

Red Kite

Open Water Swimming Survey

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water



Report

Red Kite Environment and FLISTRO

March 2023

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1 The survey

Introduction

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water commissioned Red Kite Environment and Eowyn Wilde at FLISTRO to prepare and conduct a community survey to assess opinions on open water swimming or dipping across the areas served by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water/DCWW. This report presents summary findings of the survey.

Methodology

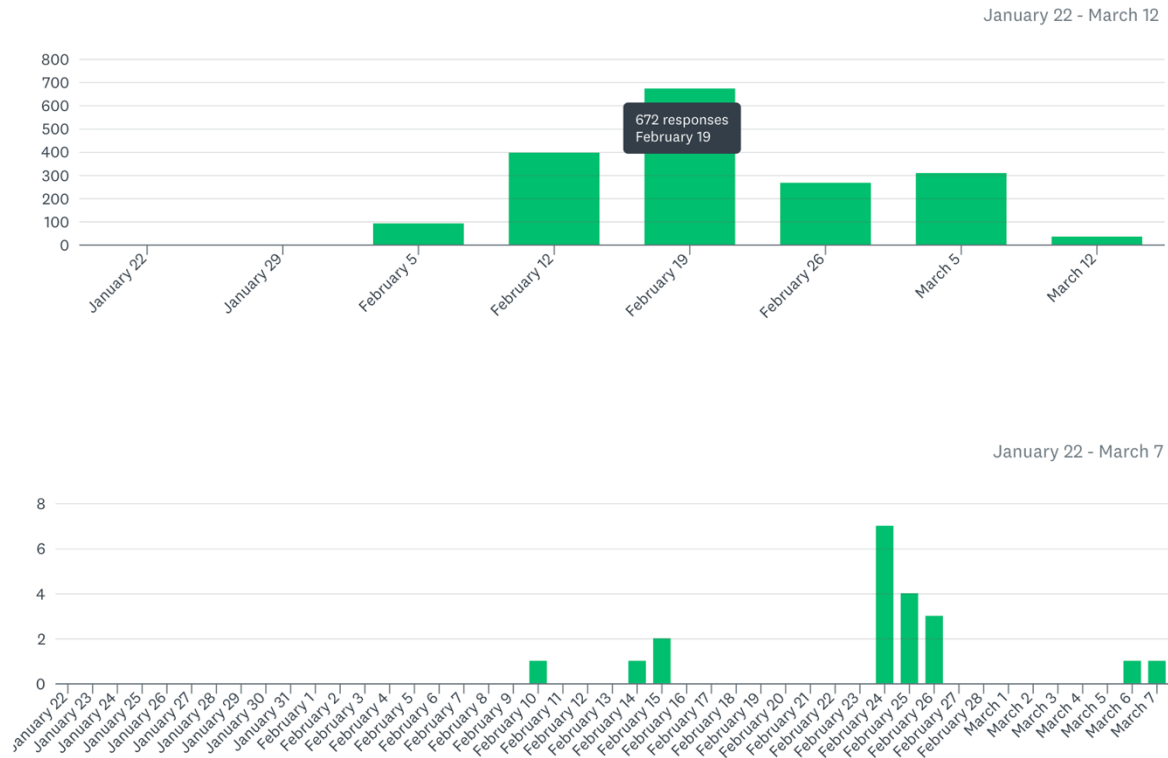
The consultation survey ran from Friday 10 February 2023 to Thursday 16 March 2023 as a questionnaire developed on SurveyMonkey. It was promoted in the following ways:

- A link was placed on the Welsh Government website.
- A link was placed on the Yammer platform for DCWW staff.
- A link was sent to the administrators of open water swimming Facebook groups.
- A Facebook campaign was created, with a link to the survey included in the advertisement. The recommended target audience was people interested in either open water swimming or winter swimming, which had an estimated audience of 125,000 living in areas served by DCWW.
- A link was sent by DCWW to swimming groups and external stakeholder groups including Afonydd Cymru, Rivers Trust, Surfers Against Sewage, the Independent Environmental Advisory Panel and others.

Level of engagement

The questionnaire generated **1767** responses in English and **20** in Welsh. This has collected a good range of data for DCWW. However, it was a lower response rate than initially anticipated. There are several possible reasons for this lower rate including survey and consultation fatigue and the last-minute changes made to the survey imagery and text to meet new DCWW requirements.

Survey and consultation fatigue is likely to be a factor, as several other open water swimming surveys were run during January to March, including one run by Blue Tits in January which attracted thousands of responses. Welsh Government also ran their swim survey during February and March. Our experience of running the survey for DCWW at Llanishen and Lisvane, and similar surveys for other organisations involved in managing natural and cultural sites, is that the first week of Facebook campaigns is the time when most responses are gathered, but this did not happen for the DCWW Swim Survey.



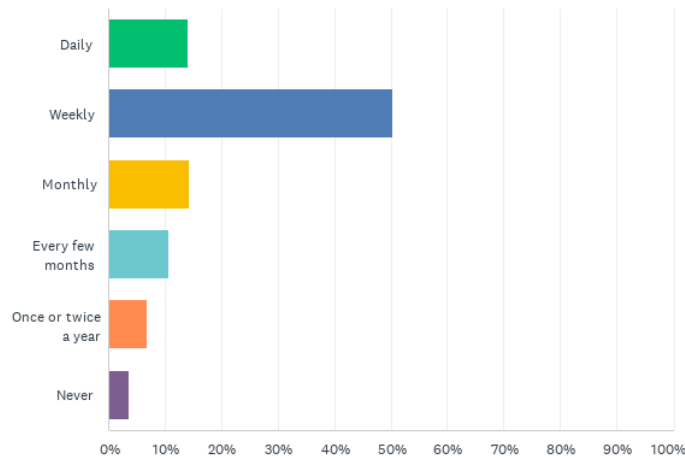
2 Findings

The responses are presented as bar charts where respondents have clicked set responses provided in the questionnaire. Where questions have included an ‘other’ option we have provided a selection to illustrate a range of responses. We have also presented some of the ‘other’ responses as ‘word clouds’ that indicate frequency of responses – the larger the word the higher the frequency of response. Word clouds work well when the response is just a few words, such as a specific name or location, but work much less well when the response includes lengthy descriptions. The word clouds are provided only for the English responses as they cannot be generated in the Welsh language.

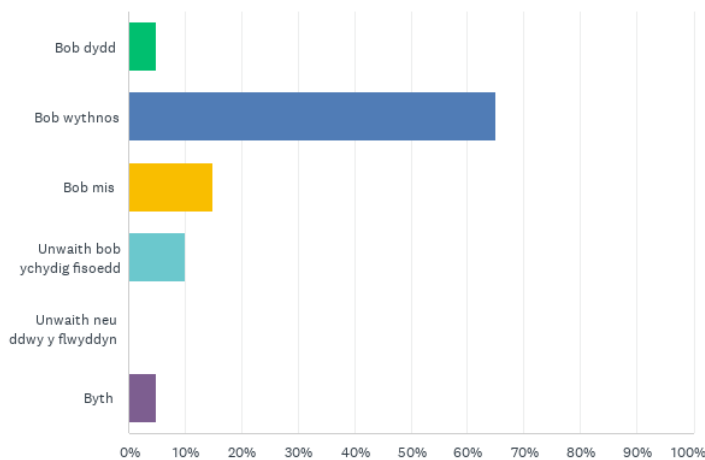
Q1 How frequently do you open water swim or dip in areas served by DCWW (sea, rivers or lakes)?

There were 1766 responses in English and 20 in Welsh to this question. Between 50% and 65% of respondents are swimming weekly and around 15% swimming monthly. A significant number, between 5% and 15%, are swimming every day. As over 60% of respondents were members of swim groups this figure is clearly disproportionate for the Welsh population as a whole.

