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# Survey of Outdoor Inland Water Swimmers in Wales

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## Survey of Outdoor Inland Water Swimmers 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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## Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Inland waters sites	Water sites such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs (not coastal water sites such as beaches).
OIW	Outdoor Inland Waters
OIWS	Outdoor Inland Water Swimming
Recreational water activities	Activities in and on the water such as fishing, kayaking/ canoeing, paddleboarding, surfing and swimming.
Unmanaged sites (lakes/reservoirs)	Bathing water locations that do not have facilities (e.g. toilets, café, changing facilities)
Managed sites (lakes/reservoirs)	Bathing water locations that do have facilities (e.g. toilets, café, changing facilities)
QR Code	Quick Response code - QR codes are a machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone or other smart device.
Blue Flag accreditation	Blue Flag is a voluntary award for beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats. In order to qualify for the Blue Flag, a series of stringent environmental, educational, safety, and accessibility criteria must be met and maintained. More info available at <a href="#">Blue Flag</a>
SAFE Cymru accreditation	S.A.F.E Cymru (Safe Aquatic Facility Endorsement) promotes safety and enjoyment in open water swimming through four key strategic objectives, these are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safe Facilities: A national governing body accreditation designed with a supportive and continuous assessment process.</li> <li>- Advice and Guidance: The latest up to date information, support and advice from national governing bodies on open water swimming participants at all levels.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Education and Training: A fully resources and expansive training programme to support both the operational workforce at facilities and our participants at all levels.</li><li>- Participation: A clear pathway in Wales that helps our nation enjoy, participate, learn and compete in open water swimming.</li></ul> <p>More info available at <a href="#">S.A.F.E Cymru – Swim Wales</a></p>
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# 1. Introduction/Background

## Context

- 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)<sup>1</sup> require the Welsh Government to consider applications from the public to annually identify popular bathing areas in Wales. A bathing water is a coastal or inland water that attracts a large number of bathers in relation to any infrastructure or facilities that are provided, or other measures that are taken, to promote bathing at the site<sup>2</sup>. Through the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 (Wales) regulations, water sites can be designated as a bathing site where the water quality is tested during bathing season<sup>3</sup> 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 contribute to the objectives set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015<sup>4</sup> 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 currently 109 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 website<sup>5</sup>. Currently 108 of

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<sup>1</sup> [The Bathing Water Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Designation and de-designation of bathing waters: guidance \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>3</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> May – 30<sup>th</sup> September

<sup>4</sup> [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Information about Bathing Water Quality in Wales - Natural Resources Wales](#)



Wales' designated bathing sites are on the coast and just one is inland (Llyn Padarn Lake).

- 1.4 In recognition of the increased interest in outdoor swimming at inland water sites, Welsh Government has made a commitment to *'begin to designate Wales' inland waters for recreation, strengthening water quality monitoring'* in the updated 2021-26 Programme for Government which also reflects the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru<sup>6</sup>.

### **Previous research commissioned on the topic**

- 1.5 In Autumn 2022, the Water Policy Team in the Welsh Government commissioned Beaufort Research to include questions in their Wales Omnibus survey of 1,000 people in Wales<sup>7</sup>. This research aimed to better understand the Welsh public's attitudes toward, understanding of, and engagement with inland bathing waters in Wales. Swimming was the most popular recreational water activity amongst respondents but was slightly more likely to be undertaken at a coastal location than in rivers, lakes or reservoirs. The key barriers to taking part in recreational activities in inland water highlighted by respondents in this survey were concerns around physical safety and concerns about water quality. Opinion was divided on confidence in water quality at inland water sites and many respondents supported the designation of more inland water sites to promote water quality.

### **Current research**

- 1.6 Only 10 per cent of the 1,000 respondents in the Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey had reported swimming in inland waters in the last few years. Therefore, the Welsh Government were interested in gaining more views from people who regularly swim in outdoor inland waters to build the evidence base on inland water use and views on designation.
- 1.7 The Climate and Environment research team in Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government were commissioned by the Water Policy Team, Welsh Government to conduct a survey targeting outdoor inland swimmers to inform future

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<sup>6</sup> [Programme for government: update | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Inland bathing waters in Wales: public attitudes | GOV.WALES](#)

inland bathing waters designation in Wales. This research aims to understand swimming habits, outdoor inland swimmers' views on designation and what qualities and facilities respondents' look for in an outdoor inland water swimming site.

## **2. Methodology**

- 2.1 The questions in the survey were designed by the Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Services team and the Water Policy team – the survey script can be found in Annex A.
- 2.2 The data for this survey was collected via Smart Survey between the 6<sup>th</sup> of February to the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2023.
- 2.3 The survey was disseminated in a variety of ways in order to reach individuals who had participated in outdoor inland water swimming. The aim was to gather as many views as possible. The survey link was shared with Swim Wales and Surfers against Sewage to share with their members and Adventure Smart Wales to share with their businesses. The survey link was also included in another survey on related issues by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. The survey was promoted on the official Welsh Government Climate Change Twitter account and on the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) social media accounts and within the Welsh Government Climate Change bulletin.
- 2.4 This survey did not intend to be representative of the Welsh population or outdoor inland swimmers more generally, given that little is known about other characteristics of swimmers to inform any kind of valid sampling approach. Therefore, findings should not be translated more widely to other Outdoor Inland Water Swimmers who did not participate in the survey. The survey did however achieve a high response rate (757 complete responses<sup>8</sup>) which provides some confidence that findings may reflect at least some of the variation of views amongst outdoor inland water swimmers.
- 2.5 The survey was available to complete in both English and Welsh. All quotes from the qualitative analysis in this report are presented in the language used in the

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<sup>8</sup> 241 partial responses were recorded but not analysed for the purpose of this report.

report (i.e. Welsh or English). Where the response quoted was given in a language different to that of this report (English and Welsh versions of the report have been produced), the quotes have been translated.

## **Demographics**

- 2.6 There were no targets for respondents across demographics as the survey did not want to exclude any views – it is a recreational activity that is participated in across Wales. Twenty-eight respondents completed the survey in Welsh. Annex B shows the breakdown of respondents by age: most respondents were aged 41-51 (32 per cent) and 51-60 (36 per cent). In terms of location of respondents, a higher proportion of respondents were from Cardiff local authority (11 per cent) and Gwynedd local authority (9 per cent) than other local authorities. Annex C shows the proportion of respondents from a particular local authority compared against 2021 Census figures for context.

## **Analysis**

- 2.7 Quantitative analysis was undertaken in Microsoft Excel. Many questions allowed participants to select multiple answers; therefore, the percentage of all response options do not add to 100 in these cases. Responses indicated that all 757 respondents participated in outdoor swimming (either coastal only, inland waters only, or coastal and inland waters). There were 69 respondents who gave inconsistent answers to the questions around where they swam – see table 2.1:
- 58 reported having participated in outdoor swimming in coastal waters only in question 4 but in question 7 had reported swimming in outdoor inland waters (OIW).
  - 11 reported participating in OIW swimming in question 4 but then reported having yet to swim in OIW in question 7.
- 2.8 These respondents were excluded from analysis for questions about general swimming activity and OIW swimming activity specifically. For questions concerning respondent OIW swimming habits, Outdoor Inland Water Swimmers (OIWS) only (consistent responses) were included in the analysis. See Annex D for a breakdown of the respondent group considered in the analysis of each question.

