

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair
Public Accounts Committee

Date: 21 June 2021

Dear Dame Meg

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee on Monday (14 June) to give evidence on the principles of effective regulation.

We will get back to the committee with a full response on our prosecution activity shortly, but I wanted to clarify a couple of remarks I made during the session.

In response to your question on sewage pollution I said:

“What we are doing in the short term, including for the Lea, is making sure that we have monitoring, which we have encouraged the water companies to put in place; we now have monitoring on more than 80% of the 15,000 overflows around the country. That tells us and the water companies much more accurately when, how frequently and by how much the sewer outflows overflow, and we publish that data for the public to see.”

Whilst it is correct that Event Duration Monitors do show when and how frequently sewer overflows spill, they do not themselves measure the volume of outflows. If an overflow passes a threshold of a certain frequency of spills the EA do then require the water companies to investigate the impact of these on the environment, and as part of this investigation the volume of sewage outflows will be measured.

I also said:

“We provide advice to the public about the conditions under which they may want to consider swimming in those rivers.”

We do publish the EDM data online every year, information which can help the public decide whether, when and where they want to swim. Alongside the Environment Agency’s pollution risk forecast service, near real-time data on storm overflows spills is available through the Surfers Against Sewage app for designated coastal bathing waters, however neither are currently in place for rivers in general.

I would be grateful if you could circulate this note to the committee and update the transcript accordingly.

Yours sincerely

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