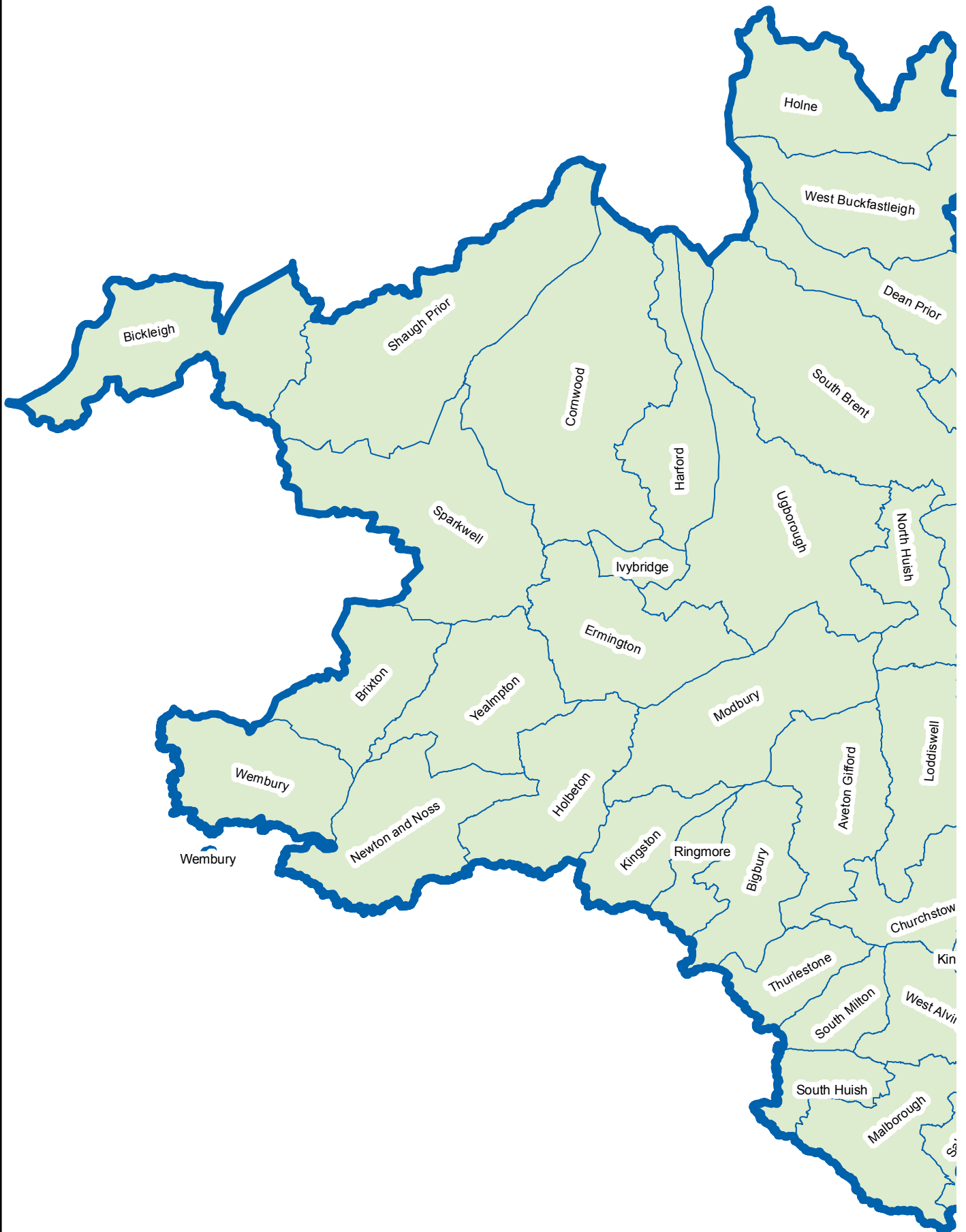
River Erme Parishes Joint Water Quality Group: Ivybridge, Kingston, Holbeton, Ugborough, Ermington and Modbury.

River Water Quality Groups meet regularly to:

- Review water quality data from the whole river catchment.
- Jointly fund monitoring equipment to be deployed along the catchment.
- Analyse catchment data regularly to measure progress against targets.
- Consider the impact of planning decisions on water quality
- Engage with South West Water and the Environment Agency as a water quality group.

