



people power change
38Degrees

**The Public's
Verdict on the
Water Bill**

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Introduction

The Government's Water Bill marks a "make or break" moment for our rivers and seas. While ministers claim they are ready to clean up the industry, the public is demanding more than just warm words - we want a fundamental shift in how our most precious resource is managed.

That's why between the 9th February and the 8th March, 37,470 people shared their views in a national survey by 38 Degrees and Surfers Against Sewage to send a clear message: the era of corporate failure and environmental neglect must end now. And with bills set to soar from April

2026, this is the critical window to ensure the voices of the people who pay the bills and swim in the water are heard.

This isn't about minor tweaks; it's about a deep-seated public mandate to seize this legislative moment and end the sewage scandal once and for all. From rejecting "profit-first" models to demanding genuine accountability, these 37,470 voices provide the Government with a definitive direction of travel. We don't just want a slightly better system - we want a water industry that puts people and the planet before shareholder payouts.



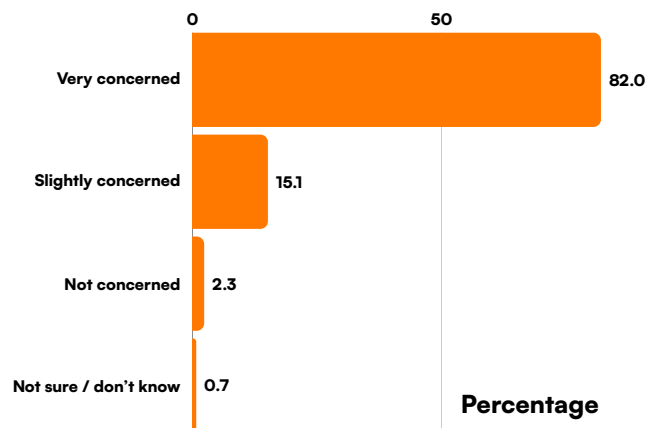
Affordability of Water Bills

The survey findings highlight a significant cost-of-living anxiety tied specifically to water utility pricing.

When asked about how proposed changes could help with affordability, many respondents expressed concern.

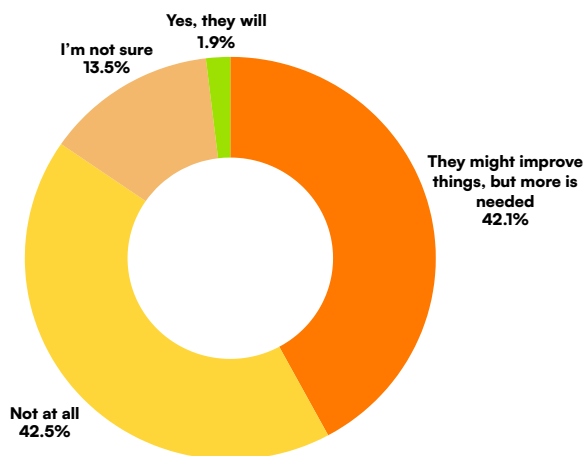
Over 82% of respondents said they were "very concerned" about affordability. Conversely, only 2% were not concerned.

Water bills are set to rise from April 2026.
How concerned are you about the affordability of your water bills?



37462 out of 37470 people answered this question

Do you believe that the changes the UK Government is proposing would help make water bills fair and affordable?



36383 out of 37470 people answered this question

The findings demonstrate a lack of confidence in the Government's current proposals to make water bills fair and affordable.

43% of respondents said the changes will not help at all, whilst another 42% said that, whilst things may improve as a result, further action is required.



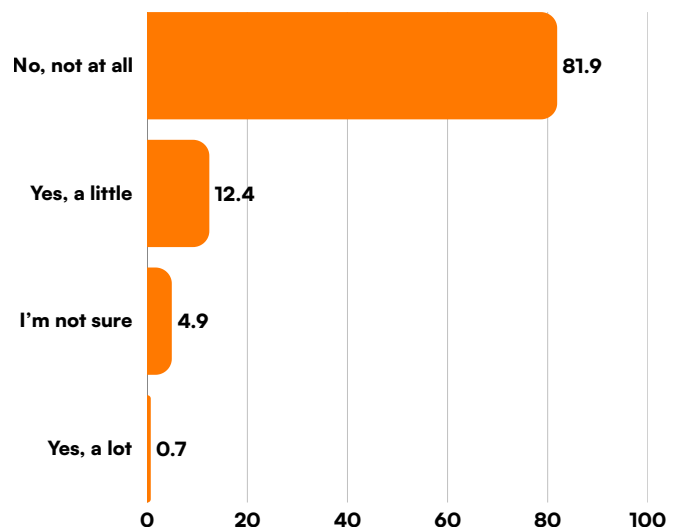
Ending the Sewage Scandal

The results reveal a strong consensus that the UK Government is not doing enough to address sewage pollution.

