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Public Attitudes Towards Inland Bathing Waters in Wales

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Public Attitudes Towards Inland Bathing Waters in Wales

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Table of contents

1. Introduction and objectives	4
2. Methodology	6
3. Research findings	8
Use of inland waters in Wales for leisure or recreation purposes	8
Motivations for choosing to swim outdoors	14
Barriers to participating in recreational water activities at freshwater sites	16
Support for the designation of inland freshwater sites as bathing/ recreational waters	20
4. Conclusions	25
Annex A – Survey Questionnaire	27

List of figures

Figure 3.1: Visited inland waters and coastal waters in Wales for a day out/ leisure or recreation purposes in the last few years	9
Figure 3.2: Interest in recreational water activities by age (prompted).....	10
Figure 3.3: Interest in and participation in recreational water activities (prompted).....	11
Figure 3.4: Participation in recreational water activities by age (prompted	12
Figure 3.5: Participation in recreational water activities by location type	14
Figure 3.6: Main unprompted reasons for swimming outdoors	15
Figure 3.7: Main prompted reasons for swimming outdoors	16
Figure 3.8: Barriers to taking part in outdoor recreational activities at freshwater sites in Wales (prompted)	17
Figure 3.9: Agreement that 'I am confident that the water quality at freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard' by age.....	18
Figure 3.10: Agreement that 'There are not enough inland freshwater sites (e.g. rivers, lakes and reservoirs) suitable for bathing/ recreational use in Wales', by age	20
Figure 3.11: Agreement that 'I would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/ recreational waters' (Designation of a site means the water quality there meets a certain standard), by age	21
Figure 3.12: Agreement that 'I would be interested in having access to real time data about the standard of water quality at freshwater sites in Wales', by age.....	23
Figure 3.13: Facilities would like to see at freshwater sites, if designated as bathing or recreational water sites (prompted).....	24

List of tables

Table 3.1 - Main reasons why agree/ disagree with statement 'I am confident that the water quality at freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard' (unprompted).....	19
Table 3.2 - Main reasons why agree / disagree with statement 'I would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/ recreational waters' (unprompted).....	22

Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Inland waters or freshwater sites	Water sites such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs (not coastal water sites such as beaches).
Recreational water activities	Activities such as fishing, kayaking/ canoeing, paddleboarding, surfing and swimming.
Social grade	A social classification system used in market research and other sectors. The classification assigns every household to a grade (A, B, C1, C2, D, E), usually based upon the occupation and employment status of the Chief Income Earner.
Quota controls	Quota controls are target numbers of interviews set for specific demographic groups within the population, to help achieve a representative sample for the survey. Interlocking demographic quota controls means that the target incorporates two variables: age group within gender.

1. Introduction and objectives

- 1.1 The Welsh Government recognises the rising popularity in outdoor swimming and other water-based activities and the health and well-being benefits which they can deliver for communities throughout Wales. The Bathing Water Regulations 2013 (Wales)¹ require the Welsh Government to annually identify all popular bathing areas in Wales. Through these regulations water sites can be designated a bathing site where the water quality is tested during bathing season and given a quality classification. The objective of these regulations is to protect bathers' health and inform them of health-related hazards associated with poor water quality.
- 1.2 Delivering high bathing water quality helps to contribute to the objectives set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015² for a number of reasons. This includes supporting the well-being goal to deliver a 'Healthier Wales' by encouraging public awareness of water quality, as well as the physical and mental health benefits that come from partaking in recreational activities at bathing water sites. Designating bathing waters to ensure good water quality also supports the well-being goal of 'a Wales of Vibrant Culture and thriving Welsh Language' particularly through supporting the people of Wales to undertake sports such as swimming.
- 1.3 There are 107 designated bathing waters in Wales. These are monitored for water quality by Natural Resources Wales throughout the bathing season to protect public health. The current designated sites and information on the water quality can be found on the Natural Resources Wales website³. Currently 106 of Wales' designated bathing sites are on the coast and just one is inland (Llyn Padarn Lake). Within this report, freshwater and inland water sites are terms which are used interchangeably, these cover rivers, lakes and reservoirs.
- 1.4 In recognition of the increased interest in outdoor swimming at freshwater sites, Welsh Government has made a commitment to *'begin to designate*

¹ [The Bathing Water Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

² [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

³ [Information about Bathing Water Quality in Wales - Natural Resources Wales](#)

*Wales' inland waters for recreation, strengthening water quality monitoring' in the 2021-26 Programme for Government*⁴.

- 1.5 Welsh Government therefore wished to gather information on people's interest in outdoor swimming and other water-related recreational activities with views on designation.
- 1.6 Beaufort Research was commissioned by Welsh Government to conduct a representative survey of public attitudes towards inland bathing waters in Wales using the September 2022 Wales Omnibus.
- 1.7 The aims of the study were to better understand the Welsh public's attitudes toward, understanding of, and engagement with inland bathing waters in Wales. The results will be used to shape policy, research, education and public engagement to help deliver on the Programme for Government commitment in beginning to designate inland waters for recreation.

⁴ [Programme for government: update | GOV.WALES](#)

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The survey was conducted on the Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey, which interviews a representative sample of 1,000 adults across Wales each wave. A different set of adults is interviewed each wave although samples are matched in terms of key demographic characteristics.
- 2.2 Interviews are conducted online using the Cint™ online panel exchange platform. The Cint™ platform and its products comply with various industry standards including ISO 20252 - the international quality standard for market research services. Multiple data quality checks⁵ are built into the Cint™ system and Beaufort builds in its own quality control questions and measures within the survey and excludes respondents who fail these checks.
- 2.3 The survey was subject to interlocking demographic quota controls⁶ of age within gender. A further separate quota control was set on social grade⁷ and interviews were undertaken with residents of every local authority in Wales. At the analysis stage, the data was weighted by age group, gender, local authority grouping and social grade. This ensures that the sample reflects 2011 Census figures and the particular characteristics of the Wales population.

⁵ These checks are to ensure that real people are answering the survey questions, to prevent duplicate responses and ensure that sufficient attention is paid to questions to provide high quality data.

⁶ Quota controls are target numbers of interviews set for specific demographic groups within the population, to help achieve a representative sample for the survey. Interlocking demographic quota controls means that the target incorporates two variables: age group within gender.

⁷ Social grade is a classification system based on occupation developed for use on the National Readership Survey (NRS). Social grades are defined as follows:

AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations

C1: Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations

C2: Skilled manual workers

DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only.

- 2.4 Draft questions for the Inland Bathing Waters survey were supplied by Welsh Government. These were finalised following discussions with Beaufort (see Annex A for the questionnaire).
- 2.5 The majority of questions asked were closed questions, that is participants were given response options to choose from. Sometimes a single response was required, and sometimes multiple responses could be chosen. Where open questions were included, respondents could provide any answer they wished using their own words. At the end of survey fieldwork, a code frame was developed for each open question based on the list of verbatim responses, so answers were grouped thematically. Individual responses were assigned to the relevant codes during data analysis and results were included in the data tables.
- 2.6 Demographic questions are included as standard in the Wales Omnibus survey. The survey was available in English and Welsh and could be taken in the participants' preferred language.
- 2.7 Fieldwork took place between **19 September and 9 October 2022**. A total of 1,000 interviews were completed and analysed.
- 2.8 Full data tabulations from the survey have been provided to the Welsh Government in a separate technical report.
- 2.9 The Wales Omnibus Survey uses proportional quota sampling (not random sampling) to reflect key demographics within the Welsh population. Therefore, any findings in this survey reflect the view of the sample and care should be taken in translating any findings to the wider population in Wales.