**We are asking
our new MPs to
collaborate along
river catchments -
as have our parish
councils.**

**Will you work
together in
parliament to
ensure our laws are
implemented and
budgets allocated
to fully protect our
rivers for future
generations of
inhabitants and
wildlife?**





NORTH DEVON

Hartland and Clovelly
Streams, Taw
and North Devon
Streams, Torrridge



DEVON SOUTH

Avon Salcombe and
Kingsbridge
Dart Start Bay and
Torbay, Erme and
Teign



TAMAR

Lynher, Plym Tamar
Lower, and Inny
Tamar Upper, Tavy,
Thrushel Wolf and Lyd,
Yealm



DEVON EAST

Clyst and Culm,
Creedy and West Exe,
Exe Main, Lim and
Axe, Sid and Otter

REASONS for NOT ACHIEVING GOOD RNAG (Ecological status)

Find out the Ecological status of the water bodies in your Constituency by clicking on the relevant Catchment Management zone above.

Explore how many of your water bodies are of 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Moderate' or 'Poor'. = ecological status.



**Only 21% of Rivers in Devon
are of Good Ecological status**

**Will you pledge to set
2027 as a target for the
Rivers in your Constituency
Catchment to be of
Good Ecological status?**

Who is responsible?

Drill down into the data for your catchment and you will find a table (as you scroll down the entry) which tells you who is responsible for the pollution that caused the Ecological status to be downgraded from 'Good'

The EA will determine the several RNAG that may have collectively downgraded the water body and indicate the **Responsible Sector**.

South West Water

Sewage discharge (continuous) due to:

'Inadequate hydraulic capacity' or 'On-going Investigation'

Agriculture

Poor soil management
Poor livestock management
Poor nutrient management

Urban / Highways

Road run-off and plastic waste

Forever Chemicals

No individual Sector responsible because sources very diverse and historical.

The extent and source of unsafe bacterial content in water caused by human sewage and animal manure contamination is not identified by the Environment Agency Reports.

This ambiguity makes it difficult to solve the problem.

e-DNA water sampling at strategic points in the river system, above and below treatment works or agricultural businesses - will provide the evidence needed to solve the problem.

Some community groups are paying for this analysis themselves. £250/sample

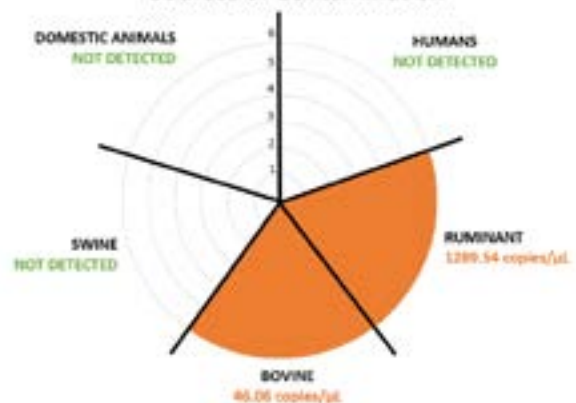


a) Enterococci Faecal Contamination



Sample ID: Water_DC_North+_Middle_Ponds

b) Sources of Contamination



INVESTIGATE SEWAGE SPILLS by CONSTITUENCY

RIVERSTRUST Sewage Map

Water companies must now reveal how many of their treatment works they are monitoring themselves for the following information - TOTAL:

- Combined Sewer overflows CSOs
- Duration (Hrs) overflows.

This data can be investigated by town, District Council and by Constituency. Click on the above link for the interactive map and explore your data by clicking 'INVESTIGATE' to find the data for your Catchment Constituency.

Click on the brown dots on the Rivers Trust Sewage Maps that locate South West Water sewage treatment plants and waste water treatment plants - to find the latest evidence of the CSOs from those assets. The Discharge Permit for every treatment works specifies the size of the asset in relation to the original population it was designed to serve.





Geoffrey Cox
Catchment Constituencies:
Rivers Torrington, Yeo, Walden, Tamar, Lew, Thistle Brook, Lyd and Tavy.