**Table 2.1 – Respondents grouped by their swimming habit responses**

Group of respondents	Number of participants
Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639
Costal swimmers only - consistent responses	49
<b>Consistent response sub-total</b>	<b>688</b>
Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - inconsistent responses	11
Coastal swimmers - inconsistent responses	58
<b>Inconsistent responses sub-total</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>All respondents</b>	<b>757</b>

2.9 However, all respondents were included in the analysis of the findings for questions that asked about their views of barriers to OIW swimming, designation and what they would like to see at designated OIW sites. This decision was taken as these questions did not refer strictly to personal swimming habits and experiences. Additionally, as they had experience in outdoor swimming generally, these respondents were still able to provide useful insight into factors that may encourage swimming in OIW.

2.10 There were two open questions in the survey as well as 7 closed response questions that had an open text 'other' option. Qualitative analysis for these questions was undertaken on MAXQDA software to assign codes from the responses in order to group qualitative responses. Three researchers undertook this analysis using an inductive approach – this involved generating codes and refining them as they reviewed the responses. The three researchers met regularly to discuss the codes they had assigned and the lead researcher also conducted a quality check on all responses and codes to ensure consistency across the codes generated and the responses these were assigned to.

### **3. Findings**

#### **Outdoor Swimming Activity**

- 3.1 The most common place to swim outdoors was in the sea (reported by 83 per cent of 688 respondents) followed by unmanaged lakes/reservoirs, and rivers (reported by 71 per cent and 65 per cent respectively). Respondents reported swimming in managed lakes and reservoirs the least (36 per cent). Overall, 93% of respondents had reported swimming in inland waters – i.e. had reported swimming in one or more of the following: rivers, unmanaged lakes or reservoirs and/or managed lakes and reservoirs. Therefore 7 per cent reported having participated in outdoor swimming in coastal waters only. OIWS respondents generally chose to swim in both OIW and coastal waters – 81 per cent of 639 OIWS respondents<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.2 Seventy-eight per cent of the OIWS respondents reported swimming with others but not in the context of a swimming group (i.e. with friends). Forty-six per cent reported swimming alone and 44 per cent as part of a swimming group. Fourteen per cent reported swimming with children.
- 3.3 Many outdoor inland water swimmer (OIWS) respondents reported swimming outdoors year-round, with over 63 per cent swimming throughout the winter months<sup>10</sup>. However, the highest proportion of OIWS respondents reported swimming during the warmer months<sup>11</sup> (over 95 per cent).

#### **Outdoor Inland Swimming Activity habits and experiences**

- 3.4 When considering OIWS respondents only, respondents generally were more likely to report having participated in outdoor swimming in rivers, lakes and reservoirs for many years – see figure 3.1. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents reported participating in OIW swimming for 5 years or more and 34 per cent for between 2 and 5 years.

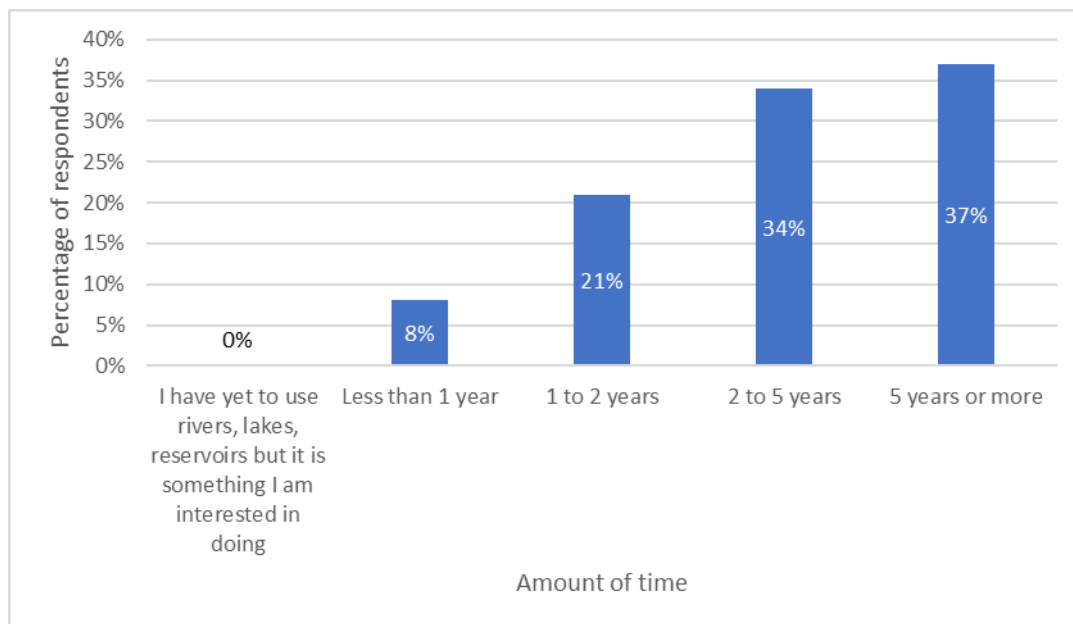
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<sup>9</sup> 639 respondents who consistently reported swimming in inland waters (see methodology for inclusion and exclusion criteria).

<sup>10</sup> November 67%, December 63%, January 63%, February 63%, March 71%

<sup>11</sup> May 95%, June 98%, July 98%, August 98%, September 96%

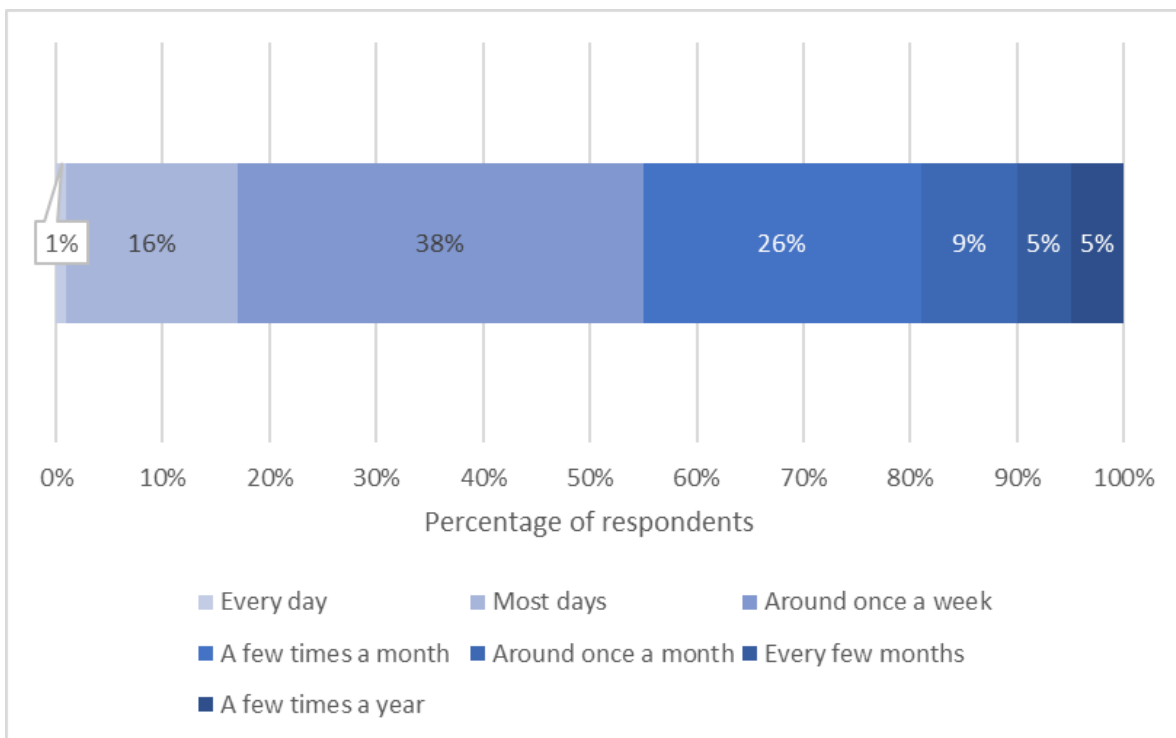
**Figure 3.1:** How long OIWS respondents had participated in OIW swimming



