



Borough Council of
King's Lynn &
West Norfolk



LGA Coastal Special Interest Group and Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk: Coastal Water Quality Summit

Thursday 19 June 2025

Coastal Water Quality Summit Summary Report





Foreword

We are pleased to present this report following the Coastal Water Quality Summit, which brought together councils, partners, and stakeholders to explore the urgent and complex challenges facing our coastal environments.

As Chair of the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) and Coastal Water Quality Member Champion, we were proud to co-host this event in collaboration with the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk. The summit provided a valuable platform for sharing knowledge, strengthening partnerships, and identifying practical steps to improve water quality along our coasts.

Alison Hume MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Coastal Communities, joined us to highlight the importance of national policy reform, sustainable coastal economies, and the need for a dedicated Coastal Minister. Her remarks reinforced the value of cross-party collaboration and long-term investment in our communities.

We shared insights into the causes and consequences of poor water quality locally and nationally, including seabird, dog and human waste, runoff, microplastics and misconnections as contributing factors to poor water quality in several locations. In line with the LGA Coastal SIG Coastal Water Quality Survey report, the reputational and economic impacts of coastal water quality perception in the public eye, and genuine issues impacting our communities, are significant.

This report captures the key themes, discussions, and recommendations from the summit. We hope it serves as a useful resource for councils, regulators, and partners working collaboratively to protect and enhance our coastal waters.

Cllr Ernest Gibson

Chair, LGA Coastal Special Interest Group

Cllr Sandra Squire

Member Champion Coastal Water Quality





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Introduction

The Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group (LGA Coastal SIG) is associated with the LGA with a membership of Local Authorities covering over 60% of the English coast. South Tyneside Council are the Lead Authority, led by Councillor Ernest Gibson as Chair since September 2019, supported by Vice-Chair Cllr Derek Bastiman of North Yorkshire Council. The Coastal SIG champions the collective interests of coastal, estuarine and maritime communities by increasing awareness and debate on environmental, economic and social issues at all levels in relation to the coast.

The LGA Coastal SIG determines its' work using priority work-themes; one of which is Coastal Water Quality. As an Elected Member led group, each work-theme has a Member Champion to lead on actions and recommendations. Cllr Sandra Squire of the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk is the Coastal SIG Member Champion for Coastal Water Quality, and is supported by two Officer Leads, Michelle Hogg of South Tyneside Council and Clare Nolan-Barnes of Blackpool Council.

In close collaboration with the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, we arranged a Coastal Water Quality Summit held online on Thursday 19 June 2025 with several key speakers and organisations with an interest in Coastal Water Quality.

The outputs of the Summit are outlined within this report, which will help guide our next steps within the Coastal Water Quality work-theme.





1. Overview

The LGA Coastal SIG and Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Coastal Water Quality Summit invited stakeholders from government, academia, industry, non-governmental organisations and community groups to address the growing concerns around coastal water quality. The summit focused on policy reform, public communication, environmental monitoring, and community engagement.

The Summit took place in three parts, starting with the initial welcome coming from Cllr Ernest Gibson as LGA Coastal SIG Chair. We were then joined by Alison Hume MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Coastal Communities (APPG for Coastal Communities) for opening remarks. The Coastal SIG acts as the Co-Secretariat for this APPG, which has a membership of ~45 Parliamentarians (Members of Parliament and the House of Lords).

Our morning session on Regulation and Policy was facilitated by Coastal Water Quality Member Champion, Cllr Sandra Squire ending with a question-and-answer session for presenters. Our second presentation session with a focus on Communities was facilitated by Cllr Andy Bullen, Mayor of Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, with a question-and-answer session after all presentations.

After lunch, a Panel Discussion with Panel Members representing both Regulation and Policy organisations, and Non-Governmental and Community Organisations was held with a focus on Coastal Water Quality issues titled 'Safeguarding our Shores: Collaborative Solutions for coastal water quality'.

Throughout the day, polls were used on Slido to find out who was on the call, key information attendees would like to find out from the Summit, and their priorities for water quality. Attendees were also asked to make a pledge to support water quality and provide feedback on the Summit. Questions were also submitted and facilitated through Slido throughout the Summit.

2. Key Messages

a. **Local Impact:** Coastal Water Quality Summit discussions and presentations addressed water quality as a major public concern in terms of interacting with water bodies and as a result, this is impacting on water-based industries.





b. Information: Ensuring the correct messaging around bathing waters and coastal water quality in relation to water safety is key for public safety and in supporting reputation of a thriving blue economy in the UK.

c. Policy gaps: Attendees highlighted policy gaps they would like to be addressed including; expanding water quality considerations to include emerging pollutants which could be hazardous to human health such as Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and exploring the implementation of a Polluter Pays Principle.

d. Wider themes: Throughout the Summit the following four themes were echoed throughout, and it was made clear that pollution from Water Companies is not the only pollution source that needs addressing. The themes align with the key asks and actions the Coastal SIG's Coastal Water Quality Working Group:

- i. Extend definition of water users under bathing water classifications to include non-bathers.
- ii. To continuously record real time data to share with the public to support public safety and planning for water-based industries
- iii. To extend bathing water season to understand the quality of water year round
- iv. A fourth mentioned was to look at different forms of testing beyond e-coli to modernise testing.