3. Research findings

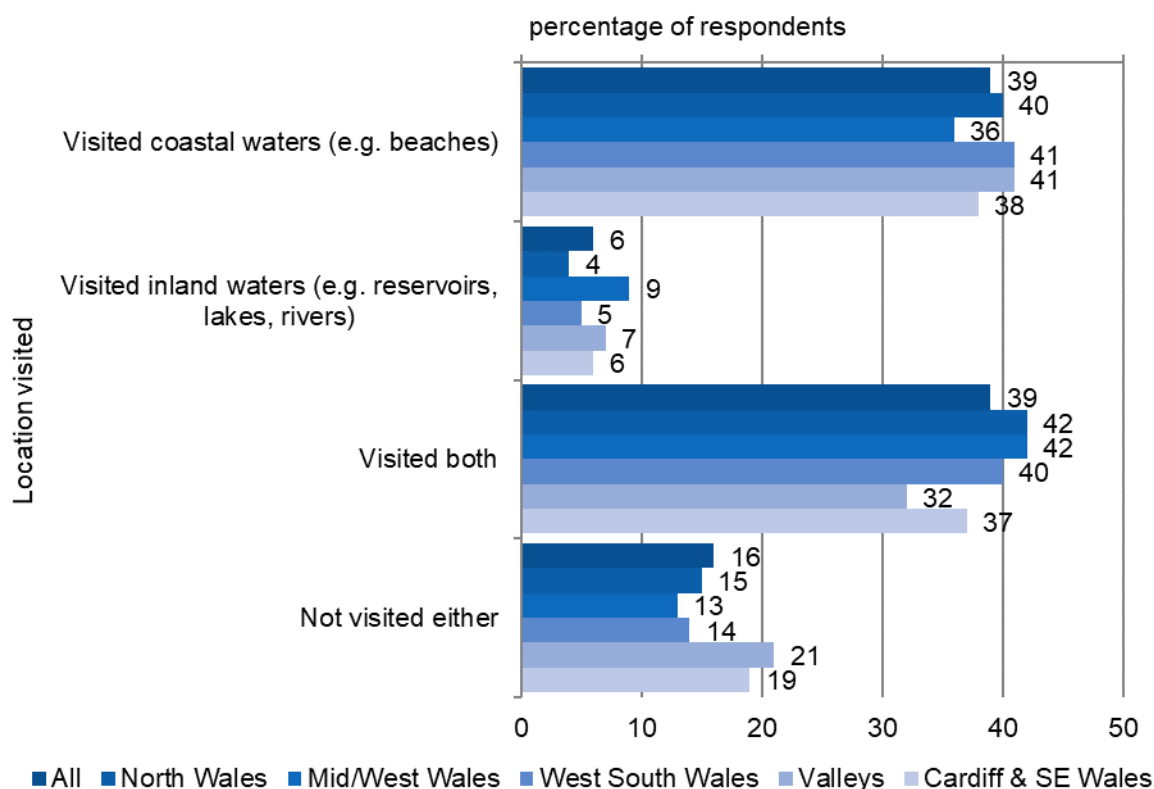
Use of inland waters in Wales for leisure or recreation purposes

- 3.1 Almost four in ten of those interviewed (39 per cent) had visited both coastal waters (e.g. beaches) and inland waters in Wales (e.g. reservoirs, lakes or rivers) for a day out or for leisure or recreation purposes in the last few years. The same proportion (39 per cent) had only visited coastal waters, while the proportion that had only visited inland waters was much lower (6 per cent).
- 3.2 Overall, therefore, almost half of all respondents (45 per cent) had visited inland waters in the last few years for recreational purposes. Around one in seven (16 per cent) had not visited either inland or coastal waters.
- 3.3 Those living in Mid and West Wales⁸ were most likely to have visited inland waters for leisure or recreation in the last few years, while those living in the South Wales Valleys were least likely to have done so (at 51 per cent compared to 39 per cent respectively).

⁸ Regions were defined as follows:

- North Wales: Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Conwy, Anglesey, Gwynedd
- Mid / West Wales: Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire
- West South Wales: Swansea, Neath & Port Talbot, Bridgend
- Valleys: Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent
- Cardiff & SE Wales: Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport

Figure 3.1: Visited inland waters and coastal waters in Wales for a day out/ leisure or recreation purposes in the last few years⁹



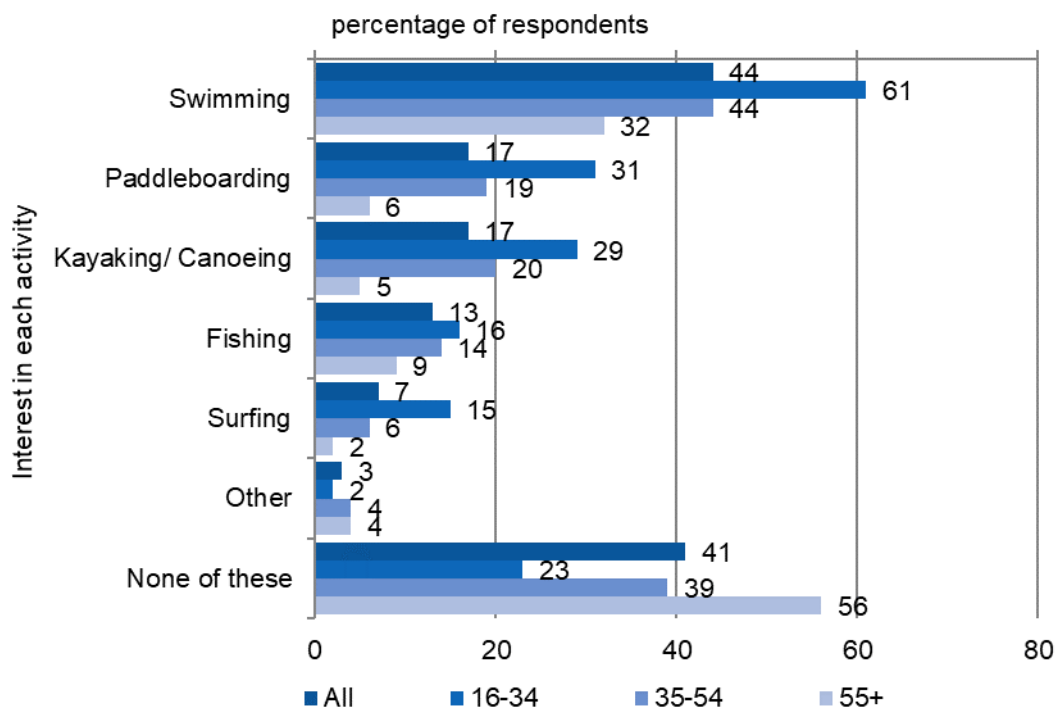
Base: All (1,000), North Wales (219), Mid/West Wales (159), West South Wales (162), Valleys (180), Cardiff & SE Wales (280)

- 3.4 Almost eight in ten (78 per cent) recent visitors to inland water sites like reservoirs, lakes and rivers in Wales had travelled there by car. Twelve per cent said they had walked, while the percentages using other modes of travel were very low (for example 3 per cent used a bus, 2 per cent a bicycle and 1 per cent a train).
- 3.5 Respondents were presented with a list of recreational water activities and asked which, if any, they were interested in. Swimming was the most popular activity overall (which 44 per cent of those interviewed said they were interested in), followed by paddleboarding and kayaking/ canoeing, each chosen by 17 per cent. Fishing was selected by 13 per cent and surfing by 7 per cent. Around four in ten of those interviewed (41 per cent) were not interested in any recreational water activities.