*Base: all OIWS respondents - excluding those who provided inconsistent answers (639)*

3.5 Of those that had swam in OIW, most respondents reported swimming around once a week (38 per cent) or a few times a month (26 per cent) – see figure 3.2. Sixteen per cent of respondents reported swimming most days, meanwhile only 1 per cent of OIWS respondents swam in OIW every day.

**Figure 3.2:** How frequently respondents swim in rivers, lakes, reservoirs – All respondents.

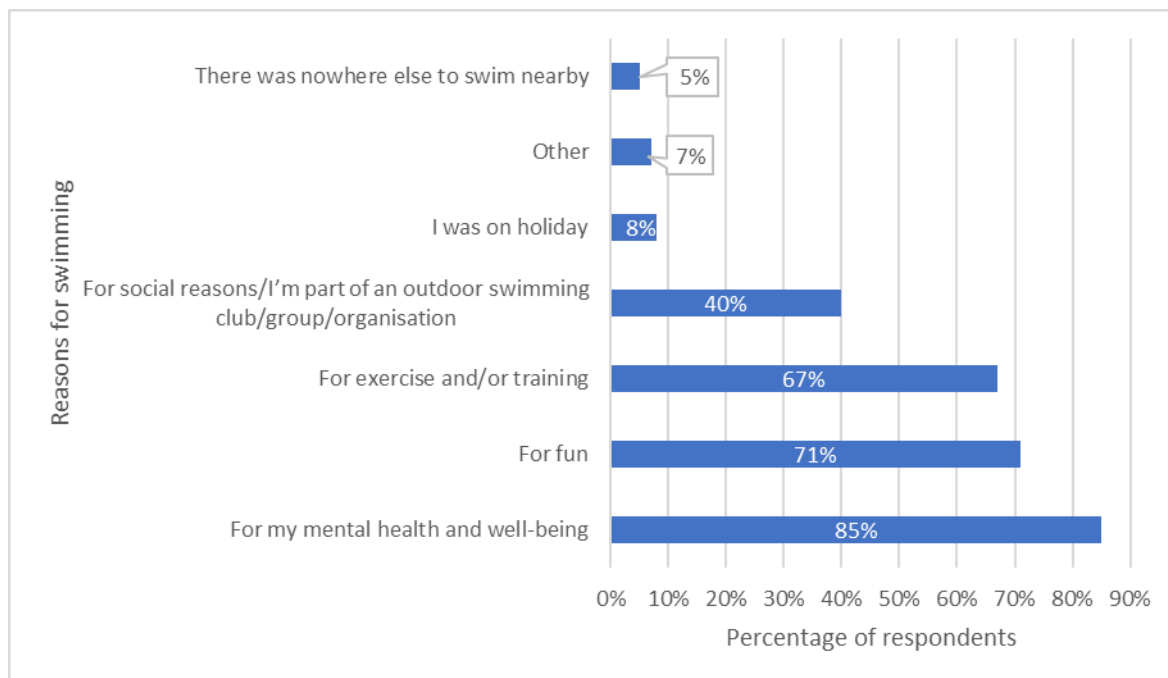


*Base: all OIWS respondents - excluding those who provided inconsistent answers (639)*

- 3.6 The most common reasons that OIWS respondents reported choosing to swim in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales were for their mental health and well-being (85 per cent), for fun (71 per cent) and for exercise and/or training (67 per cent). Very few respondents reported ‘There was nowhere else to swim nearby’ as a reason (5 per cent). Forty per cent of respondents reported that they swam for social reasons.
- 3.7 Of the 43 respondents that selected ‘other’, the most common answers were connection with nature/natural beauty (18 responses), more convenient/cheap than swimming pools (11)<sup>12</sup>, health benefits (7) and as part of other outdoor activities e.g. hiking, water sports (5).

<sup>12</sup> “More convenient/cheap than swimming pools” responses include ease of access (5), the price of fees in swimming pools (4) and the respondents reporting wanting to avoid chlorine/chemicals in swimming pools (2).

**Figure 3.3:** Reasons why OIWS respondents swim in rivers, lakes, reservoirs



*Base: all OIWS respondents - excluding those who provided inconsistent answers (639)*

- 3.8 Water quality and water safety (e.g. safe entrance and exit points) were the factors ranked<sup>13</sup> as the most important by the respondents when choosing where and when to swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs see table 3.1. This indicates that both the condition of the water in terms of its suitability for swimming and the physical safety of the water site were considered most important to OIWS. The third most important factor was proximity to home. Public transport links and a lifeguard on site were the factors least important to the respondents.
- 3.9 Response patterns indicate that respondents did not view water safety in terms of safe access into and within the water and having a lifeguard on site in a similar way. It is unclear why this would be the case but given many respondents swim regularly,

<sup>13</sup> Participants were asked to rank each factor from 1-10. During analysis, each factor is provided a weighting whereby items given a ranking of '1' are given the greatest score and items given a ranking of '10' are given the lowest score – this is done for each respondent's answers. To determine the order of factors (i.e. how important they are considered to be) for the OIWS respondents in the sample, the score for each factor is summed for these respondents and these scores are then ranked from 1-10 where 1 is the factor with the highest score.



these responses could reflect the confidence in their own swimming ability or a preference for factors that allow them to swim safely independently.

**Table 3.1:** Factors ranked in order of their importance to the respondents when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs - OIWS respondents.

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Water Quality	1
Water Safety (safe entrance and exit points)	2
Close to home	3
[Desire for a] Remote location, away from other people	4
Car parking nearby	5
Other bathing water users (swimming groups)	6
Accessibility [Ability to access sites / land]	7
Facilities on site (toilets, changing facilities, etc.)	8
Public transport links	9
Lifeguard on site	10

*Base: all OIWS respondents - excluding those who provided inconsistent answers (639)*

- 3.10 Other factors identified by OIWS respondents as important within an optional open-text question were: connection with nature/natural beauty (52 out of 187 respondents), the water condition or quality (34 out of 187), availability of safety information (24 out of 187), availability of information on the legality of wild swimming/public access (19 out of 187). Table 3.2 shows the themes mentioned in the open text responses. Some respondents provided multi-part answers, therefore 205 responses were coded from 187 respondents.