When asked directly, 82% of respondents said "No, not at all", reflecting a demand for more urgent and decisive intervention.

In contrast, less than 1% said the Government is doing "a lot" to tackle the crisis.

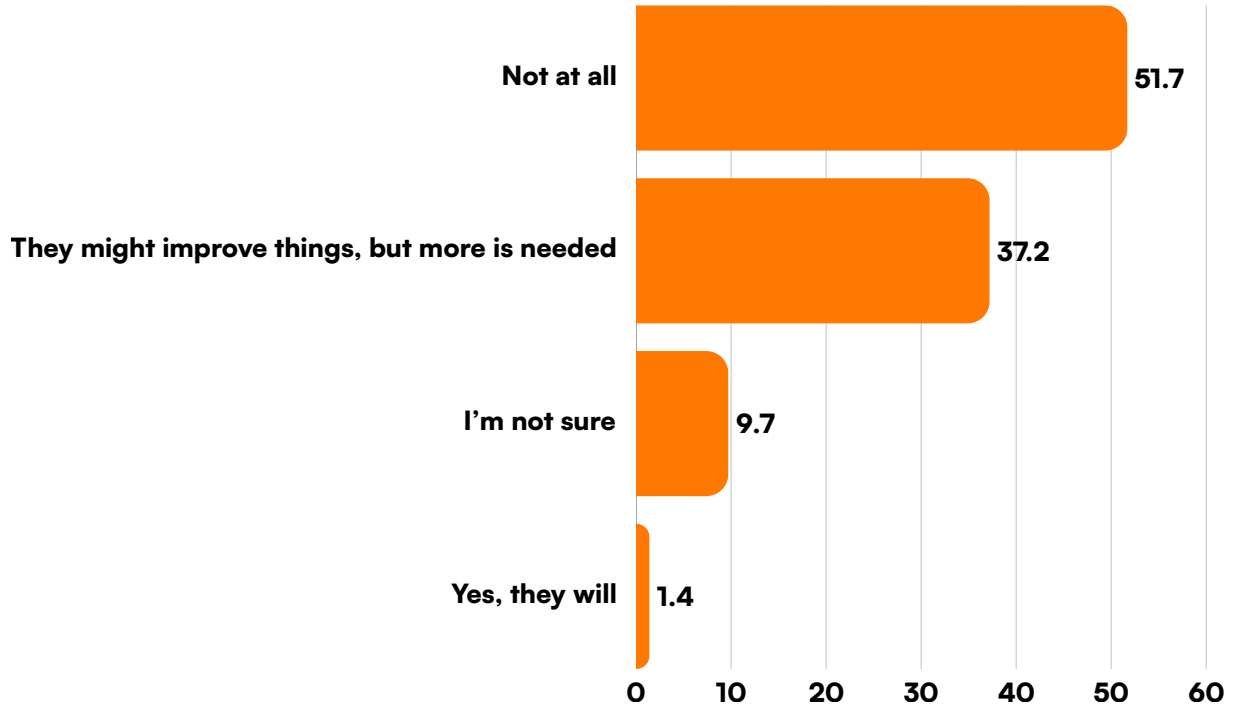
Do you think the UK Government is doing enough to end the sewage scandal?



27916 out of 37470 people answered this question.



Do you believe that the changes the UK Government is proposing would help end the sewage scandal?



34619 out of 37470 people answered this question

The survey results also indicate a clear gap between the Government's policy proposals and the public's expectations for clean waterways.

When asked how proposals in the Water Bill could help end the sewage scandal, many respondents

expressed scepticism that the changes will solve the problem.

More than half of respondents (52%) said the current proposals will fail to end the scandal. Only 1% said they believed the plans as they are will help to fix the issue.