⁹ Figures may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding

3.6 Younger people aged 16-34 were more likely than middle aged and older people to be interested in every recreational water activity. Only 23 per cent of 16-34s were not interested in any recreational water activity, compared to 56 per cent of those aged 55 and over.

Figure 3.2: Interest in recreational water activities by age (prompted)¹⁰

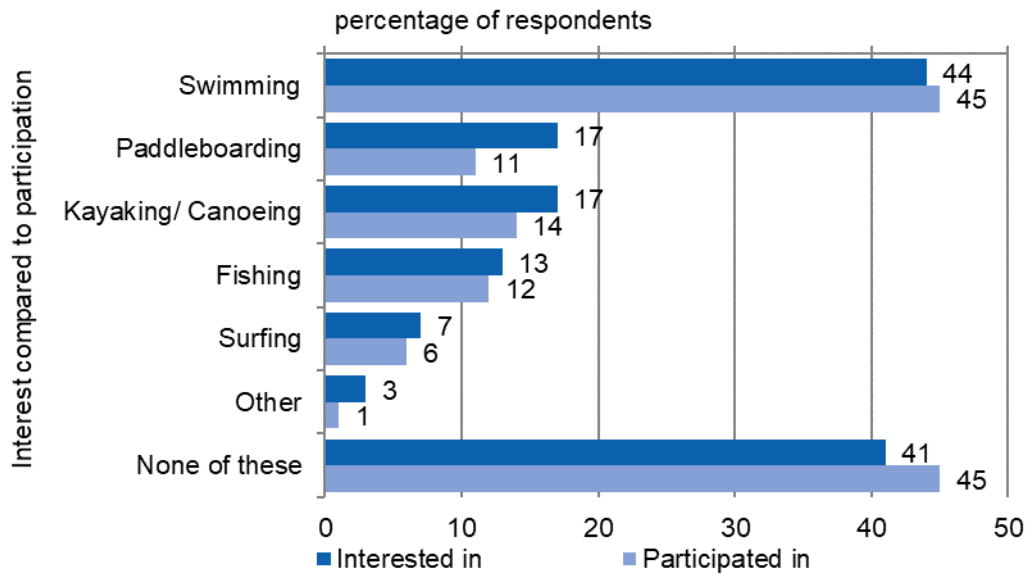


Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

3.7 When asked which of these recreational water activities, if any, they had taken part in within the last few years, participation levels generally reflected interest levels – see figure 3.3. More people were interested in paddleboarding than had tried it, with 17 per cent interested in the activity compared with 11 per cent who had taken part in it. The same was true to a lesser extent of kayaking/ canoeing, with 17 per cent interested but only 14 per cent who had taken part in it.

¹⁰ Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

Figure 3.3: Interest in and participation in recreational water activities (prompted)¹¹

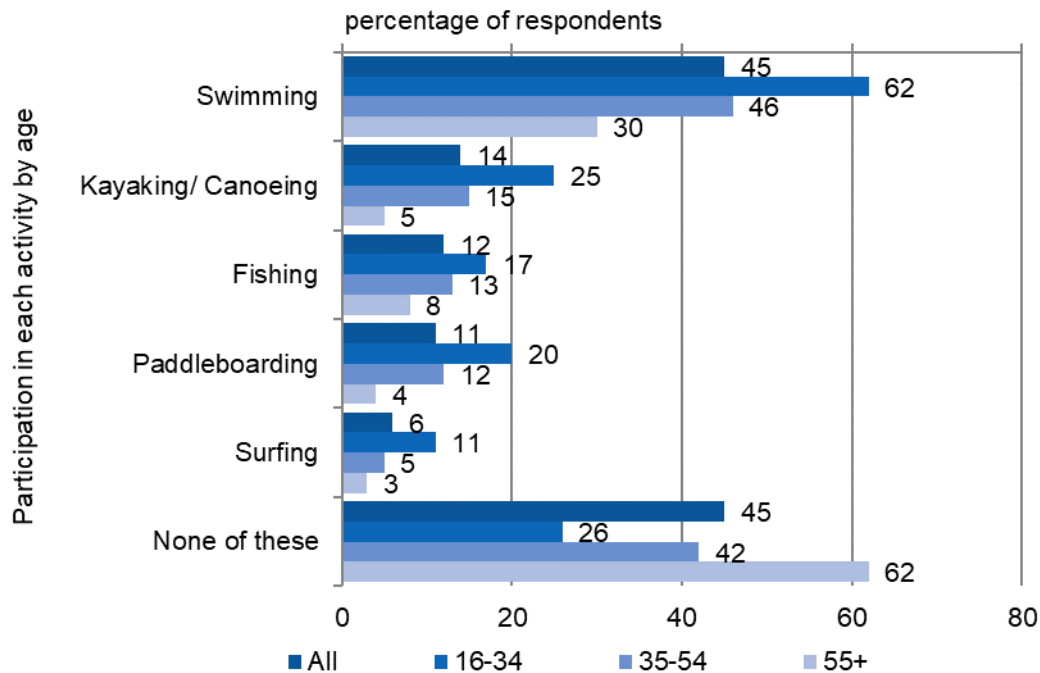


Base: All (1,000)

- 3.8 Fifty-five per cent of those interviewed had participated in at least one recreational water activity in the last few years, rising to 74 per cent of those aged 16-34. Older people aged 55 and over were least likely to have taken part in any recreational water activity (at 38 per cent).
- 3.9 The most popular recreational water activity for all participants was swimming, which 45 per cent had taken part in. This was followed by kayaking/ canoeing, which 14 per cent had taken part in, fishing (12 per cent) and paddleboarding (11 per cent). Respondents aged 16-34 were more likely to have participated in each activity at a higher rate. More than six in ten younger people had participated in swimming (62 per cent), 25 per cent had participated in kayaking and canoeing, 20 per cent in paddleboarding and 17 per cent in fishing.

¹¹ Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

Figure 3.4: Participation in recreational water activities by age (prompted)¹²



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

3.10 Just over one in four of those interviewed overall (26 per cent) had taken part in one of these activities at a freshwater site. Another 29 per cent had taken part at a non-freshwater location, while the remaining 45 per cent had not taken part in recreational water activities anywhere.

3.11 Looking at the behaviour of those who had only visited freshwater sites in the last few years, most (34 of 59 respondents) had not taken part in any recreational water activity. This suggests that many visits to reservoirs, lakes or rivers in Wales are made for other reasons.