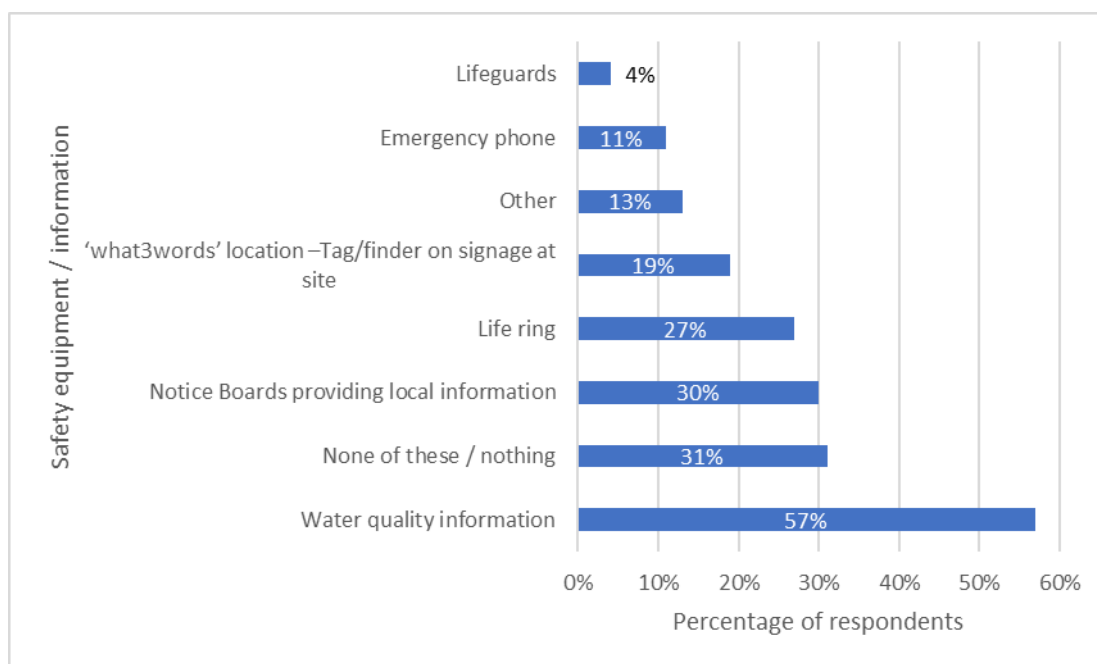
**Table 3.2:** Additional factors identified by respondents as important to them when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and - OIWS respondents

<b>Code</b>	<b>Count</b>
Natural beauty/Contact with nature	52
Water Condition/Quality	34
Safety/Knowledge	24
Legal/public access	19
Weather/Temperature	16
Accessibility	10
Price/Financial	10
Health benefits	8
Desire for remote and untouched areas	7
Quiet	6
Geographical information (OS maps, coordinates or what-3-words)	6
Depth of water	3
Site doesn't disturb wildlife	4
Location with facilities	2
No filming happening	2
Don't know/understand	1
AED/Defibrillator on site	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>

*Base: OIWS respondents who answered question 11 - optional (187)*

- 3.11 In terms of safety equipment and information that OIWS respondents look for at an inland water site (i.e. at rivers, lakes or reservoirs), 57 per cent of respondents reported looking for water quality information. Around one third of respondents reported looking for notice boards providing local information (30 per cent), the presence of a life ring on site (27 per cent). Thirty-one per cent of respondents reported not looking for anything, or none of the options listed.
- 3.12 Of the 81 respondents that selected 'other', the most common answers were location-specific hazards e.g. currents, entry points (19 out of 81), research and knowledge of the area and use of personal equipment (20), and swimming with others as a safety precaution (12).

**Figure 3.4:** Safety equipment/information respondents reported looking for at inland water sites – OIWS respondents.



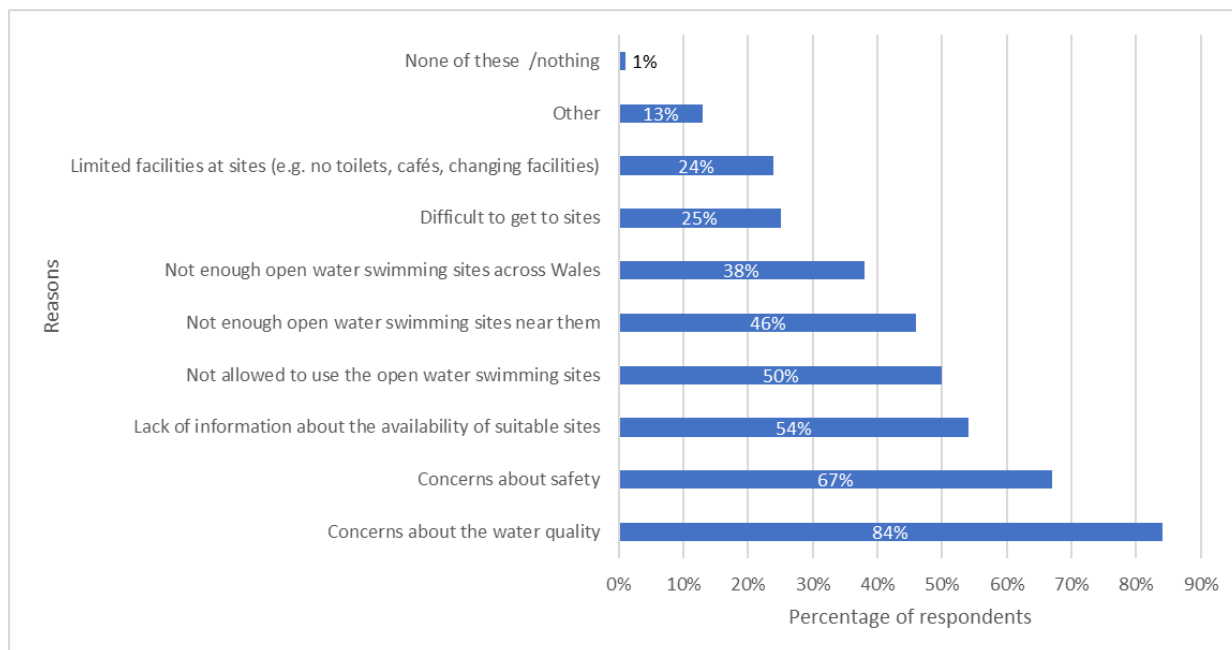
*Base: all OIWS respondents - excluding those who provided incongruent answers between question 4 and question 7 (639)*

### **Barriers to Swimming in Outdoor Inland Waters**

- 3.13 All respondents were asked why people might be put off from swimming in rivers, lakes and reservoirs (OIW). 'Concerns about the water quality' was the factor that many respondents (84 per cent) suggested put people off from participating in OIW swimming. The second highest factor was 'concerns about safety' (66 per cent), followed by lack of information about the availability of suitable sites (54 per cent) and not being allowed to use the open water swimming sites (50 per cent). Only 1 per cent of respondents reported thinking that none of the factors listed put people off from participating in outdoor swimming.
- 3.14 Of the 97 respondents that selected 'other' when asked why people might be put off from OIW, the most common answers were lack of safety information and knowledge (30 responses), the cold temperature (24), unclear rules regarding right of access/issues with landowners (22).
- 3.15 When OIWS only were considered, there was little difference in the percentage of respondents who reported certain factors putting people off: concerns about water

quality (85 per cent), concerns about safety (67 per cent) and lack of information about suitable sites (54 per cent).