Q1 How frequently do you Open Water swim or dip in areas served by DCWW (sea, rivers or lakes)?



Q1 Pa mor aml rydych chi'n nofio neu'n dipio mewn Dŵr Agored (y môr, afonydd neu lynnoedd) mewn ardaloedd y mae Dŵr Cymru yn eu gwasanaethu?



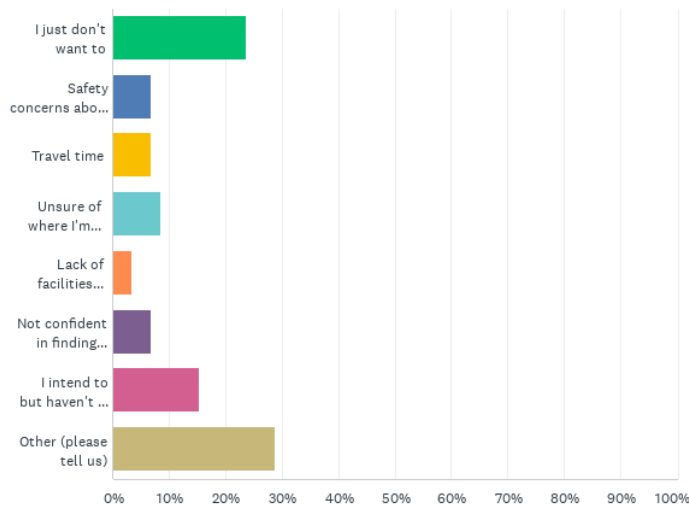
Q2 Is there anything that prevents you from open water swimming or dipping in areas served by DCWW?

There were 59 responses in English and no responses in Welsh. Over 20% of the respondents didn't want to swim in open water while around 15% intended to but haven't got round to it yet. Responses of between 5% and 10% included safety concerns, uncertainty about where they are allowed to swim, and not confident about finding water quality information.

Other comments included:

- *Water is unsafe for swimming*
- *Too formal and too many rules to comply with. Cannot just turn up and swim in a designated area without having to book into specific times, etc.*
- *Water quality*
- *Raw sewage in rivers and sea*
- *Always told we're not allowed, so haven't*
- *I used to swim weekly, after several times at being ill / rashes caused by the poor water quality I won't swim again*

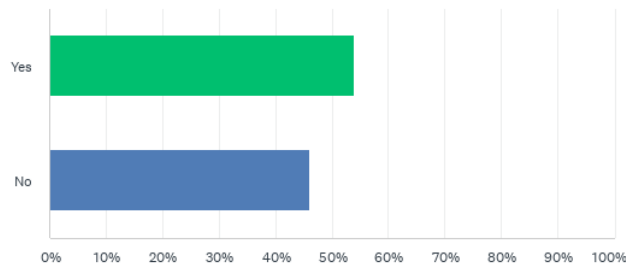
Q2 Is there anything that prevents you from Open Water swimming or dipping in areas served by DCWW?



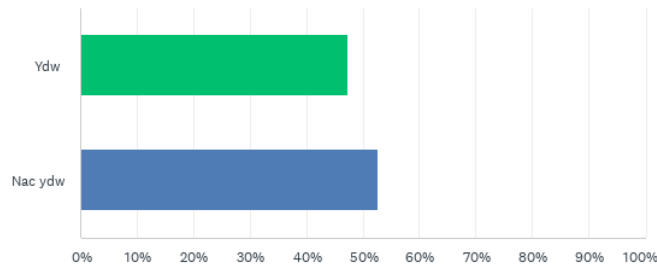
Q3 Are you a member of an open water / wild swimming group or club?

This question had 1686 English responses and 19 Welsh. The split in English responses was 54% yes and 46% no, and in Welsh 47% yes and 53% no.

Q3 Are you a member of an Open Water/Wild Swimming group or club?



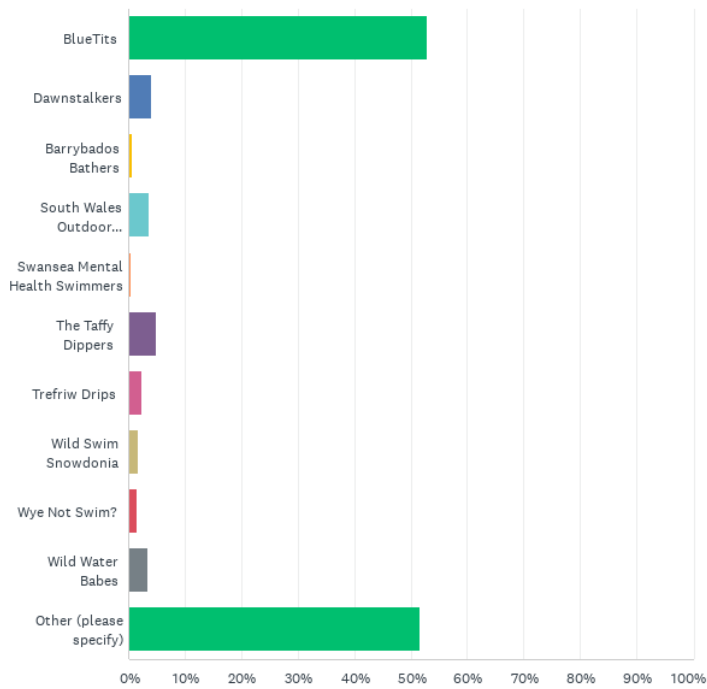
Q3 Ydych chi'n aelod o grŵp neu glwb Nofio Dŵr Agored/Nofio Gwyllt?



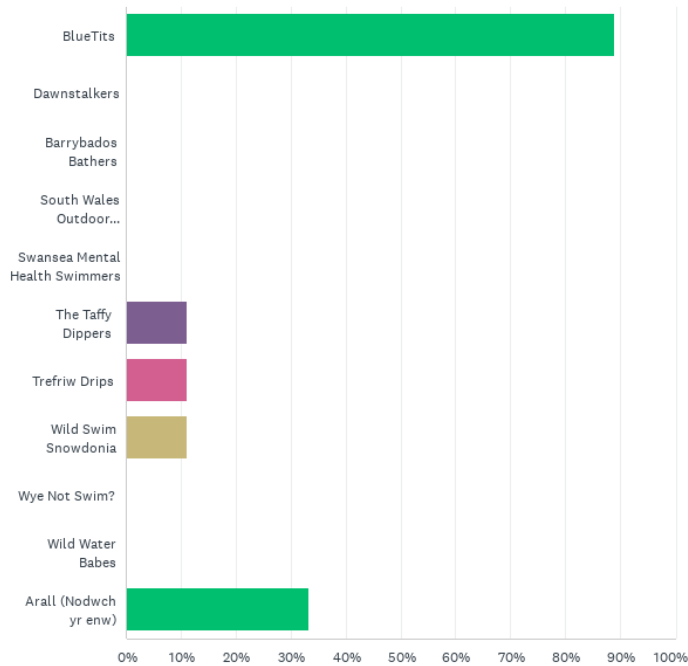
Q4 Which Open Water swimming group/club are you a member of?

There were 903 responses to this question in English and 9 in Welsh. Over 50% of respondents in English were members of the Blue Tits and under 5% were members of other groups such as Dawnstalkers, South Wales Outdoor swimming, the Taffy Dippers and Wild Water Babes. Members of over 160 swimming groups or clubs responded to this question.