3. Presentations

As previously mentioned, the morning of the conference featured a range of informative and insightful presentations from key Government and Regulatory Bodies, Academics and Industry, Non-Governmental Organisations and Community Perspectives. This helped to ensure a balanced, engaging and collaborative Summit, representing the challenges faced by all water-facing organisations, academics and regulators, as well as opportunities to improve coastal water quality relations and public awareness.

Below is a summary of each presentation. Full slides can be found in Appendix I:





Government and Regulatory Bodies

- **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) - Lewis Kirk:** DEFRA's recent Bathing Water Reforms are being finalised, with proposed changes including removing automatic de-designation of sites, increased flexibility in bathing season dates, and enhanced focus on water quality and safety in guidance. Whilst the reform period is still underway, updated guidance now supports applications more extensively for designation of new sites. A further call for evidence has explored expanding the definition of bathers and the use of multiple sampling points for water quality. DEFRA is also reviewing health risk research to inform and support future policy. Attendees were also advised that the Water Commission's call for evidence received 50,000 responses and held over 150 stakeholder meetings, with formal replies to follow.
- **Environment Agency - Mat Jarman:** Audience insight research has explored how the public engages with messaging and terminology around bathing water quality. Focus groups and a survey of over 5,000 frequent water users revealed that water quality and weather are the main deterrents to entering the water, with sewage-related news being the most memorable. Less than 25% of respondents could accurately define what a designated bathing water is, and most were unaware of the Swimfo platform, though they expressed willingness to use it if made aware of it. The Environment Agency was seen as a trusted source, and the key takeaway was the need for simpler, clearer language to improve public understanding on bathing water issues.
- **Ofwat - Andrew Staines:** Ofwat as the Water Services Regulation Authority is strengthening its role in environmental regulation by increasing staff and resources. Ofwat has been looking at drainage and pollution projects to support the current five-year plan to reduce pollution risks from storm overflows, aiming for a 45% reduction in spills from 2021 levels. It has committed £12 billion to do this. As of 2025, water companies are required to report spills publicly within 24 hours, a real-time monitoring duty given to them by Ofwat. Ofwat also launched an Innovation Fund (2020–2030) to support real-time testing and increase public transparency on spills. Ofwat recognises that water quality is a multi-sector challenge with impacts on water quality being around 40% agriculturally based, 35% water companies, 10% road runoff. Ofwat is exploring regional collaboration models and closer working with local government.





- **Anglian Water - Adam Worley:**

Anglian Water has developed a bathing and shellfish waters strategy to assess faecal risk at its 54 designated bathing waters and reduce the impact of their own assets. The company operates under Ofwat's outcome delivery incentives, receiving penalties or rewards based on performance in protecting and improving bathing water quality and prevention of further deterioration of bathing water sites currently underperforming. They are actively engaging with community groups, offering information and site visits to assets, and are investing in capital projects and pollution source identification to support water quality improvements.

Academic, Non-Governmental Organisation, Community and Local Government Contributions

- **Cardiff University - Emma McKinley:**

This presentation promoted England's upcoming Ocean Literacy Strategy and invited participation in its July workshops. In Wales, an Ocean Literacy Strategy has been enacted, thinking about how to integrate sectors within coastal and non-coastal areas. Nationwide engagement across all sectors and communities has helped to ensure a whole system approach and the embedding of Ocean Literacy into Welsh society. It is hoped this will help restore society's relationship with our coastlines and the ocean. At the heart of the Ocean Literacy Strategy, is co-development and co-design which helps to shape how key action areas are taken forward. Each action has its own guidelines shaped by a co-created framework and baseline understanding of ocean literacy. A draft strategy should be available for England in early 2026, informed by workshops and online sessions that are ongoing currently.

- **Paddle UK - Chantelle Grundy:**

Paddle UK reports growing concern among members about poor water quality, which is now the biggest area of concern for paddle boarding. This issue affects the wider water sports industry, prompting the formation of the Clean Water Sports Alliance. Poor water quality poses reputational risks for international events and limits scheduling flexibility, especially for winter sports like surfing. Paddle UK is calling for accurate, year-round real-time water quality data and extended bathing water seasons to support safer event planning and boost public confidence in water sports.