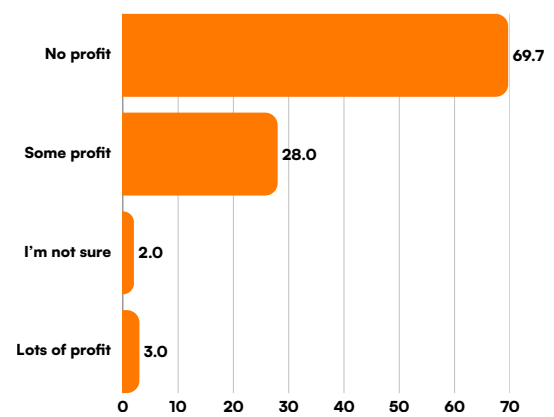
Ownership Options

"Take the water industry into public ownership and also protect the quality of the water." - Sandra Schur, Suffolk Coastal

According to the survey findings, there is a significant public mandate for restricting financial payouts in the water sector.

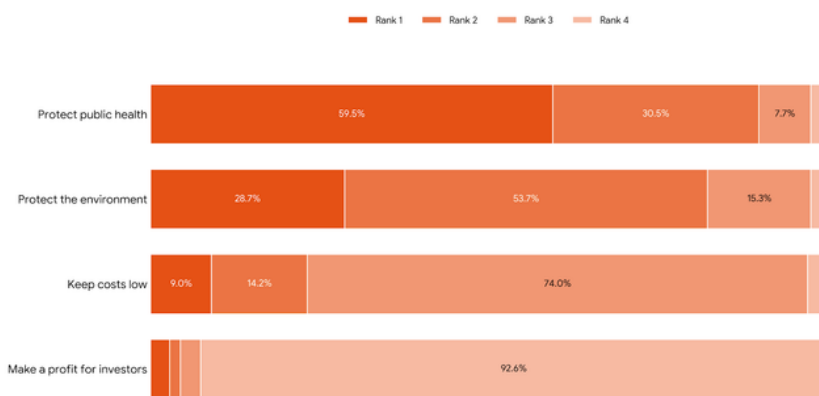
Nearly 70% of respondents said they believed water company shareholders shouldn't make any profit at all, arguing that revenue should instead be prioritised for public health and environmental protection.

How much money should shareholders be allowed to make from water companies?



33163 out of 37470 people answered this question

What should be the water companies' main goals?



30231 out of 37470 people answered this question

When asked what water companies should be prioritising, respondents overwhelmingly placed public health (60%) and environmental protection (29%) above others.

Financial goals, such as investor profit, were ranked as the top priority by just 3% of respondents.

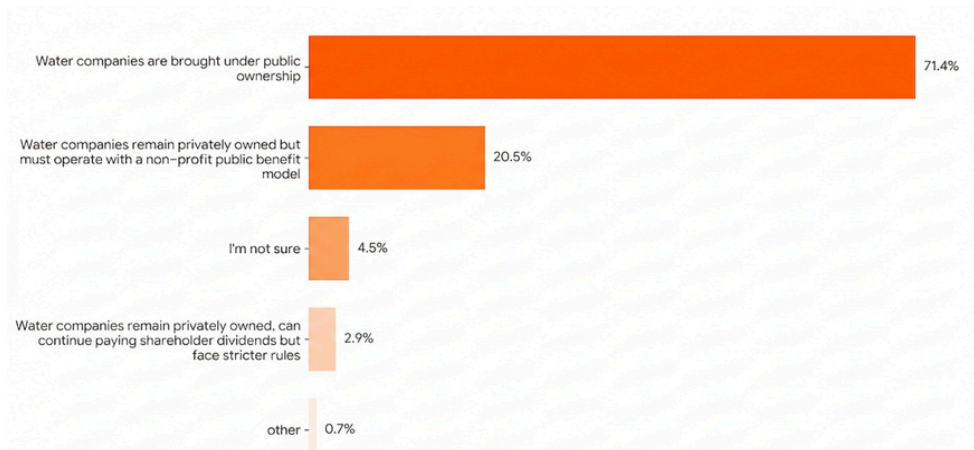
When asked how the water industry could be improved, respondents had a clear preference for public ownership.

72% said bringing water companies under public ownership would be the single most effective way to improve the sector. This far outweighed support,

at just 3%, for maintenance of the current private model.

