

PRESS RELEASE, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE. 15TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Legal challenge against Government's sewage Plan dismissed by High Court

Today, Friday 15th September, the High Court dismissed the Marine Conservation Society's case against the UK Government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan.

Together with co-claimants, Richard Haward's Oysters, and surfer and activist, Hugo Tagholm, the Marine Conservation Society sought to compel the UK Government to rewrite its Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan 2022, impose tighter deadlines on water companies and redevelop the Plan to effectively apply to coastal waters.

Sandy Luk, Marine Conservation Society CEO: "While we didn't get the result we wanted today, we will not be disheartened. By challenging the UK Government on its failure to address the impact of untreated sewage discharges into our coastal waters and estuaries, we've been able to make great progress, pushing for our ocean to be protected.

"As long as raw sewage continues to pour into our seas, affecting wildlife, habitats and all life that depends on it, we will keep doing everything possible to stop it."

As a result of the case, supported and funded by the Good Law Project, the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched a public consultation, seeking views on expanding the Plan to cover English coastal and estuarine waters, something crucially missing from the Plan when it was initially published.

Analysis from the Marine Conservation Society found that there are at least 1,651 storm overflows within 1km of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in England. Overall, in 2021, sewage poured into protected seas for a total of 263,654 hours.

Dr Laura Foster, Head of Clean Seas at the Marine Conservation Society: "Our expectations of the UK Government are clear: our seas must be fully protected from sewage pollution, with no exception. The launch of the consultation was a step in the right direction. Now, we wait for the Government's response to this, and we expect them to act to protect our seas from sewage pollution for the benefit of nature, people, and our planet.

“We need effective legislation, that is properly enforced, to prevent discharges of untreated sewage from treatment works and combined sewer overflows. Our seas cannot continue to pay the price.”

For more information about sewage pollutions impact on the ocean, visit the Marine Conservation Society's [website](#).

Legal Director of Good Law Project, Emma Dearnaley, said: “The sewage scandal is destroying natural habitats in our rivers, making swimmers and surfers sick and hitting coastal communities hard. The Government’s plan to tackle sewage dumping is not fit for purpose and allows water companies to continue pouring sewage in our rivers and seas until 2050 and beyond.

“We have been proud to support the claimants in this case, which saw important earlier success and forced Ministers to look into expanding its plan to cover coastal waters, not just rivers. But it is disappointing that the High Court has sided with the Government on the remaining legal grounds.

“This legal challenge has been about using the law – where Government policy is failing – to protect our rivers, seas and waterways for generations to come. We will continue to do all we can to help turn the tide on the sewage crisis.”

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Press Contact

Evie Martin, Media Relations Manager (evie.martin@mcsuk.org / 07891 057102)

Images

Please find high-res images linked in this [Dropbox folder](#).

Notes to editors

The **Marine Conservation Society** is the UK’s leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with governments, communities, and industry to take action to restore and protect the marine environment.