- **Surfers Against Sewage - *Kirsty Davies*:**

Surfers against Sewage reported on their latest changes to legislation calls. 1) to include recreational users as bathing water users 2) to collect real-time data year-round to share with the public 3) to include emerging pollutants monitoring as part of the reforms. These calls are underpinned by their goal to end sewage pollution impacting areas of recreation at the coast and in the ocean. Surfers Against Sewage operate a Safer Seas and Rivers app as a tool for communities and are aiming to enable water use with influencing change in legislation.

- **Marine Conservation Society - *Dr. Francesca Ginley*:**

Dr. Ginley highlighted the environmental threat of Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), or "forever chemicals," which studies have now found in all drinking water and in beverages made from fruit and wheat. These pollutants, comparable to plastics in longevity, are present in most consumer products, yet remain unregulated. Studies have also shown that PFAS concentrations increase following combined sewer overflow (CSO) spills, raising further concerns about their impact on water quality. The full extent of impacts these chemicals have remains unknown and there is a need for more extensive testing for different sources of water pollution including differentiation between PFAS and other pollutants.

- **Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) - *Luke Godwin*:**

The Eastern IFCA has highlighted water quality as one of the most pressing challenges currently facing the British fishing industry, compounding existing pressures. They are committed to collaborating on water quality initiatives and actively conduct testing amongst fisheries, recognizing clean water as vital to the sector's sustainability. Due to declining water quality, it is now very difficult to open new inshore fisheries.

- **Durham University - *Prof. Darren Gröcke*:**

Professor Gröcke introduced the method of measuring nitrogen isotopes in seaweed as a water quality indicator and nitrogen pollution sourcing tool. Seaweed incorporates nitrogen over a longer time period compared to traditional water testing such as *E-coli* testing for water bathing locations. It was suggested that seaweed could be analysed alongside *E-coli* to increase our understanding of nitrogen pollution sources – for example, between sewage and chemical





sources. Professor Gröcke has conducted many seaweed studies around England, Wales and Scotland. His intention is to continue this research project to generate an entire country coastline record.

- **Turning Tides Partnership - *Clare Nolan Barnes*:**

The Northwest Turning Tides Partnership is a regional collaboration from Wirral to Cumbria (including the Lakes), uniting data, resources, messaging, and campaigns to improve inland and coastal bathing water quality through joint efforts with partner organisations. The partnership covers 25 coastal and inland designated bathing water sites and is an excellent body to access all the benefits of a regional partnership including local campaigns and shared best practice. The partnership also offers opportunities to access funding for the public to get involved, for example carrying out local testing as part of citizen science.

Both presentation sessions offered a Question-and-Answer (Q&A) session at the end for attendees to engage and raise their queries. Throughout the day, attendees had been asked to submit any questions for the Q&A sessions on Slido ahead of discussion. These were facilitated by the Chair of both sessions and answered at the meeting. Q&A details from all Summit sessions can be found in Section 4 of this report.

4. Panel Discussion: Safeguarding Our Shores

After lunch, a Panel session titled 'Safeguarding our Shores: Collaborative Solutions for coastal water quality' was held with the following representatives from presenting organisations and expertly Chaired by Cllr Andy Bullen from the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk:

- Adam Worley - *Anglian Water*
- Andrew Staines - *Ofwat*
- Cllr Sandra Squire - *Local Authority Representative*
- Rachel Wyatt - *Marine Conservation Society*

Panellists were asked various questions:





- on policy and regulation gaps affecting coastal water quality, upcoming policy or legislative changes that can help strengthen coastal water protections, and how regulators and environmental groups can collaborate more effectively to tackle pollution.
- about how to better educate and reframe the narrative of coastal water quality being entirely the responsibility of water companies and association with sewage were also raised. Many other pollution sources can lead to poor water quality, and active contribution and understanding from communities will help enable better coastal water management.
- about how better to identify pollution sources were raised, given the challenges local authorities and partners face in tracing them accurately. Conservation authority influence in improving water quality was also acknowledged, and the need to communicate with communities about some areas being unsuitable for designation.

Key takeaways from the Panel discussion highlighted the following areas:

Policy Gaps & Emerging Pollutants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current focus on designated bathing water criteria overlooks broader coastal water quality issues.• Emerging pollutants like PFAS and microplastics are not adequately addressed in existing policy.
Broader Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor water quality affects not only designated bathing sites but the wider coastal and marine environment.
Data & Testing Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calls for evolving testing methods to include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-faecal indicators (e.g. for viruses such as norovirus).• Long-term indicators like seaweed analysis.• Better data on different types of pollution would be beneficial to cover the wider issue of water quality and could help improve public awareness and opinion.• Strong support for real-time, publicly accessible water quality data.
Pollution Prevention & Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasis on shifting toward pollution prevention rather than end-point treatment.