Qualitative comments from those who selected “other” tended to focus on holding executives criminally liable and viewing current government plans as a weak and insufficient response to the crisis.

Which of these do you think would improve the water industry the most?

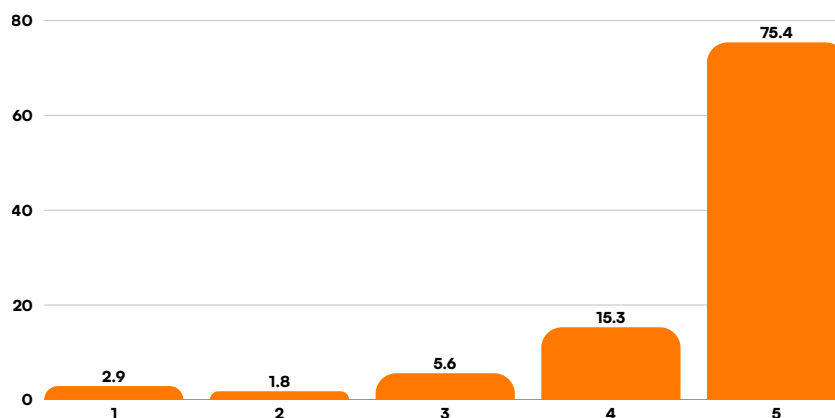


31401 out of 37470 people answered this question

The survey asked respondents how much input the Government should seek from the public when making changes to the water industry (on a scale of 1–5, where 5 represents the highest level of input).

75% of respondents selected level 5, indicating a clear appetite for greater public consultation before new changes to the water industry are introduced.

How much do you think the UK Government should ask the public for input when making new changes to the water industry?



36902 out of 37470 people answered this question

Political Implications

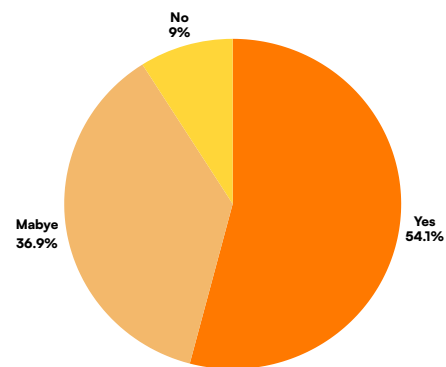
"It should be not for profit and no fat cats" - Helen Shallcross, South West Wiltshire

The survey also demonstrated the impact and potential consequences of the scandal on future elections, with more than half of respondents saying that a political party with a stronger stance on the issue would be more likely to get their vote.

When asked about how it could affect voting intention, more than half (54%) of respondents indicated that a party's stance on sewage and water companies would - or likely would - influence their vote. Indeed, only 9% of respondents said it wouldn't.

A comparison of survey respondents' past voting history and future intentions also showed a clear shift in

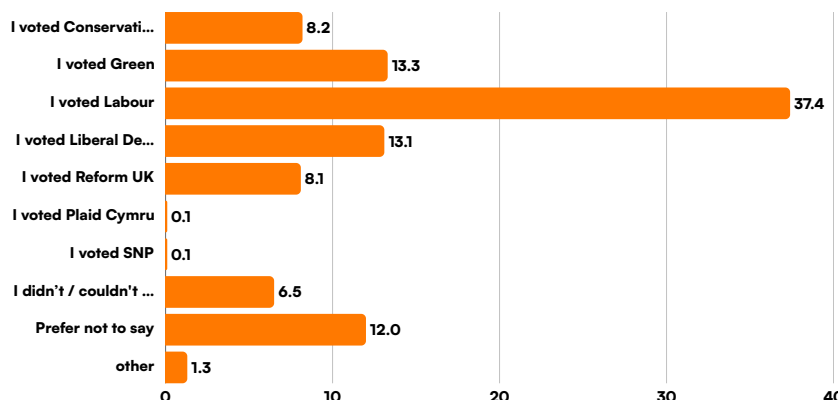
Would taking a stronger stance on sewage and water companies make you more likely to vote for a particular party?



