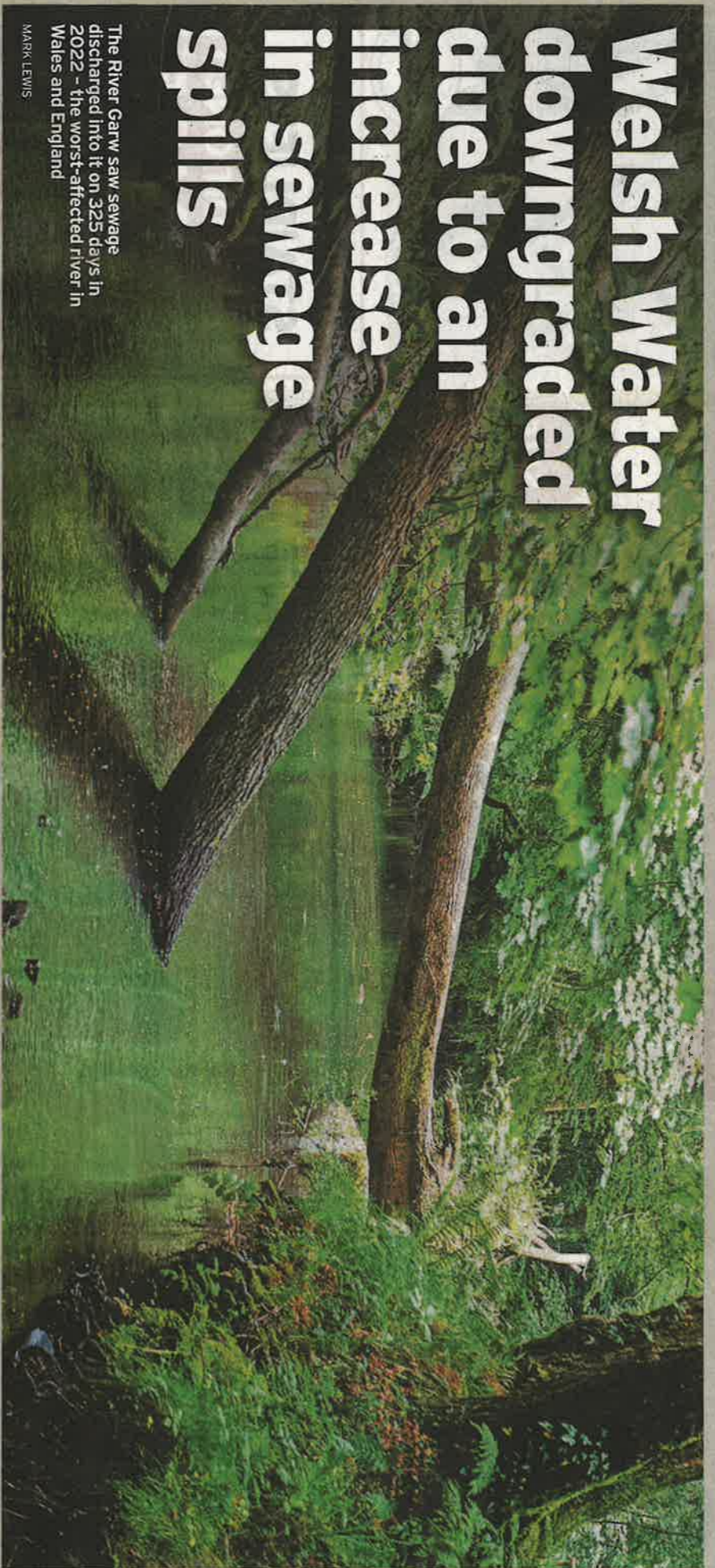


Item 81

Welsh Water downgraded due to an increase in sewage spills

The River Garw saw sewage discharged into it on 325 days in 2022 - the worst-affected river in Wales and England

MARK LEWIS



WALES' largest water company has seen its environmental rating downgraded for the second consecutive year due to the rise in sewage spills.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has reduced Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's rating from three stars to two stars.

It said Welsh Water now "requires improvement" following the further decline in the company's environmental performance, which is outlined in NRW's annual review.

In 2022, Welsh Water released sewage into rivers, lakes and seas for nearly 600,000 hours - that equates to untreated sewage discharging into Welsh waterways non-stop for 68 years.

It registered caused 91 sewage pollution incidents - up 9% from 2021.

Five of these incidents were classed as "having a high or significant impact".

It also failed to make improvements to the number of incidents self-reported to NRW, falling to 65%, a decrease of 7% from 2021.

Water companies are expected to self-report incidents to NRW before others do.

In a statement, Welsh Water said it was "working tirelessly to deliver the improvements required" and that it planned to invest an extra £100m to improve river quality by 2025, as part of an £840m improvement plan.

Last July, the company was downgraded from a four-star rating (industry-leading) to a three-star rating (good company) in NRW's environmental performance report for 2021.

Welsh Water is now expected to make improvements outlined in the report, including reducing the number of sewage pollution incidents year on year and

stopping all significant incidents.

In May, regulator Ofwat said it was launching an investigation into Welsh Water's leakage reporting for 2020 and 2021, after the company admitted it failed to accurately report leaks across its network, which were much higher than it first recorded.

The company said it was handling 1.4m Welsh Water customers a £10 rebate following the admission. NRW chief executive Clare Pillman said: "It is very disappointing that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's performance has continued to decline.

"Water companies need to take urgent and sustained action to address the significant pollution incidents we are seeing in our waters.

"In the face of the climate and nature emergencies, the need to act now is ever more important, as

our ageing sewer network comes under greater pressure.

"Without sufficient investment and a strong performance management framework from water companies, the environment will continue to pay the price. In our meetings with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water we have been very clear about the improvements they must deliver."

A spokesperson for Welsh Water said: "We are working tirelessly to deliver the improvements required in challenging circumstances especially as we experience more severe weather events and extreme variation in the climate.

"These changes are having a significant and increasing impact on our water and wastewater infrastructure and challenging how we deliver our services.

"While we recorded five serious pollution incidents for 2022, compared with three in 2021, we

have the second-lowest level of total pollution incidents in the water industry, with the number of pollution incidents having halved over the past 10 years.

"We are sorry, however, for any environmental harm that we have caused."

NRW has also published the performance of Hafren Dyfrdwy, another water company operating in parts of north-east and mid Wales.

Hafren was found to have made improvements in the number of pollution incidents, from eight in 2021 to four in 2022, reporting no significant pollution incidents.

But NRW is still pressing the company to improve its rate of self-reporting incidents, after the company only self-reported two out of four incidents, compared with six out of eight incidents in 2021.