

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

Yes please, Minister

On Thursday 29th February (leap day) West Dorset's MP, Chris Loder and his team brought Robbie Moore (Government Minister for Water and Rural Growth) on a flying visit to Charmouth.

CROWD members Dana Assinder, Paul Ramsden and Andrew Carey were invited to join the Minister for half an hour on the river bridge by the beach. They presented a Ministerial Briefing on the CROWD campaign to get the Environment Agency (EA) to restart water quality monitoring at the popular beach lagoons in Charmouth and Seatown.

Also there was the EA's Area Environment Manager Ian Withers, Sam Rose (who heads West Dorset Wilding, which successfully bid for Landscape Recovery Funding in the Brit Catchment) and Ian Rees of Dorset National Landscape (which has just won a bid for Natural Flood Management funding from Defra, also in the Brit Catchment).

CROWD's briefing explained how the lagoons at Charmouth and Seatown are used throughout the summer by children and families for boating, paddling, swimming and playing. But both are currently unsafe for humans, even though they are only a few metres from the beach, where the bathing water quality is rated 'Excellent'.

Until the EA stopped testing the lagoon at Charmouth in 2019, *E Coli* levels* were more than three times the acceptable upper limit. **Intestinal Enterococci** levels at the River Char lagoon were more than eight times the acceptable upper limit.

Levels at Seatown** were more than ten times the acceptable upper limit.

Intestinal Enterococci and some strains of *E coli* cause urinary tract infections, meningitis, endocarditis, gastroenteritis, diverticulitis, bacterial peritonitis, colitis and Crohn's disease.

CROWD asked the Minister to support its campaign:

Step 1: CROWD calls on the Environment Agency to reinstate bacteriological testing at Charmouth and Seatown. (The EA has declined to do so. Local river group volunteers are starting tests in their own laboratory at their own expense in 2024.)

Step 2: CROWD calls on the EA to undertake bacteriological testing higher up the Rivers Char and Winniford to identify sources of faecal and other pollution. (The EA has declined to do so. Volunteers are also starting their own tests in 2024.)

Step 3: CROWD is seeking to get the lagoons at Charmouth and Seatown included in the neighbouring designated bathing water. (The EA has indicated that this is not possible.)

Step 4: CROWD is assessing risks to human health from pathogens in beach sand (as highlighted by the World Health Organization) and calls on the EA to add this evaluation to its monitoring of bathing waters.

* Measurements at Charmouth were made and reported between 2nd May 2000 and 16th Sept. 2019.
(Results: https://environment.data.gov.uk/water-quality/view/sampling-point/SW-50050521?_all=true)

** Measurements at Seatown were made and reported in 2014 and on two occasions in 2023.
(Results: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/water-quality/view/sampling-point/SW-50050207>)