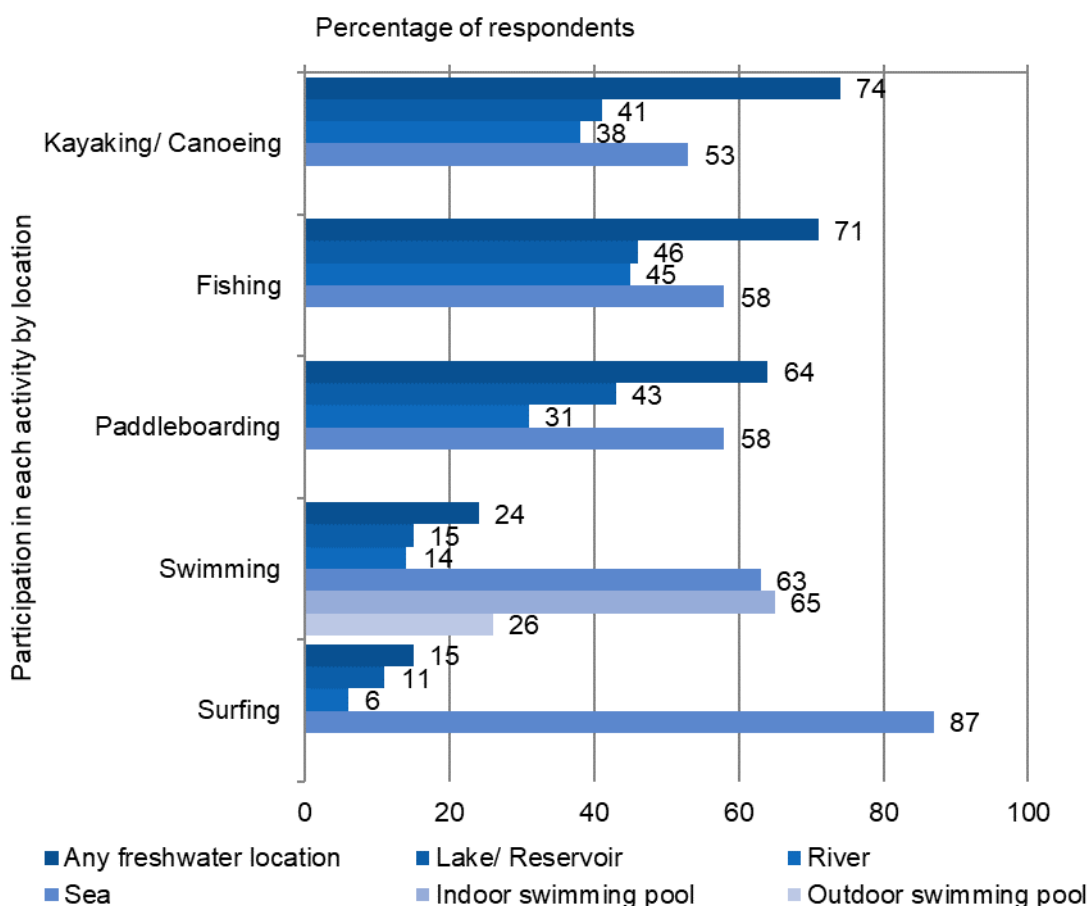
3.12 Those aged 16-34 were most likely to have participated in a recreational water activity at a freshwater location, with 42 per cent having done so (compared to 27 per cent of 35-54s and 13 per cent of those aged 55 or over). By region, those living in North Wales were most likely to have done so (at 36 per cent), while those living in the Valleys were least likely (at 18 per cent).

¹² Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

- 3.13 The recreational water activities most often carried out at freshwater locations were kayaking/ canoeing, fishing and paddleboarding. All were more likely to have been undertaken by participants at a freshwater site than in the sea. For example, almost three in four recent kayaking/ canoeing participants had done so at a freshwater location (74 per cent), compared to just over half (53 per cent) who had done so in the sea. 71 per cent of recent fishing participants had done so at a freshwater location, compared to 58 per cent doing so in the sea, while 64 per cent of paddleboarders had done so at a freshwater location compared to 58 per cent doing so in the sea.
- 3.14 On the other hand, swimming and surfing were much more likely to have been done in the sea (or, for swimming, at an indoor swimming pool) than at a freshwater location. Only around one in four of those who had participated in swimming in the last few years (24 per cent) had done so at a freshwater location, compared to 65 per cent doing so at an indoor pool and 63 per cent in the sea. When the number of those surveyed who swam at freshwater locations was calculated as a percentage of the total sample of adults (rather than those who reported swimming recently), it suggests that around 10 per cent of the sample had swum outdoors at a freshwater location in Wales in the last few years. 87 per cent of those who had participated in surfing recently had done so in the sea, while 15 per cent had done so at a freshwater location¹³.

¹³ This may include windsurfing

Figure 3.5: Participation in recreational water activities by location type¹⁴



Base: Those who have taken part in a recreational water activity within the last few years – Any activity (552), Kayaking/ Canoeing (133), Fishing (108), Paddleboarding (119), Swimming (445), Surfing (53)

Motivations for choosing to swim outdoors

3.15 Those who had swum outdoors at a river, lake or reservoir in Wales in the last few years were asked to provide an open answer on what their reasons were for choosing to do so. Twenty-one of the 98 participants within this group mentioned the beautiful location/ scenery/ views, while 14 outdoor swimmers said they did it for fun or enjoyment and 12 that they did it to cool down in hot weather. The other main spontaneous reasons given are listed in Figure 3.6 below.

¹⁴ Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

Figure 3.6: Main unprompted reasons for swimming outdoors¹⁵



Base: Those who have swum outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales in last few years (98)

- 3.16 Those who had swum outdoors at a freshwater location were then prompted with a list of possible reasons for choosing to swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs and were asked which applied to them.
- 3.17 Eighty-two of the 98 freshwater swimmers surveyed agreed they did it for fun. Fifty-five of this group said it was for exercise and/ or training , while a similar number (54 respondents) said it was for their mental health and well-being. Other possible reasons were endorsed by much smaller numbers of freshwater swimmers (see Figure 3.7).

¹⁵ Figures do not add to 98 - multichoice question

Figure 3.7: Main prompted reasons for swimming outdoors¹⁶



Base: Those who swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales (98)

3.18 When asked how often they swam outdoors at freshwater sites, 7 freshwater swimmers said they did so at least once a week, 28 did so at least once a month and 22 did so every few months. Of the remainder, 31 said they swam at freshwater sites a few times a year, while 10 participants said they did so less often.

Barriers to participating in recreational water activities at freshwater sites

3.19 All survey participants were prompted with a list of possible barriers and asked which they thought put people off from taking part in outdoor recreational activities (such as fishing, kayaking/ canoeing, paddleboarding and swimming) at freshwater sites in Wales.

