

Sewage discharges discourages people from visiting local beaches

Sewage discharges into Edinburgh's rivers are having a "material impact" on the economy and discouraging people from visiting local beaches to kayak, paddleboard and swim, according to Scottish Lib Dem leader Alex Cole-Hamilton.

On a general election campaign stop at Cramond Beach the Edinburgh Western MSP said the River Almond was "one of the worst rivers for sewage dumping by Scottish Water and sewage treatment works that we know about" as he touted his party's proposed 'Clean Water Act' to address the issue.

He was joined by deputy leader Wendy Chamberlain as the pair took water samples at the mouth of River Almond on Wednesday, June 5.

Concern over sewage "overflows" during heavy rainfall is growing amid increasing discharges and sightings of wet wipes and other sanitary products appearing in waterways.

Previous data revealed there were around 500 discharges into the River Almond in 2021 and Cole Hamilton said the "freshwater emergency" was "getting worse".

He said a big part of the problem was that only around four

per cent of of outflows are monitored by Scottish Water, which is Scottish Government-owned.

“Even so that small amount of monitoring revealed that least year sewage was dumped more than 20,000 times in our pristine rivers and beaches,” he told the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

“The River Almond is one of the worst rivers for sewage dumping by Scottish Water and sewage treatment works that we know about.

“These are places people want to fish, to swim, where our dogs and animals play and habitats for wild animals as well. The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe it really is time we address this freshwater emergency which is getting worse.

“The monsoon-like conditions we saw at the start of this general election campaign are happening with more regularity. That means the Victorian sewage network is being inundated more often, that means the sewage treatment works have to release untreated sewage into our rivers and beaches.

“Anyone who has been for a walk on this beach will have seen thousands of wet wipes.

“It’s having a material impact on our economy; I remember a time when people used to kayak and paddleboard around here. That doesn’t happen any more because people are aware of just how bad things are.

“We need to get to grips with the fact our waterways, our estuaries, our beaches are the jewel in the crown of Scotland’s tourist offer. We lose them at our peril. That’s going to harm our tourist trade and our leisure and enjoyment which has an impact on people’s mental health.

“That’s why the Lib Dems want to bring forward a Clean Water Act which will upgrade Scotland’s Victorian sewage network, it

will ban the dumping of sewage where people swim, where people fish, it will stop the practice of dumping on dry days and I hope introduce a blue flag system for Scotland's rivers."

Despite water services being devolved – meaning MPs Westminster have no control over the matter – Mr Cole-Hamilton urged voters to back his party at the upcoming vote to "send a signal".

He said: "It's not like the UK Government where they can blame water bosses and just say 'stop making a profit and sort out the system,' this is actually a problem the Scottish Government has in their powers to fix and we see that despite this repeated failure and repeated incidences of sewage dumping, our water bosses are actually getting exorbitant bonuses, effectively from the public purse, and we need to reverse that and make sure they're not being rewarded for failure, they take this seriously and actually Scottish Water gets the investment it needs."

The Scottish Lib Dems are on course to hold onto the Edinburgh West seat in the House of Commons as polling indicates Christine Jardine will be re-elected. However Mr Cole-Hamilton already setting his sights on the next Holyrood election in 2026 where party hopes to make gains in the capital.

"We're looking very hungrily at the new Edinburgh Northern seat created for the Scottish Parliamentary elections for 2026," he said, "so we're already doing some ground work there.

"As soon as the polls close on July 4th we're going to begin our campaign for 2026, that's definitely targeting that Edinburgh Northern seat. We would have won it on the local authority election result on first preferences so we're in good heart. We're going to grow even if we didn't get that; the list voting intention in opinion polls point to us getting

a list seat in Lothian.

“Remember, the Lib Dems have grown more than any other part in the city in terms of our representation on the council; we’re certainly going to see that happen in the Scottish Parliament and I hope that when that happens that will set up at least another one or two seats in the general election to follow.”

All the candidates standing in Edinburgh West are:

- Christine Jardine – Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Euan Hyslop – Scottish National Party
- Michael Davidson – Scottish Labour
- James Puchowski – Scottish Greens
- Michael Banks – Reform UK
- Tam Laird – Scottish Libertarian Party

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter