



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Survey on the length of the bathing season in England

Summary of responses and way forward

November 2013

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Background

Over the summer of 2013 Defra carried out a survey to get a view from the public on how long they felt the bathing season in England should be. The bathing season currently runs from 15 May to 30 September and it is during this time that water quality is sampled by the Environment Agency.

Options

A number of options were offered:

- Option 0 was to retain the existing season length;
- Option 1 was to retain the existing season as a default but allow flexibility where individual sites could set their own dates, based on usage;
- Option 2 was to have regional seasons, based on Environment Agency regions;
- Option 3 was to have a longer season (e.g. 15 April – 31 October);
- Option 4 was to have a shorter season (e.g. 1 June – 31 August).

Responses

602 responses were received. The majority (594) were votes for one option via the online survey. There were five written replies: two from water companies; one from a coastal forum; one from a local authority on behalf of a coastal partnership and one from an environmental NGO. Emailed replies were received from the Environment Agency, a tourism body and a private bathing water owner.

The following table sets out the voting for each option from the online survey.

Option	Number of votes	%
Option 0 – no change	28	4.7
Option 1 – flexibility	76	12.8
Option 2 – regional season	45	7.6
Option 3 – longer season	430	72.4
Option 4 – shorter season	15	2.5

Of the written and emailed replies:

- One voted for Option 0;
- Three suggested a combination of Options 1 and 2;
- The remainder did not choose any specific option.

The clear majority of voting was for Option 3 and having a longer season.

The highest number of respondents (285) to the online survey lived in the South West region. One hundred and twenty nine were from the South East; 49 were from Yorkshire and the North East; 31 from Anglian region; 32 from North West region, and 26 from Midlands region. Forty-two respondents preferred not to state their region.

Respondent	Number	%
Local authority	53	8.9
Private bathing water owner	8	1.3
Water company	4	0.7
Environmental NGO or voluntary group	54	9.1
Swimming club or organisation	19	3.2
Private individual	407	68.5
Other	36	6.1
Prefer not to say	13	2.2

We estimate that approximately 200 replies were in response to a campaign by Surfers Against Sewage to support a longer bathing season.

Next steps

Defra will consider the findings of the survey, which will feed into an Impact Assessment of any change to the bathing season. A full Impact Assessment is needed in order to have an evidence base for amending the Bathing Water Regulations which set the dates of the bathing season in England and Wales, and this would include evidence of usage at sites where changes were proposed (please note this proposal applies only to bathing waters in England). Defra will then consult formally on the Impact Assessment and any proposed change to the Bathing Water Regulations to amend the dates of the season in England.

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