

# Solent Bathing Water Quality Award Scheme: Operational Guidelines

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Solent Bathing Water Quality Award (SBWQA) scheme was launched in 1992 to provide a simple and readily understood indicator of satisfactory water quality at bathing beaches and, where feasible, in recreational waters around the Solent.
- 1.2 The scheme supplements the various beach and resort award schemes, including the Blue Flag, which all deal with many other criteria in addition to water quality.
- 1.3 The scheme is administered by the Solent Water Quality Association, a sub-group of the Solent Forum (see Terms of Reference document), through its Secretary and its Officer's Working Group.

### Purpose of the Guidelines

- 1.4 The purpose of this document is to explain how the Solent Bathing Water Quality Award scheme works, and to give guidelines to applicants and the award panel in order to help the scheme to operate smoothly.
- 1.5 The guidelines will be reviewed occasionally, in the light of experience, and updated as necessary.

## 2. OUTLINE OF THE SCHEME

### Areas Covered

- 2.1 All beaches regularly used for bathing, non-designated as well as designated, are eligible for an award under the scheme.
- 2.2 Water regularly used for recreational activities involving immersion such as water skiing, boardsailing etc. may also be included where the applying authority can show that the sampling results presented are representative of the whole area for which the application is made.
- 2.3 The scheme applies to the whole Solent, including the main harbours (Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester) and Southampton Water, and to adjoining coastlines of local authorities in membership of the SWQCA.
- 2.4 For the purpose of the scheme the extent of bathing beaches and recreational waters are to be defined by the local authority concerned, or jointly by two or more authorities where areas extend across administrative boundaries.
- 2.5 At least one sampling point must be selected in relation to each bathing beach or area of recreational use.

### Standards/Parameters

- 2.6 The basis of the standard to be used for assessing water quality is the EU Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC). The calculations are in Annex II. See link <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:064:0037:0051:EN:PDF> Between 1992 and 2011, the parameters used to assess water quality for the scheme were the **mandatory** bacterial parameters given in the Directive i.e. total coliforms (10,000 / 100ml) and faecal coliforms (2000 / 100ml).

2.7 From 2012 the parameters being monitored are [Escherichia coli](#) and [intestinal enterococci](#). The physico-chemical parameters will no longer be measured.

2.8 From 2016 the bathing water quality will be assessed under the EU Bathing Water Directive 2006/7/EC. The table below shows how compliance will be measured. (source: EA)

	Escherichia coli (E.coli)	Intestinal enterococci (I.E.)
Excellent	95% of samples should not exceed 250 E. coli per 100 ml	95% of samples should not exceed 100 I.E per 100 ml
Good	95% of samples should not exceed 500 E. coli per 100 ml	95% of samples should not exceed 200 I.E per 100 ml
Sufficient	90% of samples should not exceed 500 E. coli per 100 ml	90% of samples should not exceed 185 I.E per 100 ml
Poor	90% of samples should not exceed >500 E. coli per 100 ml	90% of samples should not exceed >185 I.E per 100 ml

2.9 Salmonella parameters are not used because the Award scheme has already recognised that such a standard is unrealistic

2.10 In addition to compliance with the mandatory bacterial parameters of the Directive, the water must not contain any gross pollution by faeces or other sewage related macro-waste, or persistent occurrence of oil or tar or of a significant smell.

2.11 The Environment Agency monitor the parameters of the table below for observational purposes only.

Beach Signage	Macroalgae - Seaweed
Algal Bloom	Other Litter
Animal Faeces	Salinity
Number of Bathers	Sewage Related Material
Number of Beach Users	Tarry Residues