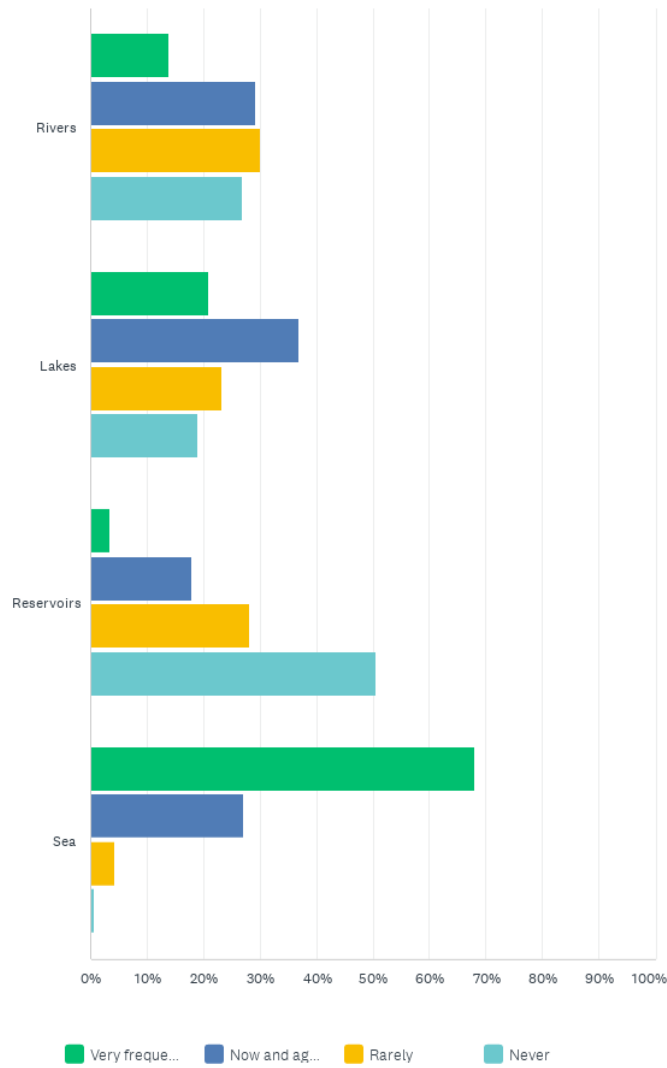
Q4 Which Open Water swimming group/club are you a member of?



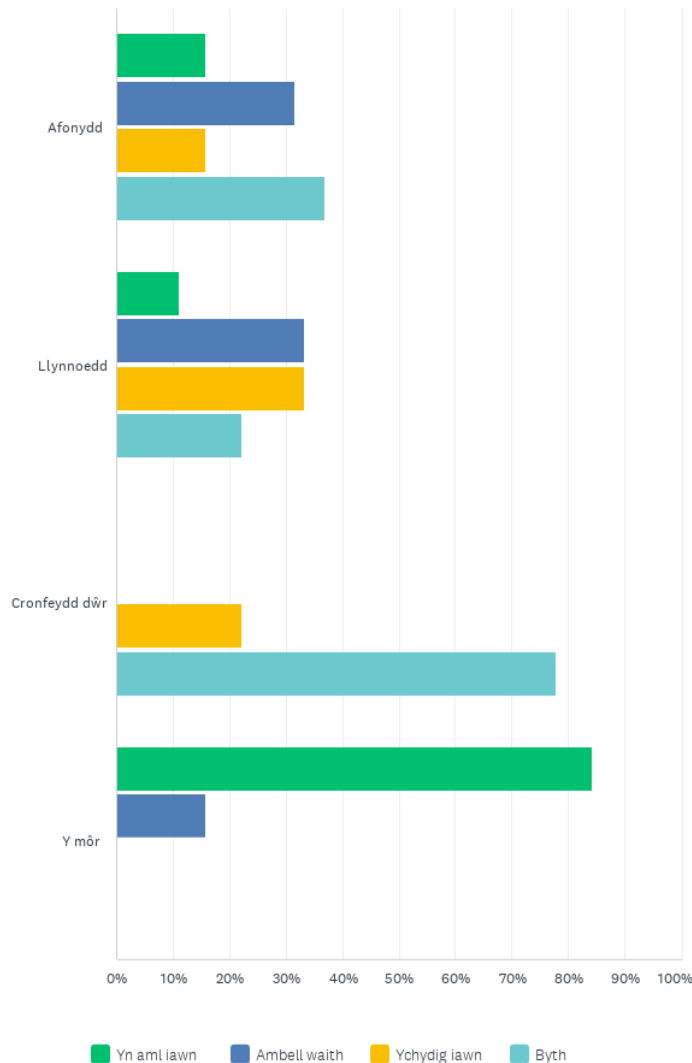
Q4 Pa grŵp/glwb nofio Dŵr Agored ydych chi'n aelod ohono?



Q5 How frequently do you swim or dip in the following types of Open Water (in areas served by DCWW)?



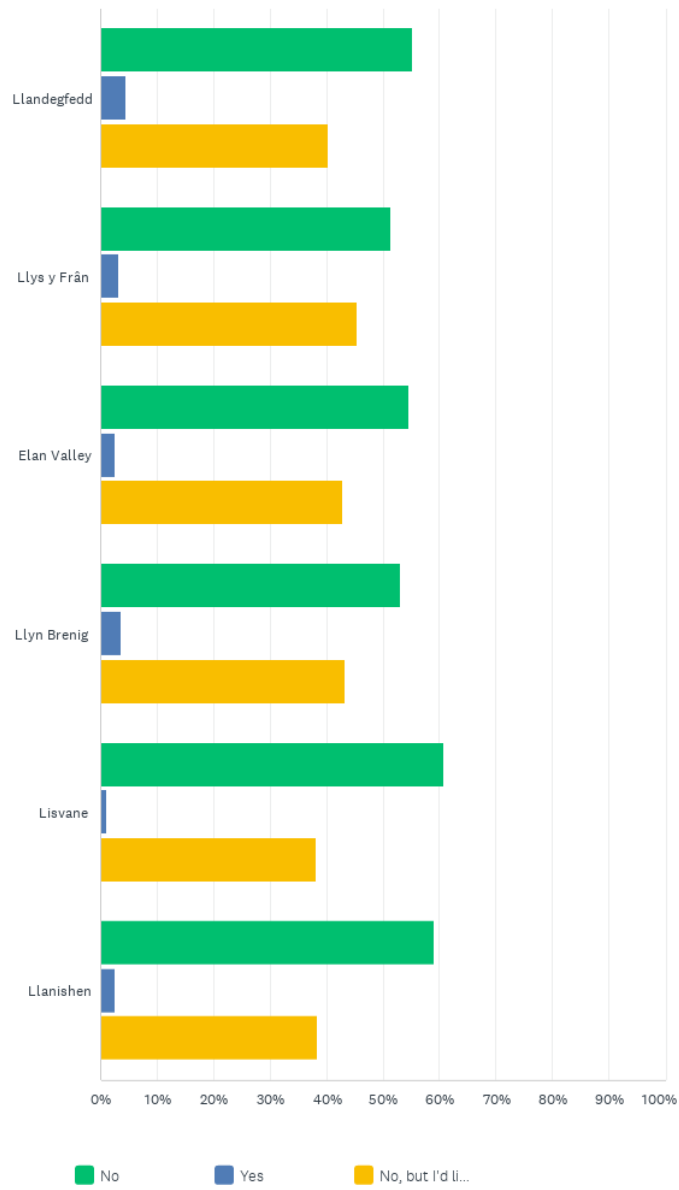
Q5 Pa mor aml ydych chi'n nofio neu'n dipio yn y mathau isod o Ddŵr Agored (mewn ardaloedd y mae Dŵr Cymru yn eu gwasanaethu)?