TORRINGTON & TAVISTOCK
 CONSERVATIVE
 Ref Boundary change formerly
 Torrington & West Devon

Total of
8,532 spills

Total duration of
97,417 hours



Fred Thomas & Luke Pollard
Catchment Constituencies:
River Plym

PLYMOUTH MOOR VIEW (Plym)
 PLYMOUTH SUTTON & DEVONPORT (Plym)

Total spills of **782** (Moorview)
1,956 (Sutton & Devonport)

Total duration **5,736** hrs (MV)
8,030 (Sutton & Devonport)



Rebecca Smith
Catchment Constituencies:
Rivers Plym, Tavy, Yealm and Erme.

SOUTH WEST DEVON
 CONSERVATIVE

Total of
2,430 spills

Total duration of
21,285 hours



Rachel Gilmour
Catchment Constituencies
Barle, Exe, Little Dart and Lowman

TIVERTON & MINEHEAD
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
ref: Boundary change former **Tiverton & Honiton**

Total of
4,163 spills

Total duration of
41,239 hours



Steve Race
Catchment Constituencies
Rivers Exe and Culm

EXETER
LABOUR

Total of
815 spills

Total duration of
1,527 hours



David Reed
Catchment Constituencies
Rivers Exe, Clyst and Otter

EXMOUTH & EXETER EAST
CONSERVATIVE
Ref Boundary change - formerly **East Devon**

Total of
2,443 spills

Total duration of
24,552 hours

Richard Foord
Catchment Constituencies
Rivers Yart, Axe, Otter

HONITON & SIDMOUTH
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

ref: Boundary change former **Tiverton & Honiton**

Total of
4,163 spills
Total duration of
41,239 hours



Martin Wrigley
Catchment Constituencies
Rivers Teign, Bovey, Lemon

NEWTON ABBOTT
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Total of
2,457 spills
Total duration of
17,663 hours



Steve Darling
Catchment Constituencies
Torbay

TORBAY
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Total of
643 spills
Total duration of
4,516 hours





Caroline Voaden

Catchment Constituencies:

Avon, Gara, Slapton Ley, Dart, Erme and Kingsbridge Salcombe Estuary

SOUTH DEVON.
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Total of

5,206 spills

Total duration of

52,226 hours



Mel Stride

Catchment Constituencies

Headwaters of Rivers: Dart, Bovey, Teign, Credenney, Taw, Okemont and Lew.

CENTRAL DEVON
CONSERVATIVE

Total of

6,635 spills

Total duration of

62,647 hours,



Ian Roome

Catchment Constituencies

Yeo, Caen, Taw, Bray, Mole

NORTH DEVON
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Total of

4,120 spills

Total duration of

39,009 hours

RIVER RECOVERY PLAN

Some rivers pass through more than one constituency which will require some **collaboration between MPs** to ensure a holistic catchment plan is feasible.

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Ordinary people have joined community groups throughout Devon to find out why the Environment Agency and Government have failed to protect our rivers. The actions in the **Devon River Manifesto** reflect this discovery. Our new MPs are requested to find out more about the issues highlighted and take action to address these impediments to clean rivers.

pages 5 - 8

Inter-parish and **inter-constituency collaboration** is key to ensuring that a holistic plan is created that ensures the whole river is restored to Good Ecological status.

pages 9 - 10

Data is freely available in the public domain to identify the **general extent of the problem and the sources of pollution**.

pages 11 - 13

It is possible, by taking additional **e-DNA water samples**, to quantify the level of E.coli pollution and identify what proportion of a local problem is due to agriculture (cows, sheep, etc.) and how much is due to CSOs from South West Water.

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MPs are now able to view the data on pollution from SWW pollution which **relates to their own Constituency**. This enables them to identify the extent of the problem and which Sector is responsible. Targets for improvement can be set and agreed with the Sector concerned.

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Constituencies can also monitor the effectiveness of their MPs in delivering the changes needed by 2030.

We look forward to your response to the information shared here .

Louise Wainwright
Chair - Avon River Champions

Avon River Champions accepts no liability for any errors in the data presented. MPs are advised to check the data manually by reference to the main Rivers Trust Sewage Map. Boundary changes will have affected some total figures.



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We are a community group working to restore Good Ecological status to the catchments for the River Avon (South Devon), River Gara and Slapton Ley and the Kingsbridge Salcombe Estuary.

Contact:

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@avonriverchampions