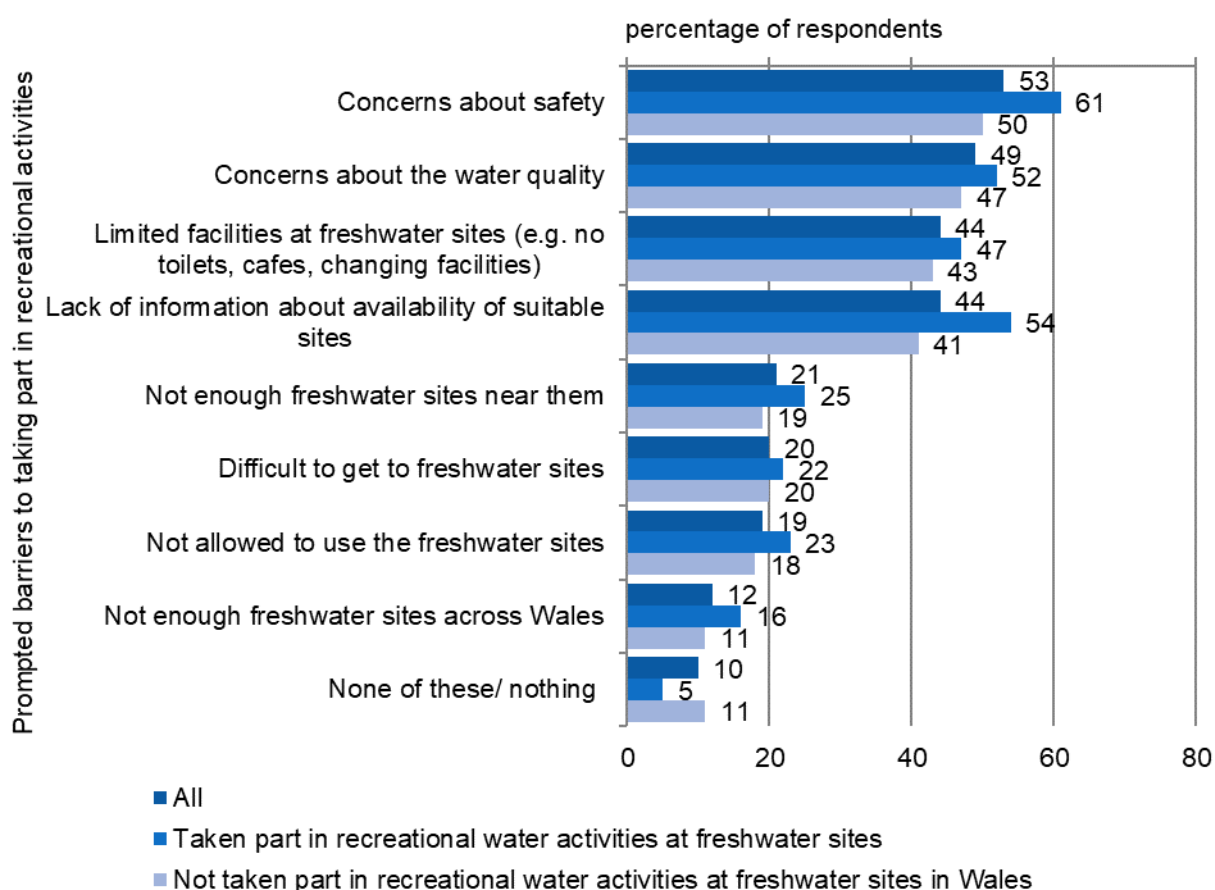
3.20 The principal perceived barriers were concerns about safety and concerns about water quality, each selected by around half of those interviewed (53 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). Around four in ten felt that limited facilities at freshwater sites and a lack of information about the availability of suitable sites would put people off (each selected by 44 per cent). Around two in ten felt there were not enough freshwater sites near them (21 per cent), that it was difficult to get to freshwater sites (20 per cent) and that people might not

¹⁶ Figures do not add to 98 - multichoice question

be allowed to use the freshwater sites (19 per cent). Only 10 per cent felt that none of these were barriers.

3.21 Those who had taken part in recreational water activities at rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales in the last few years were more likely to select each barrier than those who had not. In particular, higher proportions of users felt that concerns about safety and a lack of information about suitable sites would put people off from taking part in outdoor recreational activities at freshwater sites (see Figure 3.8 below).

Figure 3.8: Barriers to taking part in outdoor recreational activities at freshwater sites in Wales (prompted)¹⁷



Base: All (1,000), taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites (252), not taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites (748)

3.22 During the survey participants were presented with some statements about inland freshwater sites and asked to indicate the extent they agreed or

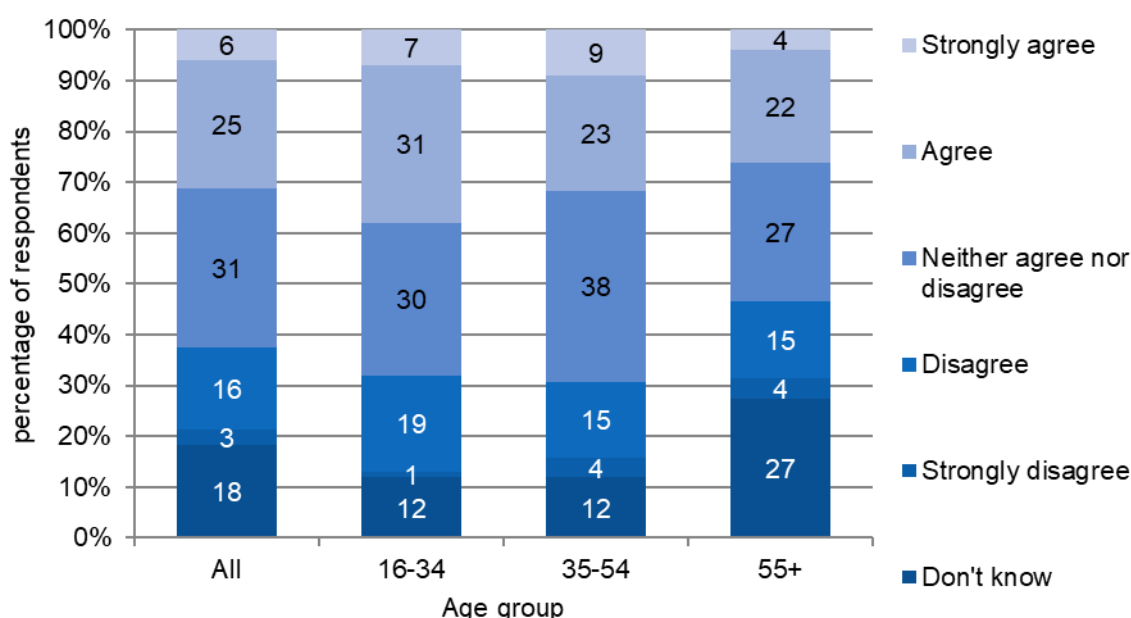
¹⁷ Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

disagreed with each. They could answer ‘*strongly agree*’, ‘*agree*’, ‘*neither agree nor disagree*’, ‘*disagree*’ or ‘*strongly disagree*’. ‘*Don’t know*’ was also included as an option.

3.23 One of the statements related to views on the standard of water quality at freshwater sites. Opinion on this issue was divided - while around three in ten of those interviewed (31 per cent) agreed¹⁸ they were *confident that the water quality of freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard*, almost two in ten (19 per cent) disagreed¹⁹. At the same time, a very high proportion (49 per cent) had no opinion or responded ‘don’t know’, especially among the over 55s age group.

3.24 Those who had taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites in the last few years were more likely to be confident that the water quality was of a high standard than those who had not. 41 per cent of users agreed with the statement, compared with 28 per cent of non-users.

Figure 3.9: Agreement that ‘I am confident that the water quality at freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard’ by age



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

¹⁸ Either responding ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’

¹⁹ Either responding ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘disagree’

- 3.25 The main unprompted reason given by those saying they were confident that the water quality at inland freshwater sites was of a high standard was that they felt water quality was regularly checked and maintained to a high standard (25 per cent). Other reasons were that they believed Wales has clean water and that the water at such sites looks clean and fresh (each given by 14 per cent of this group).
- 3.26 Conversely, those less confident about the water quality at freshwater sites were most likely to mention concerns about pollution and sewage entering the water (43 per cent). Other reasons were given by much lower proportions of this group. Where less than five per cent of respondents gave a reason this is not included below and respondents could provide multiple unprompted reasons, therefore neither the agree or disagree columns add up to 100 per cent in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 - Main reasons why agree/ disagree with statement 'I am confident that the water quality at freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard' (unprompted)