## HOW THE SCHEME WORKS

- 2.12 Application for a SBWQA must be made in accordance with the guidelines in this document, by the owner or manager of the site or area (i.e. local authority, National Trust, or private landowner). An application can be made for a cluster of beaches or recreational areas for designated EU Bathing Water beaches for the summer season. Should an application be put forward for non-EU beaches or an all year award, please supply a separate application with evidence of results. A separate application must be made for each beach or recreational area.
- 2.13 The Awards are made by an Awards Panel, which has the delegated authority of the Solent Water Quality Association. The panel must follow the guidelines set out in this document.
- 2.14 The Awards Panel is a virtual group chosen from authorities and agencies which have not submitted applications for awards, so that it is not affected by vested interests, and is chaired by the SWQA Officers Working Group's Chairman.
- 2.15 The Panel must always include a representative of the Environment Agency as the responsible body for monitoring compliance with the EU Bathing Waters Directive.
- 2.16 The Awards are presented to representatives of the applicants at the annual meeting of the SWQA Conference, or at such other time as may be determined by Association, sufficiently in advance of the bathing season to allow applicants reasonable time to comply with the operational requirements of the scheme.
- 2.17 The onus is on applicants to provide sufficient information for the Awards Panel to make their judgement. In the case of EU designated beaches for a summer only award there is no need to supply evidence as the results are published <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>
- 2.18 The Secretary to the SBWQA will examine applications to check that they meet the administrative requirements and the applicant will be given reasonable opportunity to meet the requirements should they need to.
- 2.19 If the applicant is aggrieved that an Award has not been made, an appeal can be made to an independent panel of three persons nominated by the SWQA Officers' Working Group. The outcome of the appeal must be endorsed by the full OWG.
- 2.20 The SWQA website hosted by the Solent Forum provides information on how the SWQA Awards Scheme works.

## 3. GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

### Submitting Applications

- 3.1 Applications must be submitted to the Secretary of the Solent Water Quality Association on the official application form obtainable from the Solent Forum office. One copy of the completed form must be submitted.
- 3.2 The application must be:
  - a) Complete in all respects
  - b) Accompanied by a purchase order for the appropriate fee, which is stated on the application form.
  - c) Submitted by the deadline shown on the form.

### Supporting Information

- 3.3 Applications must be accompanied by sufficient information to enable the panel to make objective judgements. The credibility of the scheme obviously depends on the independence, objectivity and integrity of the judging panel. This can only be maintained if the quality of the applications is high.
- 3.4 The actual information to support each application will differ but the following is issued as a guide to the minimum which is expected. The supporting evidence for Non-EU Bathing Water is different (see 3.5).
- a) The BWD classifications now rely on 4 years data (which is available on <http://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/> website, and the official classification are also on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bathing-waters-in-england-2015-compliance-report>
  - b) If there is a change in the pattern of the results it could be referred to as a 'step change' and classification is based on the latest data after the change (Only if agreed by DEFRA at Official EU bathing waters)
  - c) All EU Bathing Water sites are now officially classified, and so the public can easily associate the area to which the award applies. It can be found at: <http://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles>
  - d) Arrangements for sampling for the period to which the award will apply (including sampling programme/body carrying out sampling/analysis).
  - e) Part of the Directive is to place appropriate signage on the site. The profile and previous years classification are required. Weekly results are no longer required to be displayed, although some authorities may still elect to do so.
- 3.5 The system for non-EU beaches is different. Award applicant would need to send in results for assessment. They will be sent a Results Form which asks for at least 16 samples and details of the laboratory used. They would then be given a projected classification based on data available.
- 3.6 Applicants must show that adequate arrangements have been made to ensure compliance with the provisions of the scheme. In particular, the following requirements must be met.

Each award location must be provided with information displays to include the following:

- a) The award plaque and explanation of the scheme; this must make it clear that the Award is for long term bathing water quality, and does not take account of short term pollution events.
  - b) Information on how recent short term pollution events can be obtained
  - c) Maps or other information to easily and clearly indicate the area to which the award applies;
  - d) Water quality results for the area in the standard format agreed by SWQA;
  - e) Contact number at the Authority for public information / complaints about the area.
- 3.7 In addition, details for obtaining further information about water quality results and the scheme must be made available to the public.

- 3.8 Regular sampling of water in the area must be carried out at frequency and duration set down in the award application using at least 16 samples. The sampling, if not done by the Environment Agency, must be carried out to Environment Agency standards.
- 3.9 Arrangements for the removal of the award in the event of a "failure" shall be made and further samples shall be obtained. The award may not be redisplayed until samples indicate compliance with the standard.
- 3.10 Award plaques must be removed at the end of September where a seasonal award has been made; (Summer only award).
- 3.11 General publicity about the presentation of the SWQA Awards will be carried out by the Secretary of the SWQA. Applicants may wish to supplement this by making their own arrangements for more specifically targeted publicity for their Award sites.
- 3.12 The local authority shall deal with all enquiries and complaints relating to the award area. The award panel may on receipt of complaint require the Authority concerned to provide information.
- 3.13 The award panel may, on receipt of information that an area is not complying with the conditions of the scheme, withdraw the award.

For more information please contact the Solent Forum Office.  
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