

# SCOTTISH ELECTION MANIFESTO

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# OUR VISION

We want a Scotland where every person can surf, swim, or paddle without the fear of becoming ill. We want Scotland's world-famous coastlines, rivers and lochs to be free from pollution and be places where people and nature thrive.

But decades of failed regulation and underinvestment mean our seas and rivers are being polluted by untreated sewage discharges, plastic waste, and the harmful chemicals both carry.

This is a perfect storm of toxic pollution that no monitoring system adequately tracks, and no regulator effectively stops. It's making water users sick and choking our wild waters.

The next Scottish Government has the power to turn back the rising tide of pollution. They can do so by adopting our manifesto to end plastic and sewage pollution across Scotland's wild waters.



# OUR ASKS

Our priority actions to tackle the toxic plastic and sewage pollution of Scottish waters:

PROTECT



PUBLIC HEALTH

REVEAL THE TRUTH



THROUGH 100% SEWAGE DISCHARGE MONITORING

ENFORCE THE LAW



THROUGH TOUGH INDEPENDENT REGULATORS

CUT PLASTIC PRODUCTION



AND CREATE A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

PROTECT



PUBLIC  
HEALTH

Over 100,000 Scottish adults take part in outdoor water sports including wild swimming and surfing every week.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, the most popular spots for these activities are regularly impacted by sewage, and people are getting sick when doing what they love most. Current official water quality testing programs fail to protect public health. Despite the hundreds of places people surf, swim and paddle in Scotland, water quality is only regularly tested for its impact on public health at 89 officially designated bathing waters.

And these areas are tested just a handful of times between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 15<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>2</sup> When picking new spots for testing, **ONLY SWIMMERS ARE COUNTED AS WATER USERS**, meaning surfing, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding spots go untested. Testing also covers just two pollutants, *E. coli* and *Intestinal enterococci*, ignoring emerging threats from a toxic chemical cocktail including forever chemicals like **PFAS, ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA**, and **MICROPLASTICS**, which are increasingly being found across Scottish rivers.<sup>3</sup>

We urgently need policies that protect water users **WHEREVER, WHENEVER, and HOWEVER** they use the water.



## THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST:

- ➔ Set **LEGALLY BINDING TARGETS** to end untreated sewage discharges affecting bathing waters and popular recreational water usage areas by 2030.
- ➔ Introduce a world leading water quality **TESTING REGIME** that monitors emerging pollutants and protects water users wherever, whenever, and however they use the water.

REVEAL  
THE TRUTH



THROUGH **100%**  
SEWAGE DISCHARGE  
MONITORING

The true scale of the Scottish sewage scandal is hidden. In 2024, Scottish Water recorded 23,000 sewage discharges for over 200,000 hours but these figures were from just 7% of their total network.<sup>4</sup>

We estimate the real number of discharges in 2024 **COULD BE AS HIGH AS 360,000.**



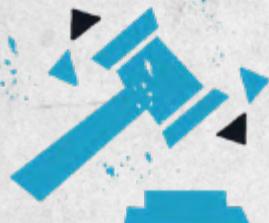
In 2025, Scottish water extended real-time monitoring to cover 30% of sewage overflows.<sup>5</sup> A step forward, yes, but 70% of sewage overflows still go unreported, and this means **PEOPLE'S HEALTH IS BEING PUT AT RISK** when they use the water without access to the information, they need to stay safe.

Without lifting the lid on the scale of sewage pollution, polluters won't take the necessary targeted action to tackle the issue and keep water users safe.

## THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST:

- ➔ Mandate **100% MONITORING** of all sewage overflows in Scotland.
- ➔ Make **REAL-TIME MONITORING DATA** available to the public.

# ENFORCE THE LAW



## THROUGH TOUGH INDEPENDENT REGULATORS

Current legislation, The Urban Wastewater Treatment (Scotland) Regulations 1994, makes clear that discharges from storm overflows are only permitted in exceptional circumstances.

But this is not what is happening. Environmental Standards Scotland, the Scottish environmental watchdog, has found that the Scottish Government and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) have consistently failed to uphold these regulations, which has allowed Scottish Water to release pollution routinely rather than only in exceptional circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

To make things worse, SEPA has seen real terms budget cuts of 26% since 2010.<sup>7</sup> The number of legal prosecutions being taken against polluters has dropped and the number of water quality samples being taken has fallen by 65% from 2019 to 2024.<sup>8</sup>

We need well-funded regulators with the teeth to hold polluters to account.



## THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST:

- ➔ **ENFORCE THE LAW** by ensuring sewage discharges outside exceptional circumstances are punished.
- ➔ Properly fund and resource SEPA so they can **HOLD POLLUTERS TO ACCOUNT**.

**CUT PLASTIC  
PRODUCTION**



**AND CREATE  
A CIRCULAR  
ECONOMY**

Every year, the global plastics industry produces more than 450 million tonnes of plastic.<sup>9</sup> 99% of this plastic is made from fossil fuels.

Domestically, Ineos' plant at Grangemouth alone produces 30-50 billion plastic pellets a day.<sup>10</sup> Without bold action from governments production of plastic across the world is projected to triple by 2060.

Plastic is devastating the environment in Scotland, with everything from packaging and plastic pellets, to fishing gear and drinks bottles polluting our wild waters and carrying with them toxic chemicals.

Official Scottish government figures estimate 1,300 tonnes of plastic pollution enter Scottish seas each year, with 90% of plastics coming from land-based sources.<sup>11</sup>

Plastics are also polluting our bodies. Microplastics have been found in all organs scientists have examined and the effects of these particles and their associated chemicals on human health are still not fully understood.<sup>12</sup>

Scotland has been at the forefront of supporting a circular economy, and was a leading voice calling for a Global Plastics Treaty focused on cutting plastic production. The next Scottish Government must turn this international leadership into effective domestic policies that reduce plastic production at the source and build a circular economy.



## THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST:

- ➔ Set **LEGALLY BINDING NATIONAL TARGETS** to cut plastic production.
- ➔ Deliver a **CIRCULAR ECONOMY** by setting legally binding reuse targets, implementing a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility scheme that holds producers accountable for all types of plastic pollution.
- ➔ **BAN HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS** in plastics.
- ➔ **BAN THE EXPORT OF PLASTIC WASTE** and ensure a just transition for workers in the plastics industry.



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