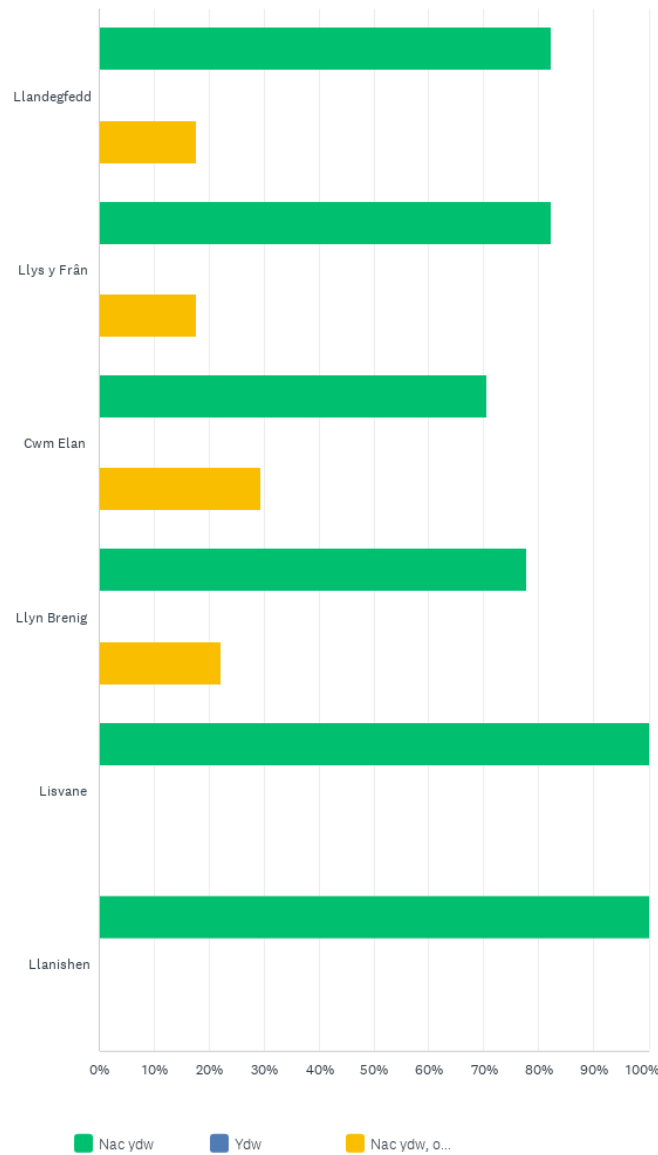
Q6 Do you regularly swim or dip at any of the following DCWW visitor attraction sites?

There were 1618 English responses and 18 Welsh to this question. Less than 5% of respondents used DCWW sites for open water swimming, though around 40% of them expressed a desire to use them. The most used sites are Llandegfedd and Llyn Brenig. Lisvane and Llanishen were not originally included but were added during the survey on 27th February. Interestingly, around 2% of respondents said they used Lisvane and Llanishen reservoirs even though they are closed to the public at present.

Q6 Do you regularly swim or dip at any of the following DCWW visitor attraction sites?



Q6 Ydych chi'n nofio neu'n dipio'n rheolaidd yn unrhyw un o safleoedd Dŵr Cymru isod sy'n atyniadau i ymwelwyr?

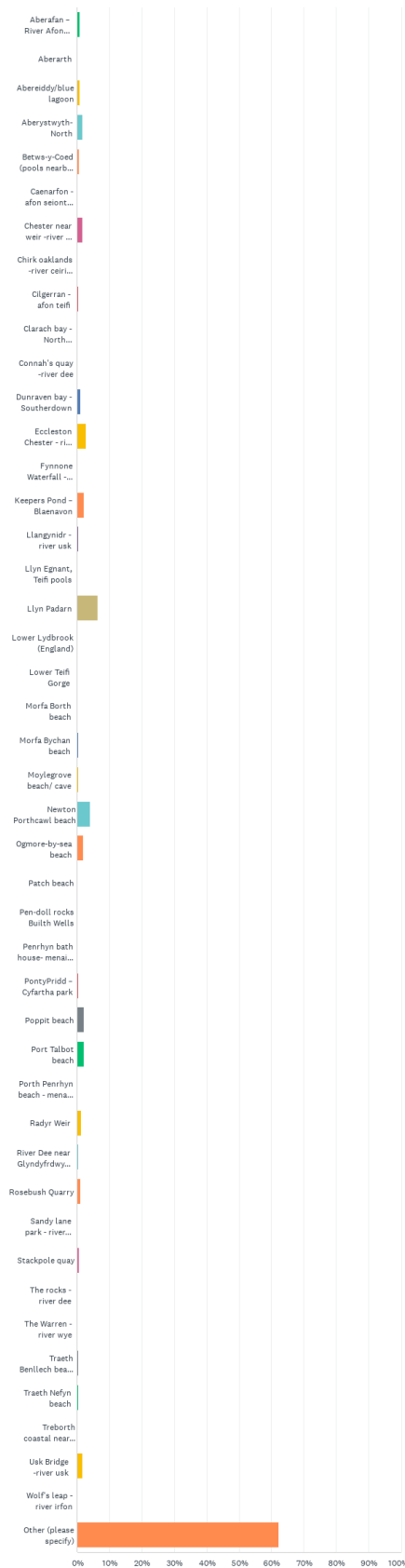


Q7 Which location do you swim or dip at MOST frequently? (Please just specify one). If you can be specific, it will help DCWW prioritise investment in those swim-spots that need it most. You can use what3words to pinpoint the precise location or share a link from Google Maps.

1476 people responded to this question in English and 19 in Welsh. Llyn Padarn is the most popular location, with around 5% of respondents choosing this site. There were 830 responses to 'other sites', which include popular sites such as Newton Porthcawl beach, Eccleston Chester River Dee and Port Talbot beach scoring above 2%.

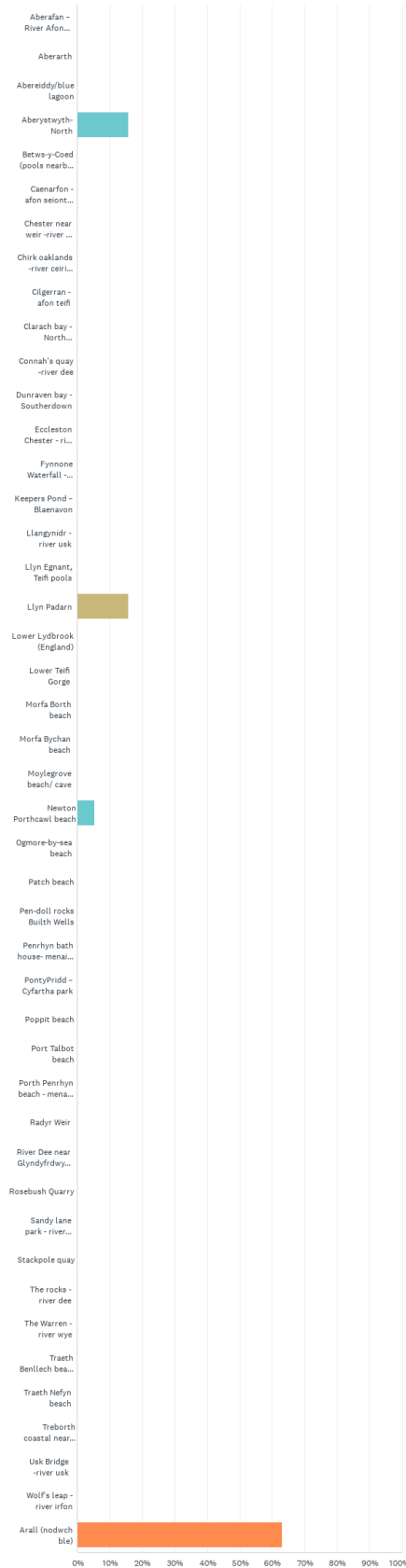
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Q7 Which location do you swim or dip at MOST frequently? (Please just specify one). If you can be specific, it will help DCWW prioritise investment in those swim-spots that need it most. You can use what3words to pinpoint the precise location, or share a link from Google Maps.