**Figure 3.5:** Reasons why respondents think people are put off from swimming in rivers, lakes, reservoirs – All respondents.



*Base: all respondents (757)*

### Designation of Outdoor Inland Waters in Wales

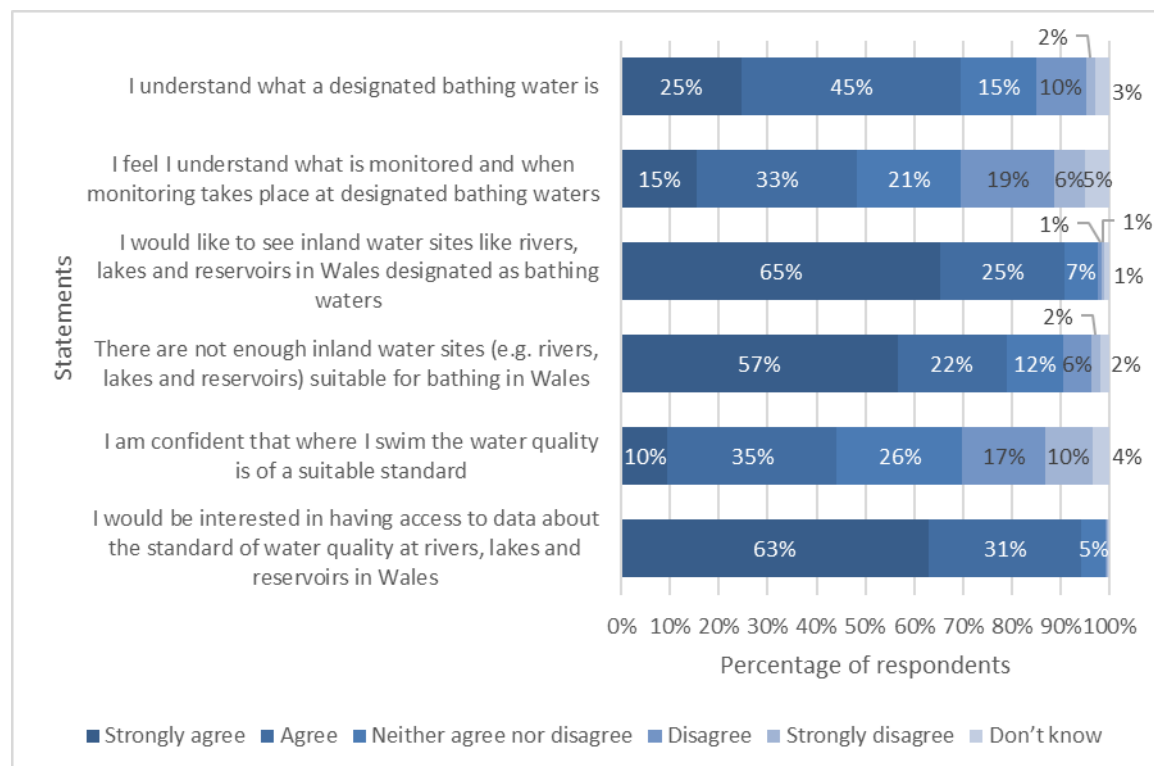
3.16 There was a good level of understanding of the designation of bathing waters amongst all respondents who completed the survey: 70 per cent<sup>14</sup> understand what designation was. However, less than half the respondents reported understanding what was monitored and when monitoring took place at designated sites (48 per cent). Generally, there was a good level of support amongst respondents for OIW designation specifically: 90 per cent of respondents reported an interest in seeing more inland water sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing waters.

3.17 In terms of water quality, a smaller proportion of all respondents reported feeling confident (45 per cent) in the quality of the water where they swim. Forty-three per cent of OIWS respondents specifically felt confident in the water quality of where

<sup>14</sup> In this section, agreement percentages reflect the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses.

they swam. The majority of all respondents (94 per cent agreed) they would be interested in having access to data about the standard of water quality.

**Figure 3.6:** Respondents' agreement rate with the listed statements – All respondents.



*Base: all respondents (757)*

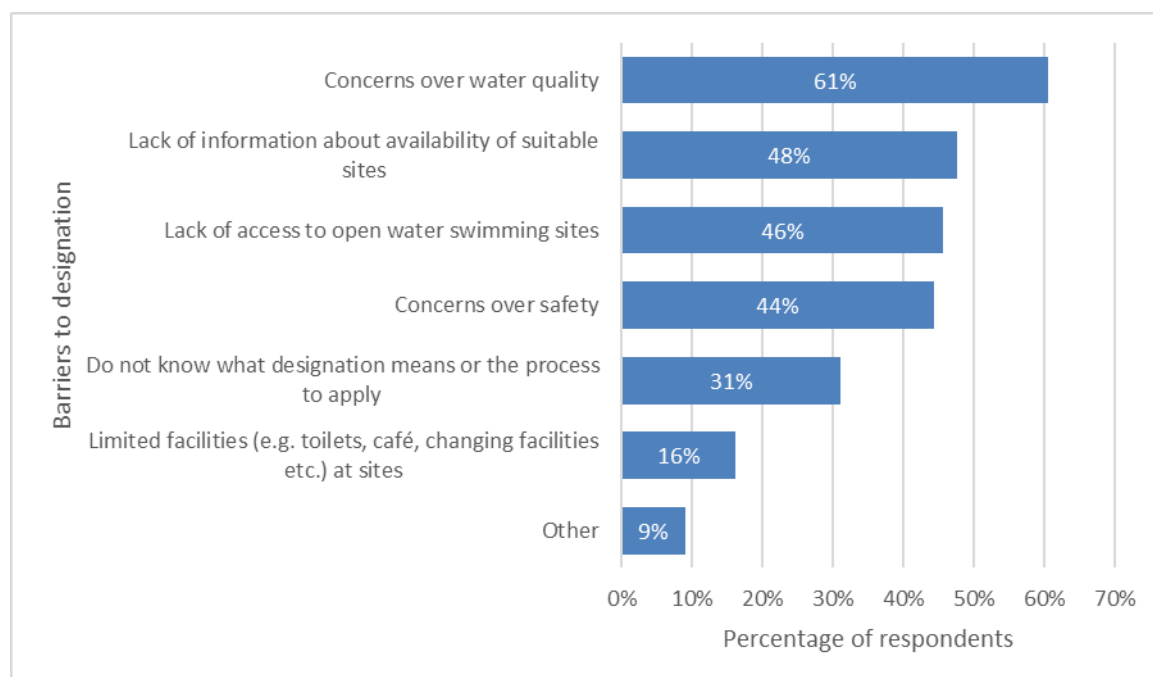
3.18 Respondents were also asked about their preferred method of communication to receive water quality information. A website (68 per cent) and a mobile app (67 per cent) were the most preferred way to receive water quality information about designated bathing waters. Forty-six per cent of respondents were in favour of information boards at the site, 26 per cent of QR code (Quick Response code)<sup>15</sup> links to information and 23 per cent of site signage.

