Update on our storm overflow reduction targets

We agree with the Government and Ofwat that the issue of storm overflows needs immediate focus, and that the industry must consider a fundamental redesign of the whole wastewater management system to meet new standards. The Environment Act was the first step, and it has our full support alongside the Government’s expectations set out in the Strategic Policy Statement and Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan.

Our overall strategy to improve our environmental impact includes initiatives to improve network capacity, more investment into our infrastructure and nature-based solutions, as well as improving water quality monitoring and investment. We have already set up our Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force which is focused on reducing the use of storm overflows, through Pathfinder projects at six key sites across our region.

In April 2022, we indicated that there was potential to reduce storm overflow use by up to 80% by 2030, but since then, we have reviewed and validated our approach via our Pathfinder Projects, our regional storm overflow investigations for our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans and through preparation for our Price Review 2024 submission. Our revised position, which we believe is affordable and deliverable, aims to reduce discharges to an average of 18\* per year by 2025. As part of our Business Plan 2025–30, we’re focusing on the most environmentally sensitive locations (coastal and inland) and prioritising nature-based solutions to reduce discharges to an average of 15\* per year by 2030, investing more than £700 million to reduce storm overflows at 179 sites.

**Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force**

The Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force is already delivering six [Pathfinder](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/our-performance/storm-overflows/pathfinder-projects/the-solent-isle-of-wight-pathfinder-project) projects, across Deal, Margate, and Swalecliffe in Kent; Pan Parishes in North Hampshire; Fairlight, East Sussex and Sandown on the Isle of Wight, which have enabled us to trial catchment-based solutions to find the best solution for the wider area.

We’re spending £35 million to 2025 implementing our accelerated storm overflow reduction plan, delivering green solutions at a scale and pace unseen before. This additional funding, agreed by Ofwat, is allowing us to accelerate our pathfinder approach and reduce releases. The findings from these projects have also informed our plans for the next investment period 2025–30.

We’re working with local MP’s, county councils, partners and customers to make a much bigger difference. By teaming up with those that own infrastructure such as the highways owned by local councils, we can work together to improve assets and scale up our delivery, while providing wider societal and environmental benefits for our communities.

**Our approach to reducing the use of storm overflows**

Broadly we believe there are four main interventions and achieving our goals will be a balance across all four areas:

1. Source control (removing and slowing the flow of rainwater)
2. Optimising of existing infrastructure (beyond permit, smarter, and more holistic)
3. Using more nature-based treatment approaches (wetlands)
4. Building more infrastructure (sewers, tanks, treatment).

We’re prioritising interventions one, two and three, before we consider building more infrastructure and we’re committed to improving the effectiveness of green solutions.

**Further investment**

It is vital that we continue to invest. We have committed to investing more than £2.5 billion across our region in the five years to 2025, equivalent to £1,500 per household. Around £1.5 billion of this is for investment in improving wastewater services, which is being used to upgrade our ability to deal with greater volumes of wastewater and the capacity to store more storm water. This is in addition to the nature-based approach to reduce storm overflows. The £2.5 billion includes £230 million of investment, over and above the allowance set by the industry regulator Ofwat.

We know that Ofwat has a duty to customers to ensure they are receiving the best value for money – even more so in the current climate. We are putting forward an ambitious and thorough proposal in our PR24 business plan, taking key learnings from our pathfinders and wider initiatives, to prove how efficient but targeted investment, can deliver for all. This plan will see us invest £700 million focusing on the most sensitive locations (coastal and inland) reducing storm overflow releases to an average of 15 per year by 2030, details of which we plan to publish in the coming weeks.