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Q7 Ble rydych chi'n nofio AMLAF? (Nodwch un yn unig) Os gallwch fod yn benodol, bydd yn helpu Dŵr Cymru i flaenoriaethu buddsoddi yn y manau nofio hynny lle mae ei angen fwyaf. Gallwch ddefnyddio what3words i nodi'r union leoliad, neu rannu dolen o Google Maps.



A word cloud of the 'other' sites shows that Colwyn Bay, Goodwick, Langland Bay, Penarth and Burry Port are also frequently used for swimming.

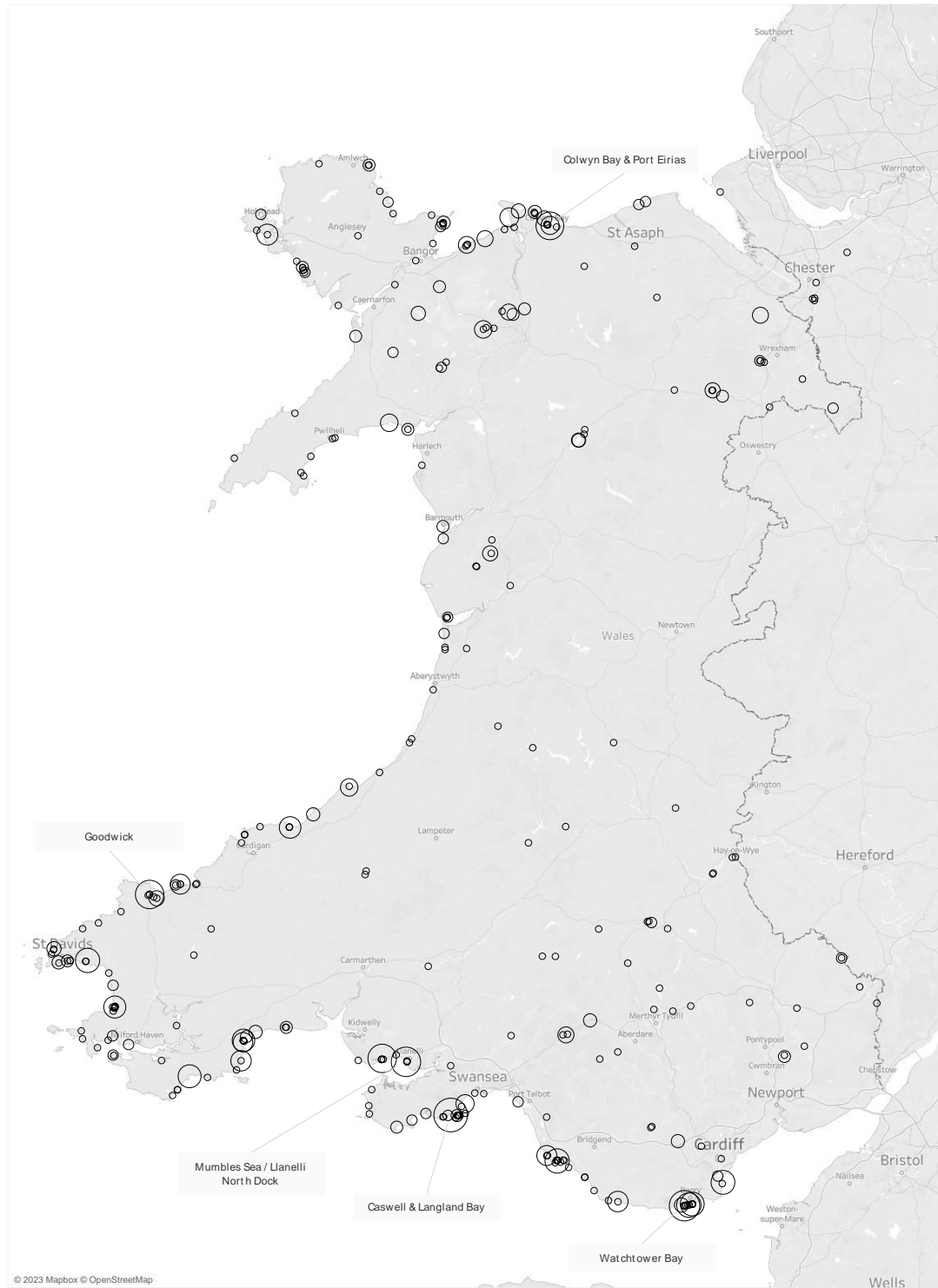
Q7 Which location do you swim or dip at MOST frequently? (Please just specify one). If you can be specific, it will help DCWW prioritise investment in those swim-spots that need it most. You can use what3words to pinpoint the precise location, or share a link from Google Maps.

address made random Llyn Geirionydd precise what3words address Llangrannog Sandy Bay
 Knap Burryport Penmaenmawr Tenby Criccieth Park Past Hope harbour Llanfairfechan
 Caerfai New Quay Amroth Rest bay Coney Beach Sandy maps.app goo.gl
 Eirias Colwyn Bay RIVER Whitmore bay Barry Solva Jackson s bay
 Coney Beach Porthcawl Horseshoe Falls River Trearddur Bay
 Llyn Padarn Caswell Bay Criccieth beach Watchtower Bay
 Horseshoe Falls Barry letters Gower watchtower Caswell
 West shore Llandudno Pembrokeshire Langland bay swansea
 Porthcawl Llanelli North Dock w3w.co world unique what3words
 Langland metre square world Burry Port words Every metre
 Colwyn Bay random words Every beach
 Every metre square Goodwick square world unique
 Langland Bay unique what3words address Penarth
 Coppet Hall Saundersfoot Watchtower Bay Barry
 Bay Barry Island Aberporth Whitesands North Dock Llanelli
 lake Swansea Fishguard Llantwit Major Whitmore bay sea Llyn Tegid
 Freshwater East Rhos sea Solva Harbour Falls River Dee
 Jackson Bay Barry Llandudno West Shore Saundersfoot
 Porth Eirias Colwyn Coppet Hall Watch House Bay Anglesey Beach Sandy Bay
 Jackson Bay Llangollen Cwm yr Eglwys Mumbles Tenby North Beach
 Rotherslade Broad haven Trearddur Broad Haven North Aberavon Llyn Bala
 Goodwick harbour North Dock Porth Eirias Penarth seafront what3words address made
 made random words

The locations of the respondents most frequently used swim or dip sites in addition to the 44 sites listed in the survey are shown on the map below. This shows that the majority of the respondents are choosing to swim at the coast but there are significant numbers swimming at inland sites.

Wild Swimming Locations

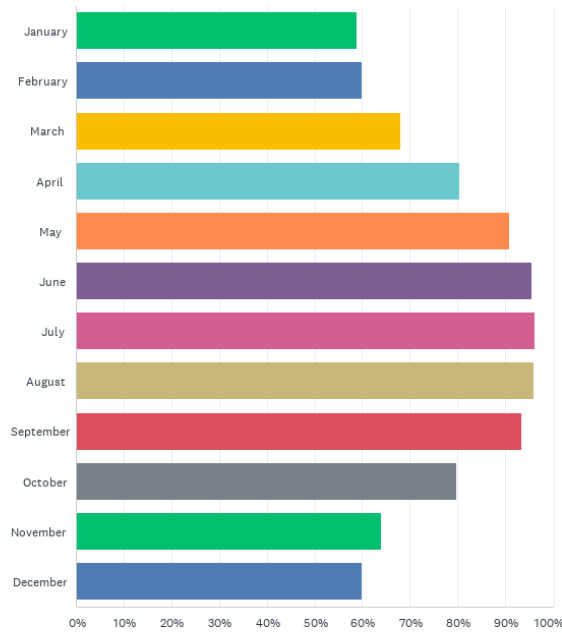
Plot of the 1026 responses that were provided as coordinates



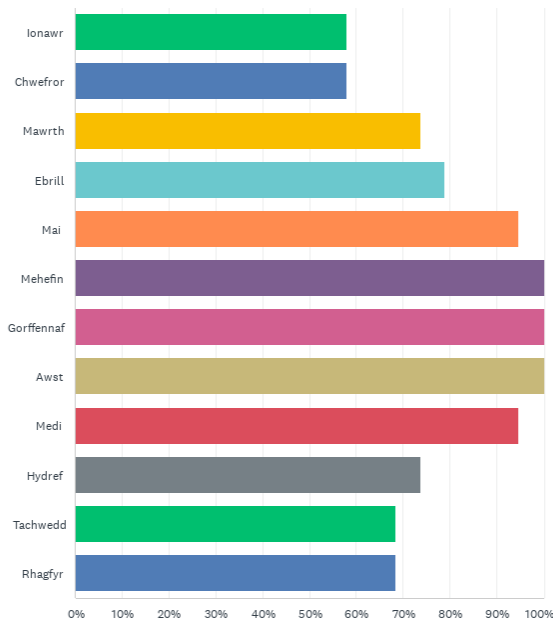
Q8 Which months do you swim or dip at this location?