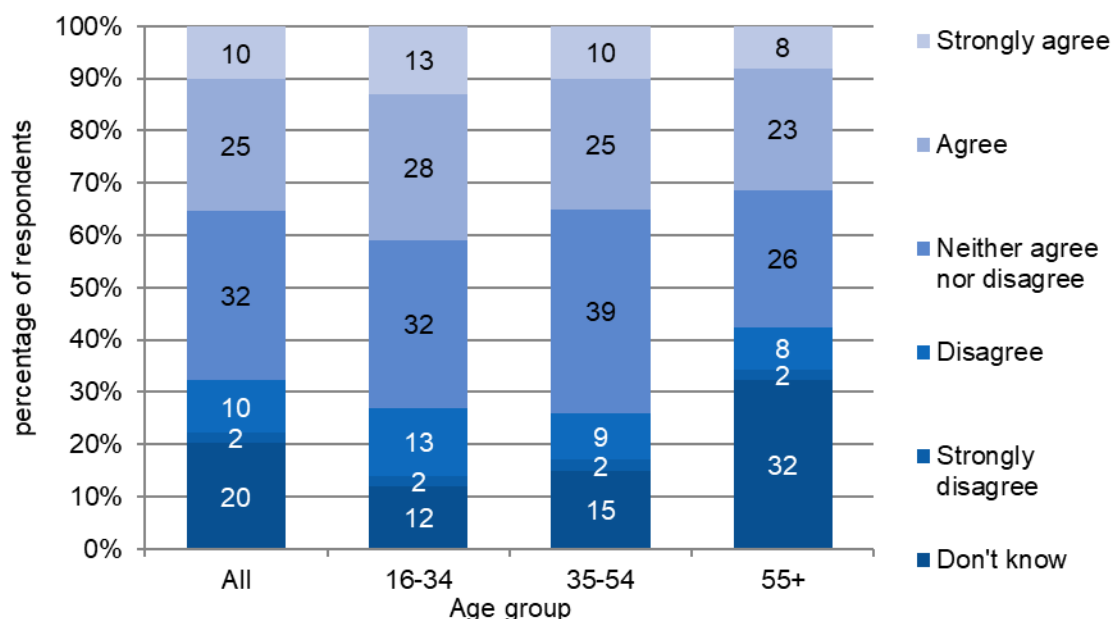
Reasons for agreeing	Agree (per cent) <i>Base: 303</i>	Reasons for disagreeing	Disagree (per cent) <i>Base: 192</i>
Water quality is regularly checked/ monitored/ maintained to high standard	25	Pollution/ sewage/ polluted effluent entering the water	43
It's Wales/ Wales has clean water	14	Water doesn't look clean/ natural	11
Water is clean/ looks clean/ fresh	14	Water quality problems/ not maintained properly	9
From what I've seen/ heard in the media	8	Don't have enough information	8
Lack of facilities/ sites	5	From what I've seen/ heard in the media	6
		Don't see fish/ wildlife	5
		Don't know much/ enough about it	5

Base: Those agreeing and disagreeing with the statement – Agree (303), Disagree (192)

3.27 Another statement focused on the availability of freshwater sites suitable for recreational water activities in Wales. Just over one in three agreed that *there are not enough inland freshwater sites suitable for bathing/ recreational use in Wales* (35 per cent), around three times more than the proportion who disagreed (12 per cent). Over half those interviewed were undecided or not able to answer, however, with 32 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 20 per cent answering 'don't know'.

3.28 Those aged 16-34 were the most likely of all age groups to feel that the number of inland freshwater sites suitable for bathing/ recreational use in Wales was inadequate, with 41 per cent agreeing with the statement and 15 per cent disagreeing.

Figure 3.10: Agreement that 'There are not enough inland freshwater sites (e.g. rivers, lakes and reservoirs) suitable for bathing/ recreational use in Wales', by age



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

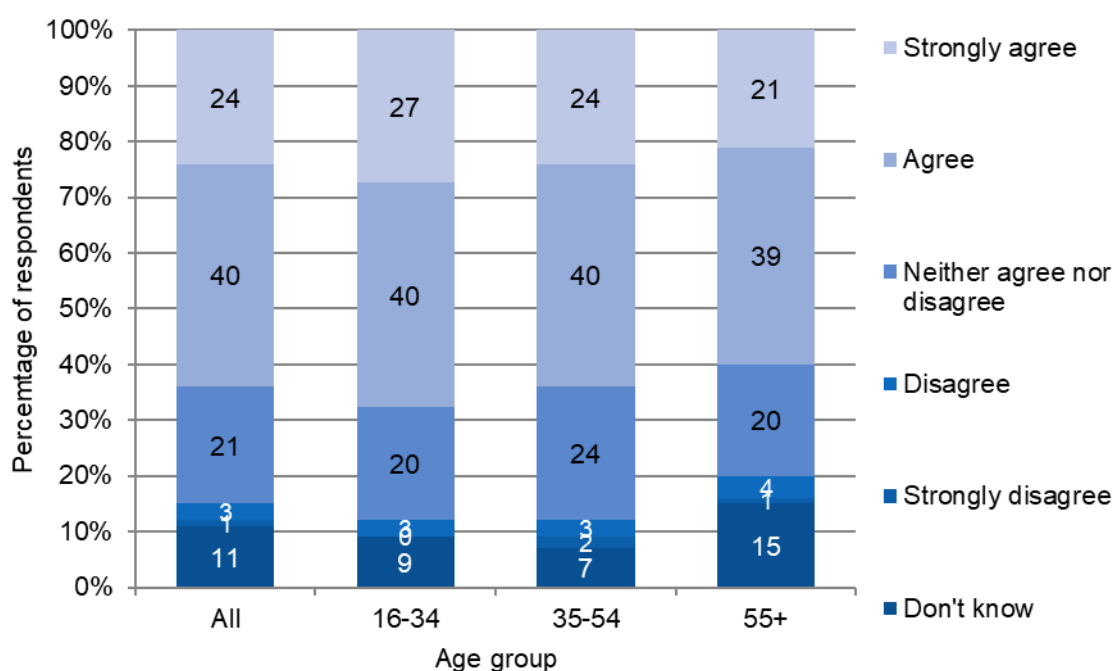
Support for the designation of inland freshwater sites as bathing/ recreational waters

3.29 Almost two in three of those interviewed (64 per cent) agreed that they *would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/ recreational waters*. Only 5 per cent disagreed, while

21 per cent could not express an opinion (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) and 11 per cent answered 'don't know'.

3.30 Younger people were most likely to be in favour of designation, with 67 per cent of 16-34s agreeing, compared to 64 per cent of 35-54s and 60 per cent of those aged 55 and over doing so.

Figure 3.11: Agreement that 'I would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/recreational waters' (Designation of a site means the water quality there meets a certain standard), by age



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

3.31 A wide range of reasons were given unprompted by those who supported the designation of inland freshwater sites as bathing/ recreational waters. The main reason was that they felt it would make it safer to bathe there (mentioned by 22 per cent of this group). Other reasons given by around one in seven of this group were that they felt it would improve water quality and provide more places to swim (mentioned by 15 per cent and 14 per cent respectively).

3.32 Conversely, the main reasons given by those opposed to designation were that it might mean an influx of crowds to these places, which would spoil them, and that they felt it might be dangerous to swim there. These views

were expressed by 16 out of 45 and 13 out of 45 respondents respectively who did not agree that they would like to see more rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/ recreational waters.

