

## OFWAT £47M Fine for Yorkshire Water – and the future of the Nidd

The Media have been full of comment after OFWAT's announcement that three water companies, including Yorkshire Water, failed to adequately invest in and maintain their networks, leading to repeated releases of raw sewage into the country's waterways.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ypp032le0o.amp>

The regulator's Chief Executive, David Black, said: "Ofwat has uncovered a catalogue of failure by Thames Water, Yorkshire Water (YW) and Northumbrian Water in how they ran their sewage works and this resulted in excessive spills from storm overflows.

"Our investigation has shown how they routinely released sewage into our rivers and seas, rather than ensuring that this only happens in exceptional circumstances as the law intends."

A fine of £47M has been announced for YW.

***It very much appears that water companies are repeatedly failing in their legislative duties in respect of the 1991 Water Industry Act, to 'provide, improve and extend such a system of public sewers and so to clean and maintain those sewers as to ensure that the area is and continues to be effectually drained'.***

NAG reaction is that:

1. This announcement is an **unsurprising but saddening** finding that confirms the suspicions, surveys, and actions of citizen groups across the country over several years.
  - NAG itself has repeatedly drawn attention to the unacceptably high number and duration of storm overflows into the Nidd.
  - Research by Windrush's Peter Hammond, using detailed data on storm overflows (including data from the Nidd) showed that **many 'illegal' flows** occurred in the absence of rain, and this was likely due to the under sizing or inadequate maintenance of the sewerage network or storage tanks at sewage treatment works (STWs)
2. **This is now Official.** It is not good enough, and citizens across the country ask for, and deserve, better. **We want cleaner rivers.**
3. It is not just a failure by YW. The funding, governance, regulation, monitoring and implementation of improvements to our surface and waste water networks and assets have been found to be defective.
4. YW promises a large program of work for 2025-2030 plans to improve matters, but **trust is in short supply** – in water companies, but also in effective monitoring and regulation, and perhaps most of all in receiving adequate funding to improve the Nidd.
5. **No-one wants to see water bills go up**, particularly when there are suspicions of diversion of public funds to provide executive bonuses and investor dividends. But funds need to be found to catch up and clean up.
6. **There does need to be honesty and openness between all stakeholders** in our complicated system to manage waste-water effectively to improve our rivers for swimming and for the wild life we love to see and interact with.

7. **We have a shared problem. Though YW has behaved irresponsibly, the other actors in this continuing tragedy have their part to play to gain improvements for us all. This includes farmers, councils and individual citizens**

### What do we need to do now?

- YW need to acknowledge their failures
- Government must agree to adequately fund, monitor and act so that waste water can be effectively managed of, even and especially in these straightened times.
  - This may involve changes to structure, functioning and governance of government departments and agencies – but **the focus needs to be on improving the river**
- YW to be more open with other stakeholders, sharing information and using the skills of the community and other agencies to support them as critical and informed friends. E.g. citizens often have a wealth of local knowledge and experience. Lets use it! Propose methods to test out in the field. Focus on implementation This must be **collaborative, not competitive**. Work together to our shared goal, *don't pass the parcel and blame somebody else*
- YW to work with other water companies in their professional body, Water UK, and internationally to **explore more effective ways** of managing the present and likely future threats to rivers and therefore to ourselves. *No place for 'not invented here', rather 'use what is shown to work' Pilot and Learn!*
  - traditional sewage treatment works (STWs) treat and monitor only for solids, ammonia and dissolved oxygen. Phosphate treatment is just being added to the Killinghall STW, and is planned for others on the Nidd over the next five years. **We have got to keep up!**
  - E.g. **nature-based, sustainable solutions** to reduce pollution have been shown to work in some places. It is a genuine alternative to building traditional concrete constructions to store polluted water for later chemical treatment? What happened to the innovation that the private sector is known for?
  - Existing assets could become **super treaters of modern forms of pollution including** complex 'forever chemicals', pharmaceuticals, microplastics – all with potentially damaging effects on wildlife? Work closely with Universities and implement the research findings.
  - Housing and councils are significant influences on pollution and storm overflows. Surface and waste water flows come from houses and from roadside gullies stretching and breaking existing networks of pipes beyond their capacity. Design out problems at source and maintain better and improve what we already have.

Nidd Action Group

08/08/24