	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support for increased producer responsibility, assigned by National Government.
Enforcement & Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and more consistent investigations.Increased funding required to support monitoring and improvement efforts.
Collaboration & Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Greater collaboration needed between regulators, environmental groups, and communities.Citizen science initiatives encouraged to expand monitoring and data collection.
Communication & Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clearer, simplified public messaging is essential to raise awareness and understanding.Better and more available publicly accessible data for other sources of pollution could help drive public demand for holistic approaches.
Environmental Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Concerns about inconsistent testing practices and the impact of extreme weather events.Importance of balancing environmental protection with public access to coastal areas.
Legislative Reform & Future Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Legislative reform and improved pollution source tracking are needed.Unified efforts are essential to achieve cleaner, safer coastal waters.

5. Q&A Highlights

Key queries raised as part of the Question-and-Answer session include the following:

- Citizen Science & Monitoring (DEFRA)**

DEFRA acknowledged the potential for citizen science data to contribute to water quality





monitoring and suggested there was scope for this to be integrated into the Swimfo platform in future.

- **Real-Time Spill Reporting (Ofwat)**

When asked if companies must disclose spill volumes, Ofwat clarified that current regulations do not require this, this would need to be implemented through national policy.

- **Planning & Water Infrastructure (Panel)**

A question on accounting for water asset capacity in new planning developments was addressed with a suggestion that local governments could collaborate more closely with water companies at the design stage.

- **Use of Engagement Data (Environment Agency)**

The Environment Agency responded to a query about utilising engagement data confirmed that all data that has been collected is under review to determine next steps for its use.

- **Classification Methodology (DEFRA)**

DEFRA responded to a query about why a four-year average is used for classifications noting that this provides a more stable and hydrologically representative result for bathing water classifications

- **Historic Overflow Data (Ofwat)**

Ofwat responded to a query on historic overflow data that it is not currently public due to limited monitoring before 2021, but this is under review as regulatory priorities evolve.

- **Targeted Communications (Panel)**

A suggestion was made to target swimming groups with water quality communications, which was acknowledged as a valuable approach for improving public awareness.

6. Calls to Action

Key calls to action resulting from discussions at the Coastal Water Quality Summit are aligned with the recommendations made in the [LGA Coastal Water Quality Report](#) released last year:

1. Extend definition of water users under bathing water classifications to include non-bathers.
2. To continuously record real time data to share with the public to support public safety and planning for water-based industries
3. To extend bathing water season to understand the quality of water year round
4. A fourth mentioned was to look at different forms of testing beyond *E-coli* to modernise testing.





Attendees are reminded to contact Emma McKinley if they would like to be involved in any Ocean Literacy Workshops to shape England's Ocean Literacy Strategy. Contact: mckinleye1@cardiff.ac.uk

Attendees were also asked to make pledges to support water quality at the coast, personal or work-related. Examples of pledges made include the below and can be found on the LGA Coastal SIG's Pledge for the Coast map:

- 'To look at how we can collaborate with other organisations to give a stronger collective voice about what changes we need to make'
- 'I am going to continue champion the coast and promote "Motion For The Ocean" and campaign for a dedicated coastal minister.'
- 'I will continue to campaign against chemical pollution in our water ways, specifically herbicides and pesticides.'

7. Conclusion

Feedback received from the Coastal Water Quality Summit has been overwhelmingly positive and together, we have hopefully started some incredibly valuable collaboration and enabled engaging discussion on Coastal Water Quality – an area very close to the hearts of our coastal communities. The Summit was attended by over 60 people and brought together voices from all sectors to collaborate on one of the most pressing issues facing our coastal communities.

Our next steps will be to review the findings, recommendations and actions from the Summit and this report and link in with our Coastal Water Quality work-theme priorities.

There has already been interest in hosting a similar event annually to continue these discussions and track progress against actions. We know there are many organisations that were not in attendance who can offer valuable contributions to our coastal communities and their representatives in the coastal water quality sphere, and we look forward to working with them.

8. Acknowledgements

We want to express our sincere thanks to everyone and all organisations that attended, presented, facilitated and contributed to our Coastal Water Quality Summit.





Thank you to Cllr Sandra Squire, LGA Coastal SIG Member Champion for Coastal Water Quality, and Cllr Andy Bullen, Mayor of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, for chairing both the presentation sessions and panel discussions. Their leadership and support were instrumental in ensuring the day ran smoothly. Thank you also to the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk for their collaboration and leadership of this Summit.

We also extend thanks to Alison Hume MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Coastal Communities, for her opening remarks, and to Cllr Ernest Gibson, Chair of the LGA Coastal SIG, for warmly welcoming all attendees.

Thank you to all of the speakers and panellists for their excellent contributions and our Coastal SIG members for attending in large numbers and to the team at South Tyneside Council, Michelle Hogg, Emily Gibson, Beccy MacDonald-Lofts and Bethany Handson, who ensured the day was a success and ran smoothly, and Kerry Payton from Blackpool Council for her notes which have helped inform this report.

