



**Scottish
Water**
Trusted to serve Scotland

4 August 2023

Councillor Raymond Bremner
Leader of The Highland Council
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Inverness
IV3 SNX

Scottish Water
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Dear Councillor Bremner,

Combined Sewer Overflow

Thank you for your letter of 11th July, following the motion passed at the meeting of The Highland Council in June – and also for the invitation to attend a workshop with members to discuss the issues raised. Please accept my apologies for the delay in providing a full reply.

At Scottish Water, we recognise that we have a vital role to play in protecting Scotland's natural environment. Every day, we treat over 1 billion litres of waste water from homes and businesses and return it safely to the environment. Over the past decade, we have invested £2.7 billion in improving and maintaining the country's public drainage system and infrastructure.

Our continuing programme of investment and improvement builds on progress made over many years to maintain and further enhance the quality of Scotland's water environment, which is generally in good health - 87% of Scotland's waterbodies achieve good or better water quality. Last year, 98% of Scotland's designated bathing waters passed stringent environmental standards, with more than ever achieving 'excellent' status. Of 11 designated bathing beaches in the Highland Council area, 6 were classified as excellent, 4 as good and 1 as sufficient.

Overflow points are an essential part of a sewer network which drains both waste water that has been used by customers within their homes and businesses; and rainwater that has fallen on rooftops, paved areas and connected parts of the public road network.

Although the drainage of roads is the responsibility of the Roads Authorities (Highland Council and Transport Scotland), historically many urban roads connect to the combined sewer system. Our network is designed with enough capacity to accommodate rainwater from a normal rainfall event, however where we have prolonged heavy or intense rainfall our network reaches its capacity.

The presence of overflows to drain very high volumes of rainwater reduces the risk of properties and streets being flooded during storm events. The waste water which overflows from these points during intense rainstorms is very dilute – less than 1% of spills by volume is sewage from customers' toilets, with the huge majority being stormwater. These overflows are licensed by SEPA to spill under certain conditions and we work hard to comply with these licences, as well as to maintain mitigation measures such as screens and storm tanks to mitigate environmental impact.

In addition to our past and current investment plans, in December 2021 we published our Improving Urban Waters Routemap (see www.scottishwater.co.uk/About-Us/What-We-Do/Urban-Waters-Routemap) which includes commitments to invest up to a further £500million in improving our sewer networks by 2027.

While we are only currently required to monitor a small number of overflows, spills from which are reported annually on our website, we have committed to adding more monitoring and making this information available on our website.

We have already identified those overflows that impact most on the water environment and have an investment programme underway to improve the highest priority outfalls. The locations identified on our website as priorities for improvement resulted from an extensive programme of environmental studies that we commenced in 2015. We are on track to install 1000 new monitors, and to have three intelligent waste water network programmes in place, by the end of 2024. This is set out in the Improving Urban Waters Routemap which includes a significant pilot project in Inverness and Nairn.

We are keen to continue working in partnership with the Council to improve the way surface water is managed in the Highlands – to reduce flood risk, reduce volume of overflows, enhance the environment and support development. Improving the quality of our water environment in Scotland is a priority for us, but can only be achieved by working at a catchment level with all relevant partners working together (Scottish Water, SEPA, councils, agriculture, industry and communities).

We very much welcome the opportunity to attend a workshop with members and representatives from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to discuss these issues further. Please get in contact with Gavin Steel from our Corporate Affairs team on gavin.steel@scottishwater.co.uk or 07484 517674 who will be happy to assist with making arrangements.

Yours sincerely,



Alex Plant
Chief Executive