There were 1508 responses to this question in English and 19 in Welsh. As expected, the most frequent use, at 95%, is in June, July and August, but there is still around 60% use in December, January and February. This appears to show a strong dedication to open water swimming all year.

Q8 Which months do you swim or dip at this location? (Tick as many as apply)



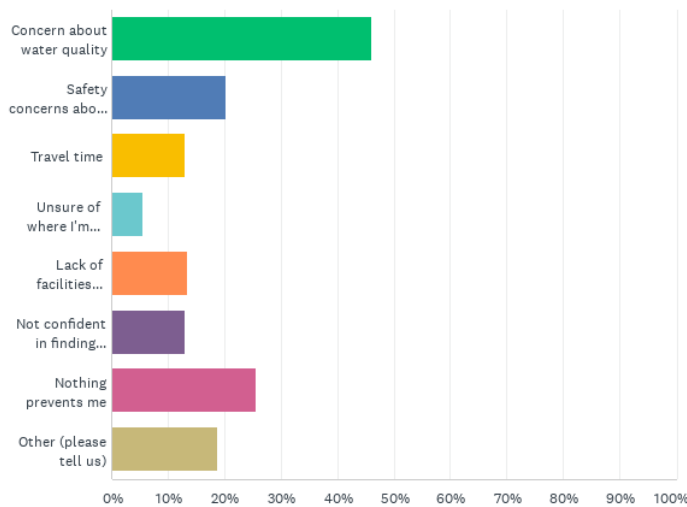
Q8 Ym mha fisoedd rydych chi'n nofio yn y lle hwn? (Ticiwch bob un sy'n berthnasol)



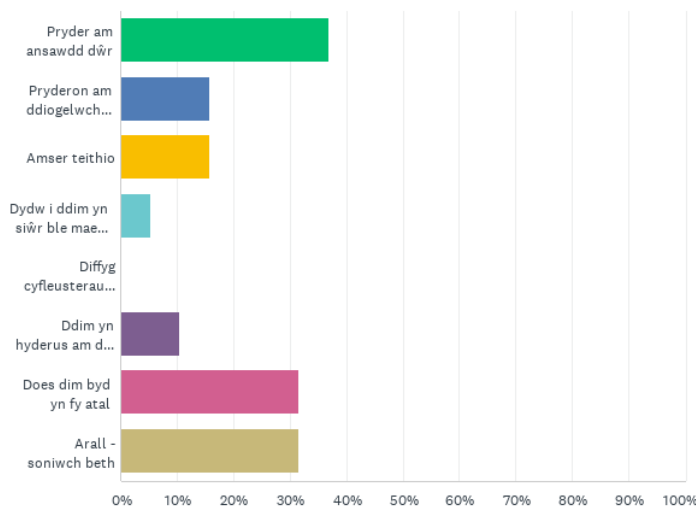
Q9 Is there anything that prevents you from swimming in this location more frequently?

This question had 1496 English and 19 Welsh responses. Between 35% and 45% of respondents chose 'concern about water quality' as a reason for not swimming at their chosen location. Other important factors were 'safety concerns about swimming alone' and 'lack of facilities'. 25% of respondents chose 'nothing prevents me'.

Q9 Is there anything that prevents you from swimming in this location more frequently?

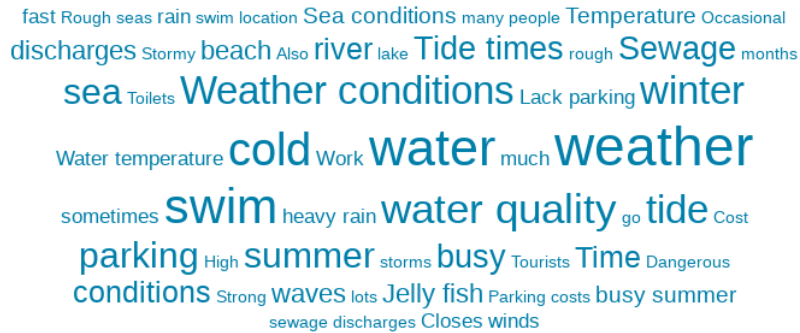


Q9 A oes rhywbeth sy'n eich atal rhag nofio yn y lle hwn yn amlach?



A word cloud of the ‘other’ responses shows that weather and cold are frequent reasons for not swimming more frequently.

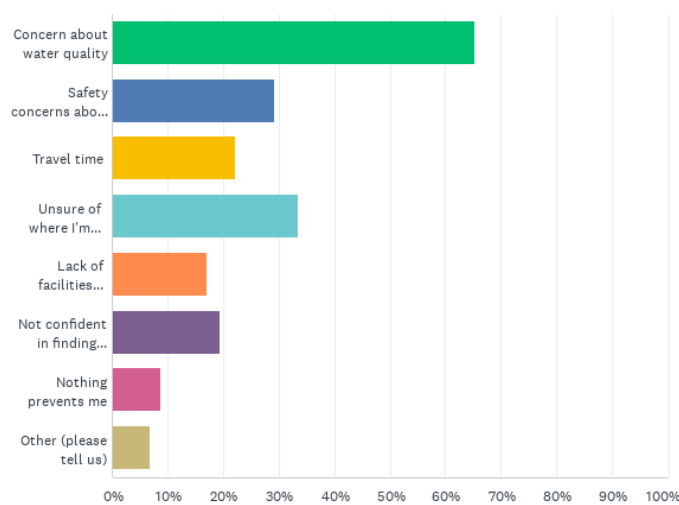
Q9 Is there anything that prevents you from swimming in this location more frequently?



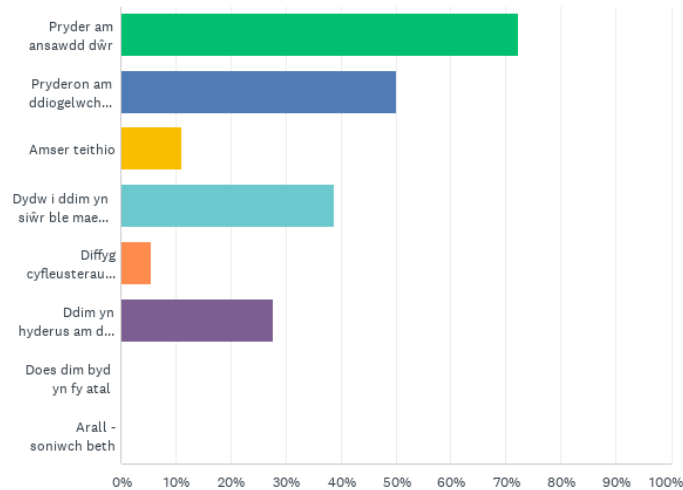
Q10 Thinking about other open water swimming locations in areas served by DCWW, is there anything that deters you from open water swimming or dipping generally?