Table 3.2 - Main reasons why agree / disagree with statement ‘I would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing/ recreational waters’ (unprompted)

Reasons for agreeing	Agree (per cent) <i>Base: 632</i>	Reasons for disagreeing	Disagree (no. of respondents) <i>Base: 45*</i>
Make it safer/ for safety	22	Don't want crowds coming there/ might spoil the places	16
Improve water quality/ clean water is important	15	Too dangerous/ need lifeguards	13
More places to swim	14	Improve water quality/ clean water is important	5
People will enjoy it/ I'd like to	9	Good for environment/ would mean more monitoring	4
Reassurance/ peace of mind	8	Not right places to swim	3
Encourage more people to swim there	6		
Good for mental health/ wellbeing	6		
For everyone to use/ accessible/ free	5		

*Base: Those agreeing and disagreeing with statement – Agree (632), Disagree (45)**

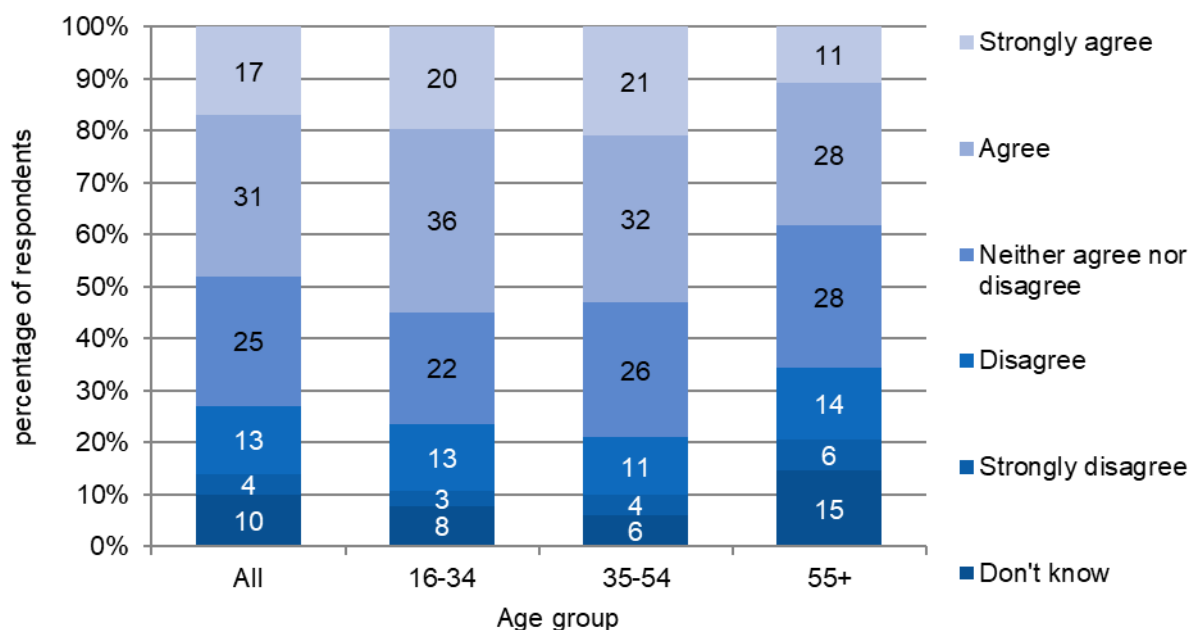
** Small base size so figures are presented as numbers of respondents, rather than percentages*

3.33 Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) agreed they *would be interested in having access to real time data about the standard of water quality at freshwater sites in Wales*, compared to fewer than two in ten (17 per cent) who disagreed. Another 25 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, while 10 per cent did not answer.

3.34 Those aged 16-34 and those aged 35-54 were most interested in the idea of accessing real time data on water quality, with 55 per cent and 53 per cent of

each age group respectively saying they would be interested, compared to 38 per cent of over 55s.

Figure 3.12: Agreement that ‘I would be interested in having access to real time data about the standard of water quality at freshwater sites in Wales’, by age

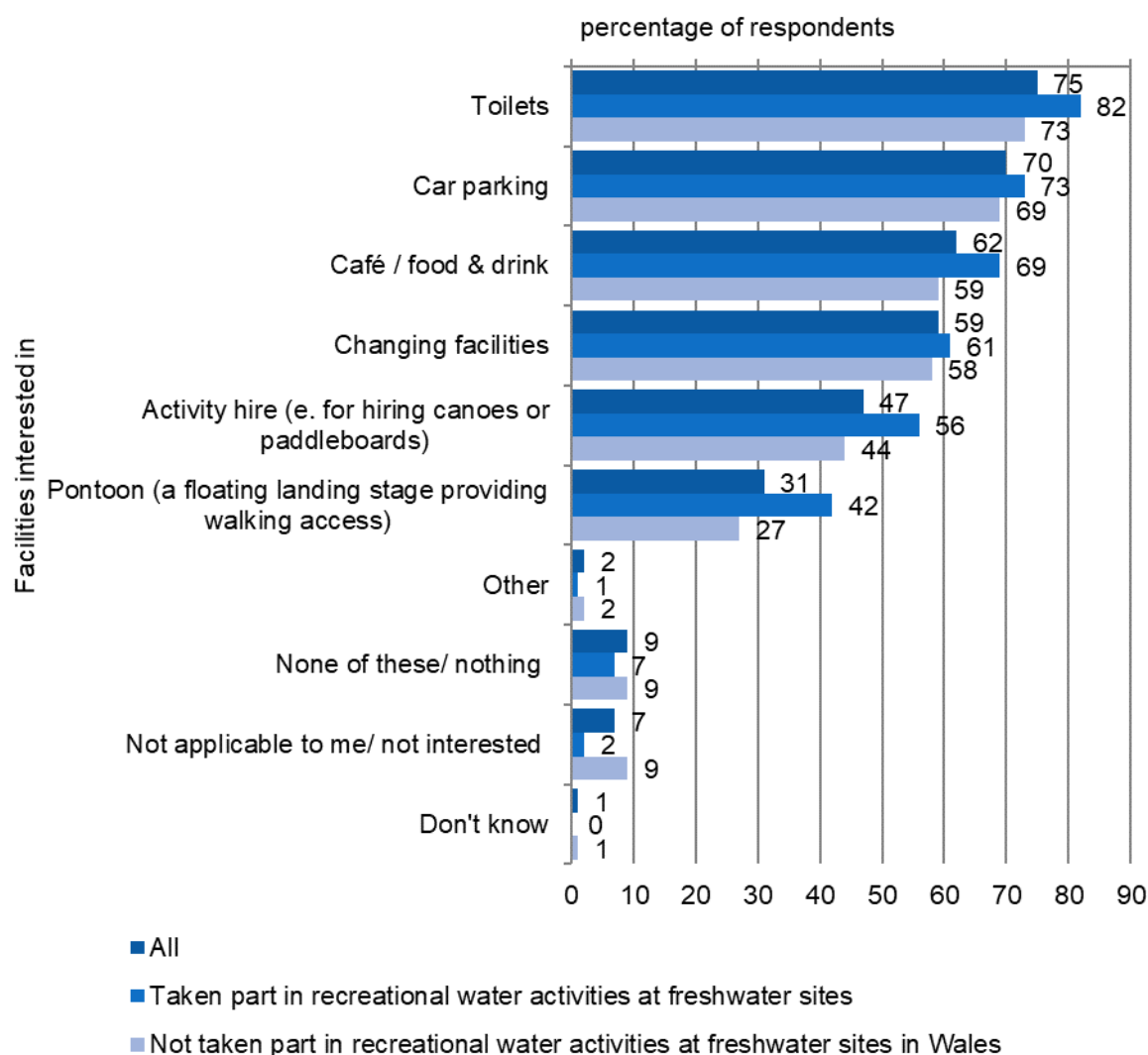


Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (274), 35-54 (354), 55+ (372)

- 3.35 When prompted with a list of possible facilities and asked which, if any, they would like to see at a freshwater site if it were designated as a bathing or recreational water site in Wales, the most popular facilities were toilets and car parking (chosen by 75 per cent and 70 per cent of those interviewed). Around six in ten would like to see a café/ eating place and changing facilities (62 per cent and 59 per cent respectively), while almost half would like to see activity hire (for example, for hiring canoes or paddleboards) (47 per cent). Around three in ten (31 per cent) would like to see a pontoon at designated sites.
- 3.36 Nine per cent overall would not want any facilities at designated sites, however, preferring them to be completely natural. This proportion rose to 15 per cent of outdoor swimmers (that is, those had had swum at freshwater sites in Wales in the last few years).

