Data & Facts - Gaps: Corporate Scum

Corporate Scum

- **Water companies** currently have too much power, and are unwilling to act responsibly. One example of this is **selective water testing** by water companies, local and national authorities, which means water samples are only taken from mid-depth of rivers, excluding **silt deposits**, where most toxic industrial legacy cocktails lie.

- Water companies can selectively **dispense with water testing results**, which can suit their purposes. In sewage overflow incidents, they may fail to provide representative data to regulators on licence breaches. More recently, most water companies now have monitoring devices at combined sewage overflow outlets, but the efficacy of the technology and the interpretation of the data flowing from these needs scrutiny.

- Water companies can also **stop sewage outflow** at treatment plants to avoid Environment Agency monitoring effectively during site checks. Having advance notice of checks, rather than spot checks allows this. You may want to ask your water company if this is a practice they use.

- **Water company improvement plans** may be completely unfit for purpose and lack public input. Inviting water companies to a Water Assembly, a water-management themed community assembly to increase accountability and transparency can be a useful way for your local community to ensure they stay on track.
  - A recent **community assembly** in Wrexham was hailed by local rebels as really useful and the beginning of good connections made with the local water company and the regulatory body. Keep an eye on this section of Community Assemblies case studies for examples of local groups addressing water issues!

- **Sewage overflow incident data** from water companies may not be **real-time**. For instance, water companies share information with the Rivers Trust, who produce a sewage map of overflow event numbers and volume. Valuable as that resource is, it isn't yet ideal until real-time monitoring data is available there.

- One option is writing a **Freedom of Information (FoI)** request to water companies to get exact data. Wording needs to be well-crafted, to prevent your responder from side-

stepping a question. See Lighthouse (What can we actually do?) for FoI letter template help,

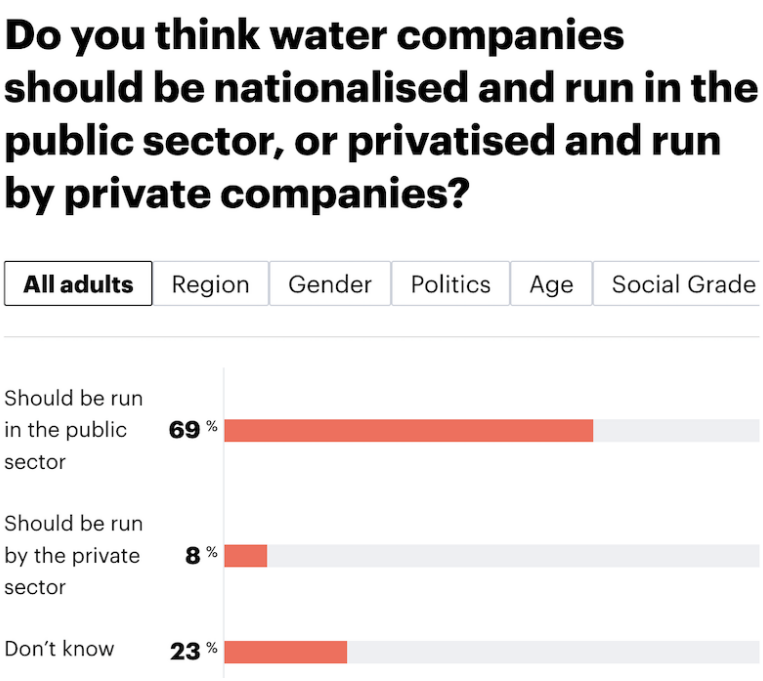
- The above are only a few of the more well-known issues, but if you really want to get to get to work with your water industry microscope, or to come up with some stinking questions to rattle the PR person at your local water company, here are a couple of good analyses of the issues:
  - **Windrush Against Sewage Pollution** response to a government consultation (Scroll to download link)
  - Written evidence submission to a Government commission by **Professor Peter Hammond BA MSc PhD MSc**

- Let's just be clear, though, it isn't just sewage we need to be mindful of, there is also **licensed industrial effluent**. For local information on incidents in England, email **pollution.inventory@environment-agency.gov.uk** . This automated reporting inventory (pollution inventory electronic data capture / PIEDC) "provides information about releases and transfers of substances from regulated industrial activities." Cautionary note: read with a sceptical frame of mind; there may be gaps and ommissions. (HINT: Keeping up with Dirty Water campaign chat will help you fill in the gaps!)
  - For Scotland, Ireland and Wales, you will need to check with your regulatory authority. **(More info coming)**

- The questions your community or local group might want to ask include many of the issues covered in the two submissions to government above, but here are some starter questions:
  - What are the thresholds that trigger reporting?
  - Reporting obligations for which chemicals?
  - How do those thresholds compare with permitted levels in other parts of the world?
  - Are the licensing laws adequate, or do they need updating?
  - Are safety assessments purely about human health, for which an adult male is the standard and which downplays impacts on children, pregnant women and unborn foetuses?
  - What are the ecological implications of licensing where you are?
  - Are water extraction licenses adequate to reflect changing weather and ecology patterns?
  - Can we trust profiteers or the Environment Agency and other authorities to tell the whole truth, or is it another case of lies, damn lies and statistics?

The Public is overwhelmingly behind us

- A YouGov survey conducted in 2023 found that 69% of the 5,930 adults surveyed want water companies to be nationalised.



- This support for nationalisation is ubiquitous across age, gender, political leaning and social grade.

The Corporate's Playbook

- Research into **disinformation tactics of English Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs)**