This question had 1475 responses in English and 18 in Welsh. The most frequently chosen issue that prevents people swimming is concern about water quality (65% English and 72% Welsh). Uncertainty about where people are legally allowed to swim (33%/50%) and safety concerns about swimming alone (29%/38%) are also important factors.

Q10 Thinking about OTHER Open Water swimming locations in areas served by DCWW: is there anything that deters you from Open Water swimming or dipping generally?



Q10 Gan feddwl am fannau nofio Dŵr Agored ERAILL mewn ardaloedd y mae Dŵr Cymru yn eu gwasanaethu: a oes rhywbeth yn eich atal rhag nofio neu ddipio mewn Dŵr Agored yn gyffredinol?



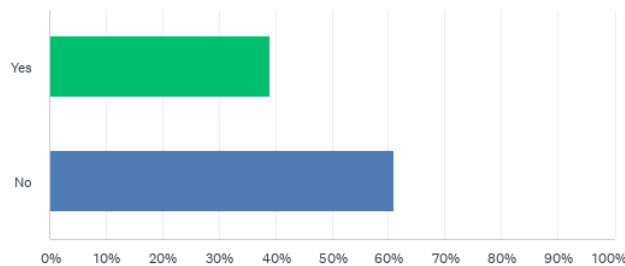
Other reasons for not swimming more frequently include:

- *Unsure of where it is safe to swim with regards to rivers and lakes.*
- *Would love to use reservoirs.*
- *But I am aware that sewage is leaked in to our waterways legally and illegally.*
- *I swim in the River Wye once or twice a year but understand it is heavily polluted so that is off putting.*
- *Welsh Water won't allow unsupervised open water swimming in their reservoirs.*
- *In the reservoir locations where open water swimming has opened up, swimming without a wetsuit is not allowed.*
- *In summer I am nervous of jetskis/other motorised equipment even though I use a bright orange float for visibility.*
- *Always water quality, particularly in rivers, and especially difficult to trust now we're no longer under protection of EU environmental directives. Too much shit (literal and figurative) getting dumped into our waterways by industry.*
- *Explicit ban with florid signage by Dwr Cymru at all 91 reservoirs. Active campaigning against all swimming (one last breath).*
- *Would prefer a location like Llanishen reservoir.*

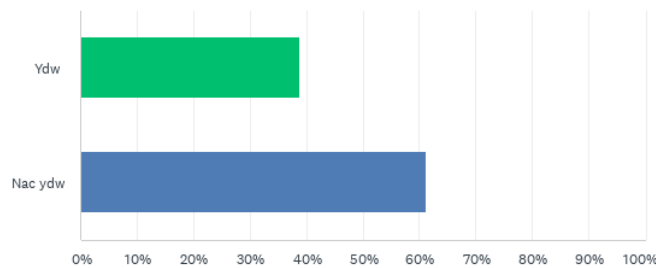
Q11 Do you know where to find information about water quality for particular swim locations?

There were 1482 English responses to this question and 18 Welsh. Around 40% of respondents knew where to find information.

Q11 Do you know where to find information about water quality for particular swim locations?



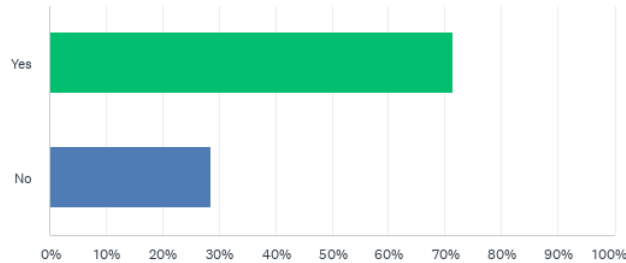
Q11 Ydych chi'n gwybod ble i ddod o hyd i wybodaeth am ansawdd dŵr ar gyfer mannau nofio penodol?



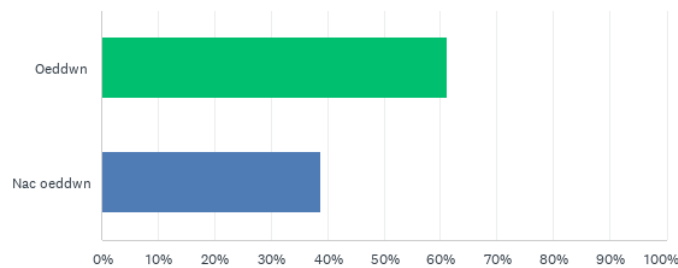
Over 200 gave more information about where they might get information from. Comments included:

- *I wish there was one central Point of information.*
- *Surfers against sewage.*
- *No info available on bathing waters quality for rivers or most lakes.*
- *Welsh water have not been reporting water quality on the safer seas app. It says the reporting is under maintenance.....really??!!*
- *I use the safer seas and river service app but other than that unsure.*

Q13 Had you heard of Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs) before today?



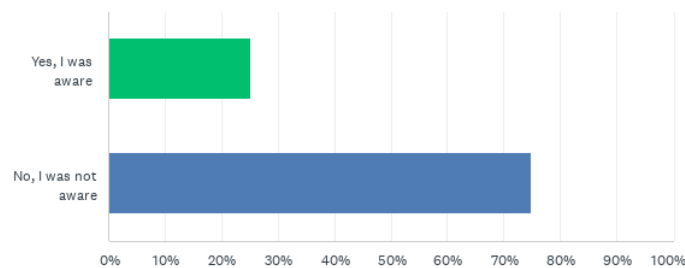
Q13 Oeddech chi wedi clywed am Orlifoedd Storm Cyfun (CSOs) cyn heddiw?



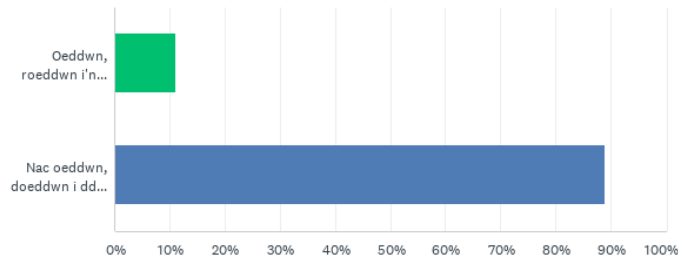
Q14 Were you aware that updates on CSOs are available on the DCWW website?

Of the 1477 English and 18 Welsh responses to this question, between 75% (English) and 89% (Welsh) were unaware that CSO data was updated on the DCWW website.

Q14 Were you aware that updates on CSOs are available on the DCWW website?



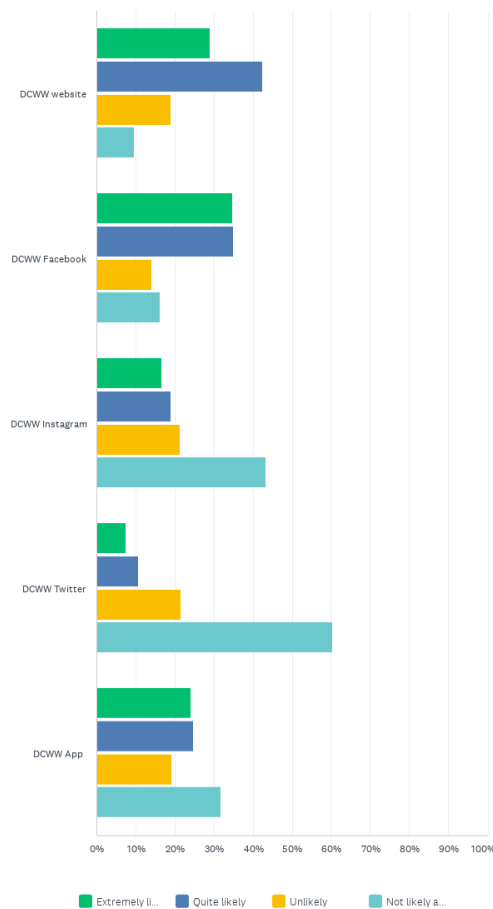
Q14 Oeddech chi'n gwybod bod diweddariadau ar CSOs i'w gweld ar wefan Dŵr Cymru?



