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Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about storm overflows.

This is the first Government to set out expectations that water companies must take steps to significantly reduce storm overflows and MPs voted for this instruction to be put on an enhanced legal footing.

Let me be clear, the amount of sewage discharge by water companies into our rivers is unacceptable; water companies must significantly reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows as a priority. If we do not start to see significant improvements I am assured that ministers will not hesitate to take action through a swathe of new measures directly on water companies in the Environment Bill.

I feel you might have been misled by some of the reporting on this matter. as I did not vote to allow water companies to pump sewage into our rivers – indeed I was no in Parliament that day. My colleagues actually voted in favour of a package of measures to reduce harms from storm overflows including a new duty directly on water companies to produce comprehensive statutory Drainage and Sewerage Management Plans, setting out how they will manage and develop their drainage and sewerage system over a minimum 25-year planning horizon, including how storm overflows will be addressed through these plans.

The Bill will also create a new duty on Government to produce a statutory plan to reduce discharges from storm overflows and produce a report setting out the actions that would be needed to eliminate discharges from storm overflows in England, and the costs and benefits of those actions. Both publications are required before 1 September 2022.

The package of measures voted for will also create three new duties on water companies to publish data on storm overflow operation, publish near real time information on the operation of storm overflows and to monitor the water quality upstream and downstream of storm overflows and sewage disposal works.

Ministers have also announced that they will bolster the measures they are already taking. In July of this year, this Government set out, for the first time ever, its expectation that Ofwat should incentivise water companies to invest to significantly reduce the use of storm overflows in the forthcoming pricing review period. The Government's amendment will place this policy position in an additional clause in the Environment Bill to underline the action the Government is taking.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY

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