

# **SAVE THE TEIFI'S RESPONSE**

**TO THE SEWAGE SCANDAL AT CARDIGAN  
SEWAGE WORKS AND UNPERMITTED  
SPILLING IN LOWER TEIFI AND ESTUARY**

**FIVE  
ASKS**

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# 01

## **RAPIDLY END THE POLLUTION FROM CARDIGAN SEWAGE WORKS AND UNPERMITTED DISCHARGES OF UNTREATED SEWAGE**

### **Issue:**

The Cardigan area of the river Teifi is the worst publicly-known case of sewage pollution - sewage work spilling, and unpermitted spilling of untreated sewage - in Wales (according to Peter Hammond 2023). The community and local wildlife have been forced to live with this for over a decade. Save The Teifi has had a number of meetings with Dr Cymru and mention was made of some seawater penetration affecting processing, but there was not full transparency about the extent of the issues. Natural Resources Wales has been aware of this situation for over 10 years and has failed to regulate or issue any penalty. The community is extremely angry that this has been happening for so long and is alarmed at the impacts on biodiversity and human health.

### **Solution:**

Start the work on Cardigan sewage works promptly or provide robust evidence as to why there is a delay to this.

Use the opportunity of the new works to install a nature-based approach as part of the solution, or provide robust evidence as to why this is not possible.

## 02

### **AUTHORITIES TO URGENTLY UNDERTAKE VIGOROUS AND COMPREHENSIVE MONITORING OF RIVER AND ESTUARY POLLUTION AND OF BATHING WATER QUALITY AT POPPIT SANDS**

#### **Issue:**

In response to the recent publication of Peter Hammond's assessment of unpermitted sewage spillages from Cardigan sewage works, Dŵr Cymru sent a letter to residents stating that there is no environmental impact from this because the bathing water quality at Poppit Sands meets 'excellent' bathing water quality standards. This contradicts the experience of the community. Many members of the community report a decline in biodiversity and river health in the last decade. Over the last few years there has been a significant increase in incidents of sewage pollution indicated by noxious odours and algal blooms, with widespread alarm at the accelerating decline of many species. It is considered an inadequate indicator of the impact of sewage releases as the bathing water is only tested infrequently during summer months when less spilling is occurring. Neither does it measure the environmental impact on water quality in the estuary, its habitat and biodiversity – an issue which complicates the interface between river and coastal waters.

#### **Solution:**

Water Framework Directive needs to be annually monitoring the areas affected by the sewage spills, including the estuary. Create a platform to share, in real time, all the data and evidence that authorities have on river health in the lower part of the catchment, estuary and localised coastal waters. Dŵr Cymru to outline how it is assessing the impact of sewage spills on the environment and publish the results for sites as they become available.

Bathing waters at Poppit Sands and Gwbert to be tested all year round.

Assessment and monitoring of the tidal dynamics of the estuary section to be published and shared in an accessible format to understand the effects of re-circulated pollution.

Communities' experience of the decline in river and estuary environmental health over the last decade to be recorded as part of the qualitative evidence collected alongside the 'quantitative science-based approach' of current river health.

# 03

## COMPREHENSIVE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMME UNDERWAY BY SUMMER 2024

### Issue:

Communities along the river have been asking for a citizen science programme for a number of years from NRW and Dŵr Cymru to support their assessment of river health and bathing water quality. This is an opportunity for authorities and communities to work together.

### Solution:

Engage the active community in a comprehensive citizen science programme along the river, in the estuary and bathing waters at Poppit Sands and Gwbirt. This should include a number of methodologies, both chemical and visual.

Support and work with continuous citizen science monitoring to identify point and diffuse source pollution.

Use this to more effectively target authorities' resources towards more detailed monitoring and urgent action to address these pollution sources.

# 04

## **NRW TO ACT AS A REGULATOR, ENFORCER AND PROTECTOR OF NATURE.**

### **Issue:**

The link between waste water treatment plant outflows (treated and untreated) pollution and the impact on wildlife is well evidenced. To allow the unpermitted spillage of sewage to continue, especially in a river identified as a Special Area of Conservation with failing phosphate targets, is inexcusable. We are in a nature crisis and cannot be complacent about species decline and habitat loss. Unless action is implemented immediately salmon will be extinct in the river Teifi within 10 years (NRW 2023); other populations have declined by 22% across Wales with the Teifi being one of the worst affected catchments (NRW 2022). As top predators both species are important biological indicators of the overall condition of the entire aquatic ecosystem.

NRW's current approach has clearly not worked as it has failed to act on unpermitted sewage spillages and other documented pollution incidents throughout the Teifi catchment over many years. The 'Team Wales' relationship between Dŵr Cymru and NRW is ineffective. NRW needs to be a regulator not an enabler. Dŵr Cymru have openly acknowledged that they prioritise investment in response to pressure from the regulator. The community is angry that the organisation responsible for protecting nature has comprehensively failed to do so.

### **Solution:**

NRW to be adequately resourced to carry out rapid monitoring and enforcement action.

More severe fines to be imposed on organisations, individuals and authorities when acting illegally – to fund that work.

Repeat offenders to be subject to increased levels of fines.

Spot fines deferred by 3 months to enable the polluter to address the pollution issue. Failure to take significant action to do so will result in a doubling of the fine.

As Dŵr Cymru is a not-for-profit company the fines should be sourced from remuneration packages and directed towards investment in improvements.

Assess all currently permitted discharges for breaches of permit and impose immediate penalties.

Review all the permits for sewage discharges to include assessment of volume and composition, and enforce whenever breached.

# 05

## **CEOS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR PROFESSIONAL NEGLIGENCE IN RELATION TO THE DAMAGE DONE TO THE RIVER AND THE IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES, NATURE AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

### **Issue:**

The community is angry that the senior management of Dŵr Cymru and NRW have overseen the unpermitted spilling of sewage for over a decade. There is also anger that when the community report sewage in the river and estuary, increased algal blooms or noxious odours, it has been told that these are natural and/or not related to any of the sewage spilling or failures of the sewage works. This has led to a breakdown of trust in Dŵr Cymru and NRW. The community does not believe that they have been providing the service they are contracted to deliver, or working to protect nature, communities or future generations. Instead, they have been protecting the reputations of their organisations and hiding failings. The damage and loss caused has resulted in a breach of their duty of care which can only be described as professional negligence.

### **Solution:**

The variable pay (Dŵr Cymru) or performance reviews (Dŵr Cymru and NRW) of CEOs, executive directors and senior management to include performance related structures for environmental measures and the protection of future generations. If this were the case, no additional pay or annual pay increase would be provided. Directors, executives and senior management would be on a 'behavioural warning' requiring significant improvement to retain their position.

Improvements to the river and sewage works must not come from customers' bills.

The community also requests an apology in writing for the sewage spilling in the river and estuary and a clear time-based action plan for urgent improvements – not a letter declaring that the media has misrepresented the issues and suggestion that there is no impact because the bathing water is 'excellent'.

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