3.19 Of the 17 respondents that selected 'other', the most common answers were a request to not have signs on site, as it would ruin the natural landscape (4 out of 17) and for the sharing of information to be done through social media e.g. Facebook swimming groups (4).

<sup>15</sup> QR codes are a machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone or other smart device (Google definition by Oxford Languages).

- 3.20 When respondents were asked to select the barriers to designating inland waters, the barrier most reported by respondents was concerns over water quality (61 per cent). Other barriers to designating inland waters in Wales identified by the respondents were lack of information about availability of suitable sites to designate (48 per cent), lack of access to open water swimming sites (46 per cent) and concerns over safety (44 per cent).
- 3.21 OIWS respondents specifically also shared these views and there was minimal difference in the views of all respondents compared with OIWS respondents.
- 3.22 Of the 68 respondents that selected 'other', the most common answers were no legal access to the site e.g. with owner consent (35 out of 68), water quality and lack of regular testing (16), and lack of easily available information on safety/knowledge of the site (16).

**Figure 3.7:** Barriers to designating inland waters in Wales – All respondents.



*Base: all respondents (757)*

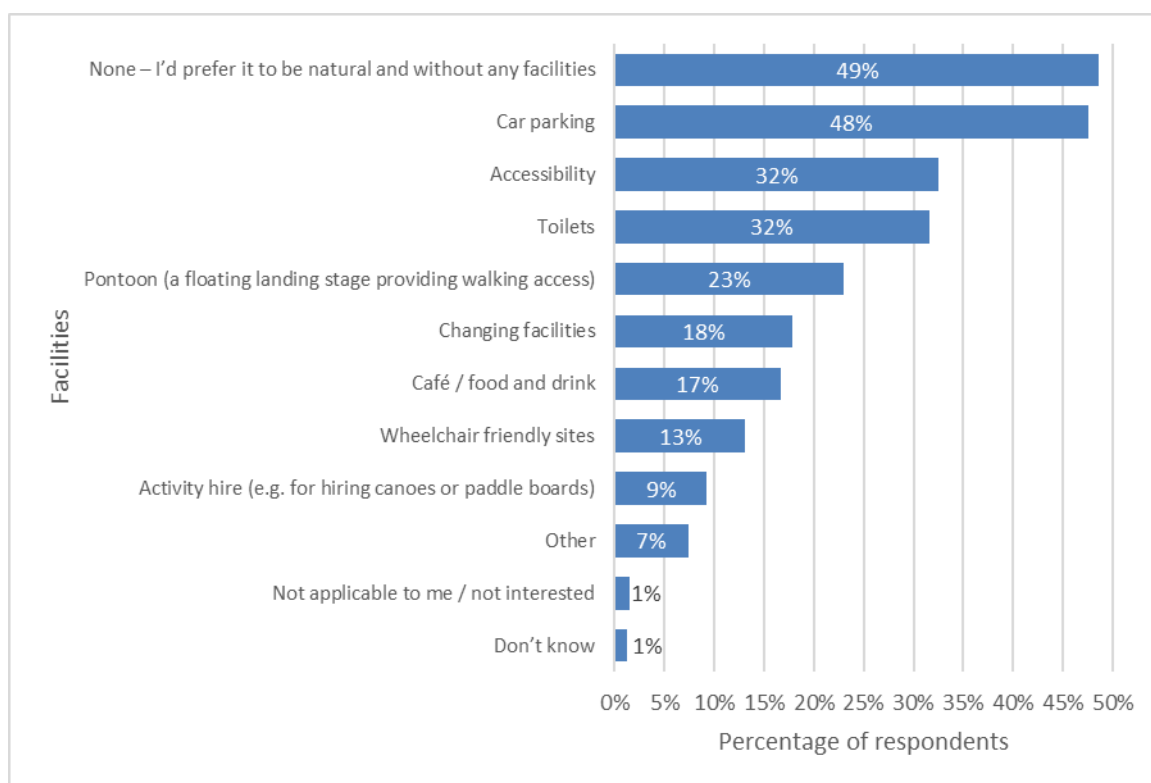
### **Facilities and accreditations at designated outdoor inland water sites**

- 3.23 Generally, there were a mixture of views related to the desire for facilities. When asked about what facilities respondents would like available at designated OIW

sites in Wales, forty-nine per cent of respondents reported not wanting any facilities, preferring it to be natural. The facilities selected more frequently were car parking (48 per cent), accessibility (33 per cent) and toilets (32 per cent).

3.24 Of the 56 respondents that selected ‘other’, the most common answer from respondents was to have a variety of locations available, some with facilities for accessibility and ease of use and some left to their natural state without any facilities (21 out of 56). Twelve respondents reported that they did not want facilities whilst 9 reported that they would like to see sites with facilities but did not specify which. Nine respondents highlighted that sites with facilities would aid disabled swimmers in accessing inland waters bathing sites.

**Figure 3.8:** Facilities the respondents would like available at designated inland water sites in Wales – All respondents.



*Base: all respondents (757)*

3.25 In terms of accreditations at designated OIW sites, 51 per cent of respondents reported wanting sites to hold Blue Flag accreditations<sup>16</sup>. Thirty-seven per cent of

<sup>16</sup> To note, Blue Flag accreditations are not currently available for inland waters.

respondents reported wanting safety accreditations such as 'SAFE CYMRU'. And 15 per cent reported wanting to see the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme accreditation. Twenty-six per cent reported not seeing the need for any accreditations.

- 3.26 Of the 57 respondents that selected 'other', the most common answer was 'I don't know', with respondents expressing a lack of knowledge or understanding of the accreditation mentioned and other accreditation available (28 out of 57). The second and third most common answer were water quality and lack of regular testing (17), which highlights the respondent's desire for an accreditation that will provide with up-to-date and frequent water quality testing.

### **General additional qualitative responses**

- 3.27 The final question provided respondents with an opportunity to mention anything they felt had not been captured in the survey – 148 respondents chose to provide additional comments, including multipart answers. The responses were coded into relevant themes where possible. Many used this as an opportunity to reiterate views explored in previous questions.

