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STATISTICAL RELEASE

5th November 2015

**STATISTICS ON UK BATHING WATERS FOR 2015:
A SUMMARY OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE 2006 BATHING WATER DIRECTIVE**

These results summarise the compliance of coastal and inland bathing waters to the Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC) for the whole of the United Kingdom in 2015. Datasets on compliance for bathing waters in the UK are available to [download](#).

Headline results

- **In 2015, out of the 624 UK bathing waters measured 595 (95.4 per cent) met at least the minimum standard of the European Bathing Water Directive in the UK.**
- **In 2015, 377 UK bathing waters (60.4 per cent) met the excellent standard of the Bathing Water Directive.**
- **In 2015, 29 UK bathing waters (4.6 per cent) met the poor standard of the Bathing Water Directive.**

Context

The new standards are not directly comparable to those produced prior to 2015. This year the UK administrations have implemented the new standards and classifications assessment under the 2006 Bathing Water Directive. The 2006 Directive replaced the 1976 Directive and updated the standards, based on recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

There are a number of significant differences to how bathing waters are now assessed:

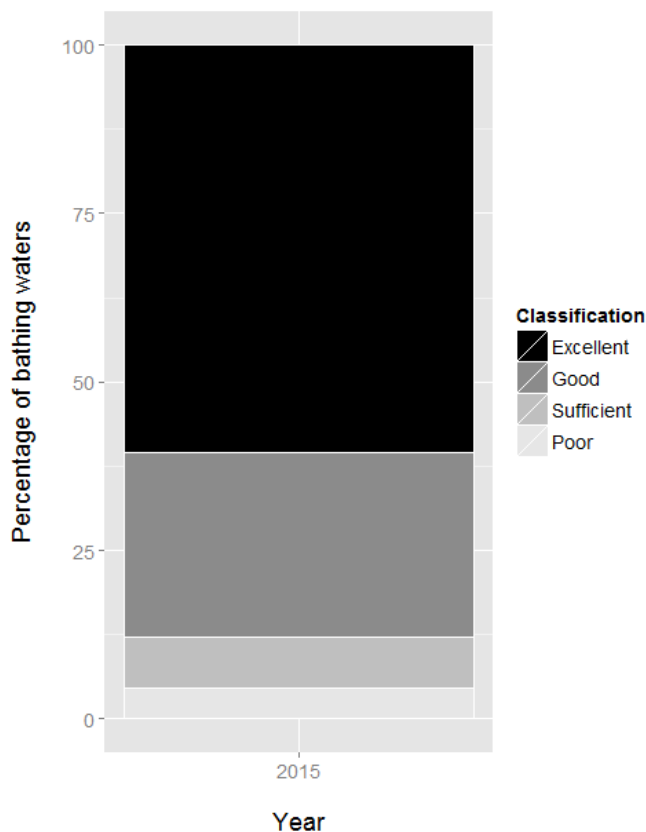
- The new annual classifications are: Excellent – the highest, cleanest class; Good – generally good water quality; Sufficient – the water quality meets the

minimum standard; and Poor – the water quality has not met the minimum standard.

- *Escherichia coli* and Intestinal enterococci are now the only parameters measured. These are assessed against the Directive's standards to produce a classification for each bathing water. The old assessment was based on 80% of the samples of bacterial parameters passing the set levels.
- Classifications are now based on a rolling data set of samples. In 2015 the results are made from up to four years' worth of results from 2012 to 2015. They are combined to provide an indication of what you might expect the water quality to be. However it should be noted that water quality can vary depending on a range of variables such as the weather. The old assessment was based one year's data.
- At coastal waters the new standards are approximately twice as stringent as the previous standards. A direct comparison is difficult as they are now based on a different type of statistical assessment – a percentile assessment. At freshwater sites the revised standards are more or less equivalent to the old standards.

Analysis

Bathing Water Classification: UK 2015



Source: Department of Environment Northern Ireland (DOENI), Environment Agency (EA), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)

Bathing water quality improved steadily between 1988 and 2014, largely as a result of improvements to the sewerage system by water companies. Latterly, variations from year to year have related to weather conditions, as combined sewer overflows operate more frequently during wet weather, diffuse pollution from urban and agricultural sources is increased, and in poor summers there is less sunlight to kill off bacteria in water.

At some sites less than four years' worth of data has been used. There a number of reasons why this may happen. New bathing waters may not have yet built up a four year data set. In addition, three bathing waters were not monitored this year as there was no access for the public and samplers. Other sites may have restarted their four year assessment cycle after major improvements to pollution sources impacting the bathing water. This makes classification more relevant than including results prior to the improvement.

Background information

These statistics have been produced to the high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which sets out eight principles including meeting user needs, impartiality and objectivity, integrity, sound methods and assured quality, frankness and accessibility. More information on the Official Statistics Code of Practice can be found at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

After this year, we are proposing to stop producing a UK-wide statistic for bathing waters from 2016 onwards. This is because the public is most interested in individual results for bathing waters and the data on the results are available for all the UK administrations as well as from the EU.

To help those deciding where to swim, information is online <https://www.gov.uk/quality-of-local-bathing-water> and on signs at the beach from May 2016.

Notes - Data is available at the following sources:

England:	http://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/
England site data:	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bathing-waters
Wales:	http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/waterflooding/bathing-water-quality-and-beaches/?lang=en
Scotland:	http://apps.sepa.org.uk/bathingwaters/LastSeason.aspx
Northern Ireland:	http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/environment-and-greener-living/the-wider-environment/environmental-quality-in-your-area/bathing-water-quality
Eurostat:	http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-bathing/index_en.html

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