3.37 Those who had taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites in Wales were more likely to be interested in every facility than those who had not. Demand among those who had participated in activities was considerably higher in the case of toilets (82 per cent compared with 73 per cent), cafés or eating places (69 per cent compared with 59 per cent), activity hire (56 per cent compared with 44 per cent) and pontoons (42 per cent compared with 27 per cent).

Figure 3.13: Facilities would like to see at freshwater sites, if designated as bathing or recreational water sites (prompted)²⁰



Base: All (1,000), taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites (252), not taken part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites (748)

²⁰ Figures do not add to 100 per cent - multichoice question

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The survey indicates that public engagement with inland bathing waters in Wales is reasonably high but is lower than people's engagement with coastal waters. While almost half of those interviewed (45 per cent) had visited Welsh inland waters for leisure or recreation in the last few years, almost eight in ten (78 per cent) had visited coastal waters for leisure purposes.
- 4.2 Participation in recreational water activities at freshwater sites was lower than visiting levels – around one in four of those interviewed (26 per cent) had taken part in a recreational water activity at a lake, river, or reservoir in Wales recently. Participation levels were higher among younger people than among any other age group. 16–34-year-olds were also more interested in every recreational water activity. This suggests that younger people are a key target audience to promote designated inland bathing waters for recreational use in the future.
- 4.3 While swimming was the most popular recreational water activity overall, participants were much more likely to have swum in the sea or in an indoor swimming pool than at a freshwater location in Wales. Although participation levels in kayaking/ canoeing, fishing and paddleboarding were lower, all these activities were more likely to have been undertaken at lakes, rivers, and reservoirs than in coastal waters. There appears to be scope to increase participation in swimming at freshwater locations in Wales.
- 4.4 When the number of those surveyed who swam at freshwater locations was calculated as a percentage of the total sample of adults, it suggests that around 10 per cent of the sample had swum outdoors at a freshwater location in Wales in the last few years. The beautiful location and scenic aspect of inland water locations is a main motivation for outdoor swimming. For fun, for exercise/ training and for mental health/ wellbeing were also important reasons for choosing to swim outdoors.
- 4.5 The key barriers to taking part in recreational water activities at freshwater sites were concerns about safety and concerns about water quality. Both need to be addressed if more people are to be encouraged to use freshwater

sites for bathing or other recreational activities in future. The provision of real time data about the standard of water quality at freshwater sites would help in addressing concerns about water quality – around half of survey participants would be interested in having access to this data.

- 4.6 What's more, many of those surveyed responded 'don't know' or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements about confidence in water quality at freshwater sites and there not being enough freshwater sites for bathing/ recreational use. This suggests that generally more accessible information might increase public knowledge of water quality and suitable sites for recreational use.
- 4.7 Other barriers to be overcome are a lack of information about available sites (a third of those interviewed felt there were not enough inland freshwater sites suitable for bathing/ recreational use in Wales) and a lack of facilities at such sites.
- 4.8 The great majority of people were therefore in favour of amenities such as toilets, car parking, cafés and changing facilities being provided at freshwater locations designated as bathing/ recreational water sites. At the same time, a small proportion of people would prefer inland bathing waters to be left natural, with no facilities.
- 4.9 The study demonstrates that there is a great deal of support for the designation of inland freshwater sites as bathing/ recreational waters – almost two in three of those interviewed (64 per cent) were in favour, compared to just 5 per cent against the idea. Those supporting the idea did so because they felt it would make it safer to bathe there, improve water quality and provide more places to swim. Those against the idea were concerned it would lead to an influx of crowds and that it might be dangerous for swimmers.

Annex A – Survey Questionnaire

B02210-4 SEPTEMBER 2022 WALES OMNIBUS

Designation of Inland Bathing Waters Survey – FINAL

Q1a. In the last few years have you visited coastal waters in Wales (e.g. beaches) or inland waters in Wales (e.g. reservoirs, lake or rivers) for a day out or for leisure or recreation purposes? *Select one*

Yes – visited coastal waters (e.g. beaches) – Go to Q2

Yes – visited inland waters (e.g. reservoirs, lakes, rivers) – Ask Q1b

Yes – visited both – Ask Q1b

Not, not visited either – Go to Q2

Q1b. How do you usually travel to inland water sites like reservoirs, lakes and rivers for leisure or recreation purposes? *Select one*

Bicycle

Bus

Car

Taxi

Train

Walk

Other (please specify) _____

It varies

ASK ALL

Q2. Which of the following recreational water activities, if any, are you interested in? *Please select all that apply*

	Q2. Interested in
Fishing	
Kayaking / Canoeing	
Paddleboarding	
Surfing	
Swimming	
Other (please write in)	
None of these	

Q3. And which of these recreational water activities, if any, have you taken part in within the last few years? Please select all that apply

If taken part in any in last few years, ask for each

Q4. In what type of location/s did you take part in [ADD ACTIVITY e.g. fishing]?

Repeat for each activity undertaken in last few years

	Q3.	Q4. Where taken part				
	Which taken part in	Indoor swimming pool	Outdoor swimming pool	Sea	River	Lake / Reservoir
Fishing						
Kayaking / Canoeing						
Paddleboarding						
Surfing						
Swimming						
Other (please write in)						
None of these						

If taken part in swimming in river, lake or reservoir in last few years in Wales

Q5. What are your reasons for choosing to swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales? Write in

Q6. Which of the following reasons for choosing to swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales apply to you? Select all that apply

For exercise and / or training

For fun

For my mental health and well-being

For social reasons / I'm part of an outdoor swimming club

I was on holiday

There was nowhere else to swim nearby

Other (please specify) _____

Don't know

Q7. How often do you swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales?
Select one

- Every day
- Most days
- Around once a week
- A few times a month
- Around once a month
- Every few months
- A few times a year
- Less often

ASK ALL

Q8. What do you think puts people off from taking part in outdoor recreational activities (like fishing, kayaking / canoeing, paddleboarding and swimming) at freshwater sites in Wales such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs? *Select all that apply*

- Concerns about safety
- Concerns about the water quality
- Difficult to get to freshwater sites
- Lack of information about the availability of suitable sites
- Limited facilities at freshwater sites (e.g. no toilets, cafés, changing facilities)
- Not enough freshwater sites near them
- Not enough freshwater sites across Wales
- Not allowed to use the freshwater sites
- Other (please specify) _____
- None of these / nothing
- Don't know

ASK ALL

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Randomise order

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
i) I would like to see inland freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing / recreational waters (Designation of a site means the water quality there meets a certain standard)						
ii) There are not enough inland freshwater sites (e.g. rivers, lakes and reservoirs) suitable for						

bathing / recreational use in Wales						
iii) I am confident that the water quality at freshwater sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales is of a high standard						
iv) I would be interested in having access to real time data about the standard of water quality at freshwater sites in Wales						

Ask all except those answering 'Don't know' at i) above
Q10a. Why do you say that? Write in

Ask all except those answering 'Don't know' at iii) above
Q10b. Why do you say that? Write in

ASK ALL

Q11. If a freshwater site was designated as a bathing or recreational water site in Wales what facilities, if any, would you want to see there? Select all that apply

- Activity hire (e.g. for hiring canoes or paddleboards)
- Café / food and drink
- Car parking
- Changing facilities
- Pontoon (a floating landing stage providing walking access)
- Toilets
- Other (please specify) _____

- None – I'd prefer it to be natural and without any facilities
- Not applicable to me / not interested
- Don't know