- 3.28 In particular, 63 respondents chose to highlight their concerns around the need for high water quality and increased testing, many mentioning concerns about sewage being dumped into water:

*"I love to swim in wild waters, but water quality is by far my biggest concern. I am concerned that water companies are dumping sewage and polluting our waters, making them unsafe for us to swim and damaging wildlife."*

Survey respondent

- 3.29 This was followed by 42 respondents mentioning issues with being able to legally use the site due to either private land owners or Dwr Cymru Welsh Water reportedly not allowing access. Interestingly, some respondents identified that concerns over owner liability for physical safety beyond the condition of the water may make gaining access difficult:

*"What is actually happening is that landowners are scared of the liability issues of people swimming on their land. This is also the case with reservoirs and water*



*companies. E.g. Lake Vyrnwy has lots of safe swimming areas but is not allowed because of the perceived danger.”*

Survey respondent

- 3.30 A small number of respondents raised the point that Dwr Cymru Welsh Water do not allow the public to swim in reservoirs managed by them:

*“Welsh Water are very hesitant to allow open water swimming in their reservoirs which is a shame. More could be utilised of these areas.”*

Survey respondent

- 3.31 There were 21 respondents who reported concerns with increased access to sites following designation. For instance, 8 of these 21 respondents set out their preference for locations to remain remote with no facilities:

*“The beauty of many inland water areas without facilities is that they are not busy places and do not always have huge crowds of people. This makes them very appealing for those of us who swim for our mental well being. I would like to see more information about the quality of water but would be concerned about adding too many facilities at some of the more remote and naturally beautiful areas.”*

Survey respondent

- 3.32 Meanwhile others were concerned with increased access threatening natural habitats:

*“I just hope that designating water as an inland water bathing space, it doesn't become too crowded and damage is caused to natural habitat.”*

Survey respondent

- 3.33 Nine respondents suggested a variety of locations for designation which could resolve some of the concerns raised by respondents above:

*“I think there probably needs to be a variety of inland bathing water types/accreditation, some more formalised with facilities and designed to attract large numbers others more natural and not overly advertised because you don't want masses there.”*

Survey respondent

- 3.34 A number of respondents used the free-text box to suggest areas they would like to see designated, these included:

- Cwm-parc
- Cosmeston lakes
- Lisvane reservoir
- River Taff
- Cardiff Bay
- River Usk
- North Dock Llanelli
- Reservoirs in the Brecon Beacons
- River Ogmore

3.35 The survey was not representative and there was not a specific question on site designation so this list is purely to demonstrate the types of sites suggested in the survey responses.

## 4. Conclusions

- 4.1 This survey did not include a representative sample of outdoor inland water swimmers due to demographics and characteristics of swimmers being unknown. This made developing a valid sampling frame difficult, so the survey instead aimed to engage as large a number of participants as possible. A large response rate (757 completed responses) was obtained which provides some confidence that findings reflect at least some of the variation amongst outdoor inland water swimmers.
- 4.2 The majority of respondents reported participating in OIW swimming in inland waters i.e. in rivers, unmanaged lakes or reservoirs and/or managed lakes or reservoirs. Over 80 per cent of OIWS respondents also participated in outdoor swimming in coastal waters. OIWS respondents were most likely to swim with others but not in the context of a swimming group (i.e. with friends) whilst almost half swam alone and over two fifths swam as part of a swimming group. Many OIWS respondents participated in swimming outdoors year-round.
- 4.3 Generally OIWS respondents were most likely to report swimming in OIW once a week or a few times a month. The main reasons for choosing to swim in OIW were for mental health and well-being and for fun. This suggests promoting the mental health benefits of OIW swimming may be an effective way to encourage others to participate.
- 4.4 The most important factors for OIWS respondents when choosing where to swim were water quality and the water safety (outside of condition or quality issues) as well as sites which are close to home or local to respondents. Water quality information was the kind of information OIWS respondents were most likely to look for at OIW sites. Furthermore, respondents were most likely to report that concerns about water quality would put people off from participating in outdoor swimming in OIW.
- 4.5 Less than half of respondents felt confident in the water quality of where they swam and the majority were interested in seeing more OIW designated as bathing waters and having access to data about the standard of water quality in an area. Respondents preferred to access water quality information online via a website or mobile app.

- 4.6 Facilities on site, public transport links and lifeguards on site were deemed the least important. When asked about facilities at designated OIW sites, most commonly respondents reported not wanting any. Car parking was more popular than other facilities. There were a number of respondents, when given the opportunity, highlighted the importance to them of a quiet area to swim that is connected to the beauty of nature. It was viewed by some that adding facilities to sites or advertising the site as an area to visit could make the area more crowded which could not only damage the natural habitat but make the waters less enjoyable to visit for existing swimmers. Views from this survey indicate that there is a potential balance to be struck between designating sites to ensure high water quality for those who already swim there and promoting their use to a larger group of people. A small number of respondents offered a solution in designating multiple sites, some with more facilities and others left relatively 'unspoiled'.
- 4.7 In terms of barriers to designation, 'concerns over the general water quality of sites' was the most common barrier identified, followed by lack of availability of suitable sites and lack of access to open water swimming sites. This issue of access was also described in qualitative comments. In particular, there were frustrations amongst respondents about rights to access land and with land owners (private and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water) not allowing swimming at their sites. Land owners were not considered as part of this survey, so further engagement with them would be beneficial.
- 4.8 Many respondents were interested in having some kind of accreditation at designated sites – the most popular of which was the Blue Flag accreditation. Currently there is no current process for a Blue Flag accreditation at OIW. This may have been the most popular accreditation because it is well known, indicating the importance of trust and understanding of accreditations that are used for OIW.
- 4.9 The most popular kind of safety equipment or information respondents desired was water quality information. There is therefore an opportunity to ensure this information is readily available at OIW sites.

4.10 This research contributes to the overall evidence base to support Welsh Government thinking in relation to outdoor inland water designation, water quality monitoring and guidance. The Welsh Government will continue to undertake research to support future decisions to support the Programme for Government commitment to designate more inland waters for recreation.

## **Annex A - Outdoor Inland Swimmer Survey**

The definition applied to 'outdoor inland swimmers' for the purpose of this survey refers to people swimming in locations such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales.

A 'designated bathing water' as described within the Bathing Water Regulations is an outside surface water where the Welsh Ministers expect a large number of people to bathe. This expectation is based on past trends and any infrastructure or facilities provided, or other measures taken, to promote bathing at those waters. If an outdoor inland water becomes designated as a bathing water, the water quality is tested by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) annually during the bathing season (15 May – 30 September). Designated bathing waters are given an annual bathing water classification of excellent, good, sufficient or poor, based on the water quality sample results.

NRW also produce and publish a bathing water profile for each designated bathing water. The profiles set out the work which NRW are doing with partners to maintain and improve water quality at these designated bathing waters.

Q1. Please confirm that:

- I have read and I understood the privacy notice.