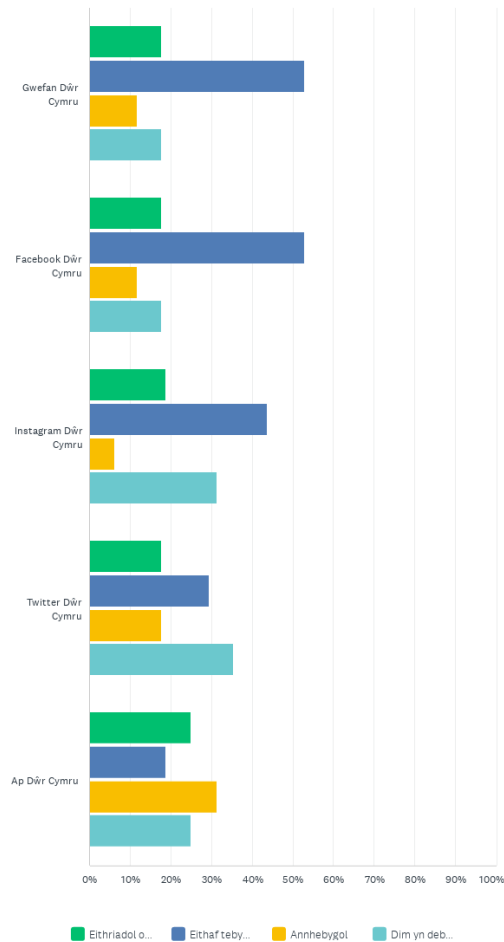
Q15 DCWW would like to ensure CSO spill notifications are accessible to our customers. Which of the following DCWW platforms would you be most likely to use for CSO updates?

There were 1463 English and 18 Welsh responses to this question. The most favoured platforms were considered to be the DCWW website and the DCWW Facebook page, with the DCWW app coming third. Twitter and Instagram were considered rather less favourably.

Q15 DCWW would like to ensure CSO spill notifications are accessible to our customers. Which of the following DCWW platforms would you be most likely to use for CSO updates?



Q15 Hoffai Dŵr Cymru sicrhau bod hysbysiadau am arllwysiadau'r CSOs ar gael yn hwylus i'n cwsmeriaid. Pa rai o blatfformau Dŵr Cymru isod fydddech chi'n fwyaf tebygol o'u defnyddio ar gyfer hysbysiadau CSOs?



Comments included:

- *Surfers Against Sewage (multiple responses).*
- *I didn't realise there was an app to check this.*
- *BBC weather and RNLI tide times.*
- *Safer Seas and Rivers Service - which is already available for some locations.*
- *I went to look for the DCWW App, but can't find it. If it was available I would use that and set notifications for CSO's near most used locations.*
- *I wouldn't bother, I would prefer investment into a system where we don't think it's acceptable to just dump shit into animals habitats.*

- *I've just checked your website and Instagram and can't see an easy way to monitor spills on any of these (no Instagram posts that I can see with any alerts and there's historical data on events on the website but no clear menu link to any real time information on the home page as far as I can see).*
- *Our harbour / marina group posts CSO updates straight away.*
- *Text system would be best.*
- *I would use a surfers website or a UK-wide website, I probably wouldn't think to use Welsh Water.*

Q16 If you have any other comments on open water swimming or dipping you think may help DCWW with this survey, please include them below.

There were 376 English and 8 Welsh responses to this question. Many of the responses were extremely detailed and need to be read in full in Q16 of the Appendix. A few comments chosen at random include:

- *We need to be careful about passing on mixed messages to the General public. By opening some sites for swimming, the previous messages on the dangers of swimming in DCWW's assets can become diluted (excuse the pun) if we start saying it's ok to swim in this reservoir but not that one.*
- *I'm glad you're surveying people - please create meaningful actions with deadlines as a result, and please promote the outcomes too.*
- *Signs at access points to beaches with a risk warning following weather events would be useful*
- *I understand the challenges around trying to address CSOs discharges. As a minimum these should always operate in compliance with their permit conditions. Long term improvements are required to prevent or reduce the frequency of discharges in future.*
- *Far more needs to be done to improve water quality, particularly in rivers adjoining agricultural land.*
- *Please make it available at Llanishen Lisvane reservoir.*
- *Concern about the quality of the water is absolutely paramount to me and to the area that I live in as much of the area's income comes from tourism.*
- *Thank you for updating the systems and trying to combat this problem, we need clean seas and rivers not just for swimmers but for whole ecosystems too.*
- *You have a responsibility to keep all sewage out of all our rivers. I live by the wye, Usk and Monnow and I swim in all three. I'm absolutely disgusted about the state of our rivers. This needs fixing.*

A word cloud of these responses is less useful than for other questions in identifying key words but it at least provides a ‘flavour’ of some of the responses.

Q16 If you have any other comments on Open Water Swimming or dipping you think may help DCWW with this survey, please include them below.

Wales conditions Thank trying CSO wildlife sites keep water clean rivers seas able swim dipping etc swimmers us locations encourage CONCERN Swansea risk system DCWW nice accessible prevent times safe swim S clubs know facility clean think open bad also survey allowed Welsh Water good take sewage monitoring reservoirs updates areas see sea open water water quality must swim places need find rivers safe open water swimming possible Please want use swim spots people available information issue great pool beaches much access especially many one will quality Stop run swimming reservoirs helpful water groups releasing important made lot go year round local improve water quality LOVE improve public users discharged CSOs pollution polluted often really

3 Conclusions

Frequency of open water swimming

Open water swimming is clearly an important activity with over half of those who responded to this survey swimming at least once a week and many swimming daily. The main issues that prevent people from swimming relate largely to safety concerns, fears of poor water quality and uncertainty as to where they could swim legally. Over half those responding belong to an open water swimming group or club.

The most used location for open water swimming is the sea, with much less use being made of rivers and lakes.

Use of DCWW sites

DCWW reservoirs are used the least for open water swimming, though many expressed a desire to use them if allowed. The most used sites are Llandegfedd and Llyn Brenig. Llanishen is also being used, though it is currently closed to the public.

Location of open water swimming

Open water swimming is taking place widely throughout Wales with the most used areas being Llyn Padarn, Newton Porthcawl beach, Eccleston Chester River Dee and Port Talbot beach. Other sites include Colwyn Bay, Langland Bay, Goodwick, Burry Port and Penarth. The majority of the respondents are choosing to swim at the coast but there are significant

numbers swimming at inland sites. The most frequent use of these sites is during June, July and August, though many people swim throughout the year.

The main issues that prevent people from swimming at these sites more frequently are concerns about water quality, safety, swimming alone and lack of changing facilities. There are also uncertainties about where to swim legally and safely.

Finding information about water quality

More than half of those responding to this survey did not know where to find information about water quality. Those who did know accessed sites such as Surfers Against Sewage, the Safer Seas and Rivers Service app and published information for local beaches. People check sites for varied information, mostly for water quality, weather, tide times and temperature. There is potential for DCWW to include water quality information on its website as respondents favoured it as a source of information on CSOs (see below).

Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs)

A majority of respondents had heard of the CSOs information, but most were unaware that CSO information was updated on the DCWW website. Respondents favoured the DCWW website or Facebook as platforms for updates, though many would continue to use Surfers Against Sewage or Safer Seas and Rivers.

Other comments on open water swimming

A large number of comments were left on the survey questionnaire, and many related to water quality and availability of safe and legal places to swim. Appendix 1 lists all these comments in Q16.

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