30360 out of 37470 people answered this question

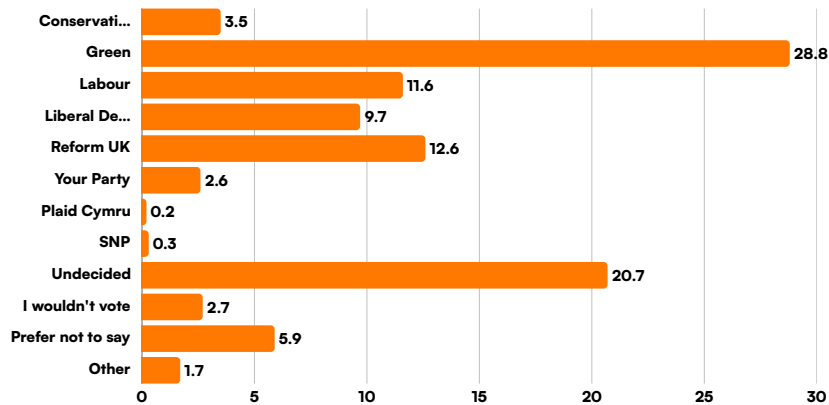
sentiment. Whilst Labour was the most popular party at the last election (37%), current voting intention shows a surge in support for the Green Party (29%) and a high volume of undecided voters (21%).

Could you tell us how you voted at the last election?



36054 out of 37470 people answered this question

If there was a General Election tomorrow, who would you vote for?



28822 out of 37470 people answered this question

When asked what message respondents would like to send to the Government about the water crisis, many made clear that public trust in the industry has reached a terminal breaking point.

Some respondents overwhelmingly condemned the privatised model as a "scandalous failure," accusing water companies of asset-stripping a national necessity to fund shareholder dividends and executive bonuses at the expense of our crumbling infrastructure.

Many respondents expressed distain about the industrial-scale discharge of raw sewage into waterways. No longer viewed as mere mismanagement, it is considered a criminal assault on public health and the environment. As one

respondent pointedly observed:

"It is an embarrassment to live in a supposedly civilised country such as the UK and to have water quality as dreadful as ours." - Annette Heritage, Thirsk and Malton

There is an overwhelmingly strong mandate for change. The public is demanding the immediate transfer of the industry to public ownership and custodial sentences for failing executives. The message to the Government is clear - water must be a not-for-profit human right, not a corporate cash cow. The sentiment is best summarised by one contributor's warning:

"You cannot drink greed." - Pauline Barrie, Esher and Walton

Conclusion

The results of our survey reveal a collapse of public confidence in the current management of England's water industry, and high levels of anxiety about rising bills.

Whilst it's positive to see the Government bringing forward the Water Bill, the public ultimately remains unconvinced that the current proposals are sufficient to tackle the sewage scandal.

This survey highlights that there is a clear public mandate for more radical reform, with a significant majority demanding a transition to public ownership and an end to shareholder profiteering.

Ultimately, the data shows that the state of our waterways has become a decisive electoral issue, with the majority of participants prepared to vote for a party that takes a stronger stance on the issue.

The message is clear: public patience has run out. Voters want decisive action to clean up our rivers and seas, hold water companies to account, and put the public interest ahead of private profit. The Government now faces a choice - continue with incremental change, or seize this moment to deliver the bold reforms needed to end the sewage crisis once and for all.



Who we are

38 Degrees

38 Degrees is a community of a million people who—in a moment away from their busy days—take small actions on issues they care about, which all add up to something bigger: a movement for a better Britain for everyone who calls our country home.

With supporters in every UK constituency, we come from all walks of life; we're nurses, taxi drivers, parents, shopkeepers, pensioners and more. With on and offline campaigning technology, a creative and dedicated staff team and a people powered movement.

We work to change lives, communities

and our country, and by coming together we can have an impact far greater than any of us could achieve alone.

Whether it's the grieving wife who forced the Government to review betting laws after the tragic loss of her husband to gambling-related suicide, or the hundreds of thousands of us who convinced the Culture Secretary to keep Channel 4 public, every time we win, we move our country a step towards the fairer, more sustainable place we're fighting for, where we are treated—and treat each other—with respect.

Surfers Against Sewage

Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is a grassroots environmental charity working with communities to protect and reclaim the UK's wild waters from polluters, focusing on tackling sewage, plastic and chemical pollution. It was created in 1990 by a group of surfers from the north coast of Cornwall, who were sick of getting sick from sewage.



Methodology

In partnership with Surfers Against Sewage and 38 Degrees supporters were surveyed between February 9th and March 8th, with a self-selecting sample size of 37,470 persons aged 16 and over, based in England.



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