

# Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1988/A](#): Review the process for disposal of household raw sewage

## Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

- The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:
  - review the process for allowing raw sewage discharge from homes into Scottish coastal waters
  - provide additional funding to SEPA for enforcement
  - introduce legislation to ban households from discharging raw sewage
- The petitioner is concerned with the impact of sewage discharge into coastal waters and its impact on water quality and beaches.
- SEPA is responsible for the regulation of sewage discharge into the water environment and requires authorisation for discharges under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (CAR).
- [The submission from the Scottish Government](#) notes that not all private sewage discharges are currently authorised. SEPA estimates from modelling that there are about 170, 000 properties on a private sewage system in Scotland and it is intended that those remaining unauthorised private sewage discharges are picked up and authorised through due diligence during house sales.
- The submission also states:
  - “SEPA believes that there remains a significant number of untreated discharges in Argyll and Bute owned by private individuals. Under CAR, the householders are responsible for their own wastewater provision. As agreed with Scottish Government at the introduction of CAR in 2006, SEPA is dealing with these in a phased manner over the long term. Householders are required to register their private wastewater discharge with SEPA during conveyancing for any house purchase. At this time, owners are required to install appropriate treatment if there is currently none provided.”
- More detail is provided in the Scottish Government’s submission and in [SEPA’s position statement WAT-PS-08-01: Untreated Sewage Discharges](#) which sets out its policy on continuous discharges of untreated sewage and how these are to be regulated under CAR.
- The petitioner is also concerned that SEPA does not have financial resources to tackle the problem and that private households cannot afford to implement adequate sewage systems.
- The Scottish Government’s submission notes that tackling issues can require a considerable amount of resource to attempt to resolve what is most often a relatively insignificant environmental impact but SEPA starts

to target enforcement action prioritised on the highest risks to the water environment.

- The Scottish Government's submission also explains that SEPA has [variable monetary penalties](#) available to encourage households to install proper sewage treatment systems and can refer cases for criminal prosecution if necessary.
- The petitioner also calls on the Scottish Government to ban outfall pipes and allocate specific funding for SEPA to identify and enforce shortfall pipe correction.
- Financial responsibility for the provision of private sewage treatment rests with the individual home owner or community. Scottish Water is responsible for the provision of public sewage treatment infrastructure.
- The Scottish Government response states that there are no plans to provide additional funds to Scottish Water to provide connections to households with private sewerage arrangements during the current investment period but households have the option to connect to the public network at their own expense and Scottish Water will make a reasonable cost contribution towards the costs of the project should a new main be required.

## Scottish Parliament Action

- [Question reference: S6W-12978](#)
- [Question reference: S6W-12976](#)
- [Question reference: S6W-10889](#)

**SPICe**

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