### **Basic details**

Q2. Location – Where do you live: (Select one)

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent)
- Bridgend County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr)
- Caerphilly County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili)
- Cardiff Council (Cyngor Caerdydd)
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Gaerfyrddin)
- Ceredigion County Council (Cyngor Sir Ceredigion)
- Conwy County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy)
- Denbighshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Ddinbych)
- Flintshire County Council (Cyngor Sir y Fflint)
- Gwynedd Council (Cyngor Sir Gwynedd)
- Isle of Anglesey County Council (Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn)
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful)
- Monmouthshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Fynwy)
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot)
- Newport City Council (Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd)
- Pembrokeshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Penfro)
- Powys County Council (Cyngor Sir Powys)

- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- City and County of Swansea (Cyngor Sir a Dinas Abertawe)
- The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Bro Morgannwg)
- Torfaen County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen)
- Wrexham County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam)

Q3. Please select the age category which best applies to you (Select one)

- up to 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 – 60
- 61 – 70
- 71 – 80
- Over 80

### Recreational activity

Please answer the following questions for the outdoor swimming that you do:

Q4. Where do you participate in outdoor swimming (Select all that apply)

- Coastal
- River
- Unmanaged lake/reservoir (i.e., location without facilities)
- Managed lake/ reservoir (i.e., location with facilities)

Q5. Do you undertake these activities alone, as part of a group or as part of a family with children? (Select all which apply)

- Alone
- Part of a swimming group
- With others (but do not consider this as a swimming group) i.e. friends
- With children

Q6. In which months do you do you participate in outdoor swimming in Wales? (Select all that apply)

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June
- July
- August
- September
- October
- November
- December

### **Outdoor swimming activity**

Please answer the following questions for the swimming that you do in rivers, lakes and reservoirs:

Q7. How long have you been using rivers, lakes, reservoirs for inland outdoor swimming? (Select one)

- I have yet to use rivers, lakes, reservoirs but it is something I am interested in doing
- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 to 5 years
- 5 years or more

Q8. 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



Q9. For which of the following reasons do you choose to swim in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales? (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/group/organisation
- I was on holiday
- There was nowhere else to swim nearby
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10. Please rank the following factors in order of their importance to you when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs (Rank 1-9, with 1 being the most important)

- Water Quality
- Water Safety (safe entrance and exit points)
- Remote location, away from other people
- Other bathing water users (Swimming groups)
- Close to home
- Car parking nearby
- Public transport links
- Facilities on site (toilets, changing facilities, etc.)
- Lifeguard on site
- Accessibility

Q11. Are there any other factors not included in the list in question 9 that are important to you when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs? (open text)

Q12. What do you think puts people off from participating in outdoor swimming in rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales? (Select all that apply)

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

Q13. What safety equipment/information do you look for at outdoor inland water locations (i.e. at rivers, lakes and reservoirs) (Select all that apply)

- Life ring
- Lifeguards
- Emergency phone
- 'what3words' location –Tag/finder on signage at site
- Water quality information
- Notice Boards providing local information
- None of these / nothing
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### Designation of bathing waters in Wales

Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Select one per row)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I understand what a designated bathing water is						
I feel I understand what is monitored and when monitoring takes place at designated bathing waters						
I would like to see inland water sites like rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales designated as bathing waters						
There are not enough inland water sites (e.g. rivers, lakes and reservoirs) suitable for bathing in Wales						
I am confident that where I swim the water quality is of a suitable standard						
I would be interested in having access to data about the standard of water quality						

at rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales						
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Q15. What do you think the barriers are to designating inland waters in Wales? (Select all that apply)

- Do not know what designation means or the process to apply
- Lack of access to open water swimming sites
- Limited facilities (e.g. toilets, café, changing facilities etc.) at sites
- Lack of information about availability of suitable sites
- Concerns over safety
- Concerns over water quality
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q16. How would you prefer to receive water quality information about designated bathing waters? (Select all that apply)

- On information boards at the site
- Site signage
- QR link to information
- Website
- A mobile app
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17. If an inland outdoor water was designated as a bathing water in Wales what facilities, if any, would you want to see there? (Select all that apply)

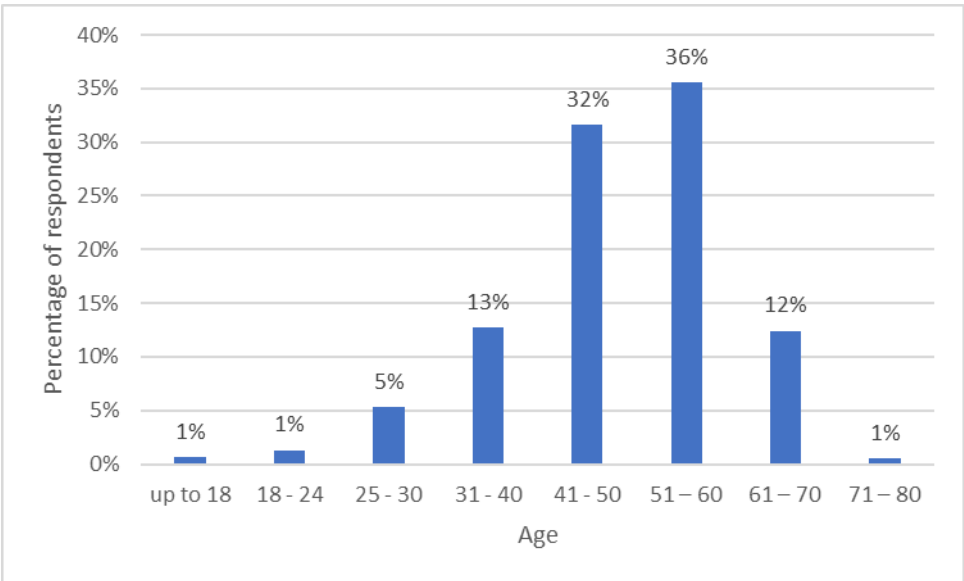
- Accessibility
- Activity hire (e.g. for hiring canoes or paddle boards)
- Café / food and drink
- Car parking
- Changing facilities
- Pontoon (a floating landing stage providing walking access)
- Toilets
- Wheelchair friendly sites
- None – I'd prefer it to be natural and without any facilities
- Not applicable to me / not interested
- Don't know
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q18. Which accreditations would you like to see designated inland bathing water hold? (Select all that apply)

- Blue Flag
- The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS)
- Safety accreditations, such as 'SAFE CYMRU' accreditation
- None, I do not see the need
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q19. Please use this space for any other comments on designation of inland bathing waters. (open text)

# Annex B – Age of respondents



Base: All respondents (757)

## Annex C – Local Authority of respondents compared with 2021 Census data

Local Authority	Survey respondents	2021 Census figures	Difference (percentage points)
Blaenau Gwent	2%	2%	0
Bridgend	3%	5%	-2
Caerphilly	3%	6%	-3
Cardiff	11%	12%	-1
Carmarthenshire	6%	6%	0
Ceredigion	6%	2%	4
Conwy	4%	4%	0
Denbighshire	2%	3%	-1
Flintshire	1%	5%	-4
Gwynedd	9%	4%	5
Isle of Anglesey	4%	2%	2
Merthyr Tydfil	2%	2%	0
Monmouthshire	8%	3%	5
Neath Port Talbot	4%	5%	-1
Newport	3%	5%	-2
Pembrokeshire	4%	4%	0
Powys	7%	4%	3
Rhondda Cynon Taf	5%	8%	-3
Swansea	6%	8%	-2
Torfaen	2%	3%	-1

Vale of Glamorgan	6%	4%	2
Wrexham	1%	4%	-3

## Annex D: Breakdown of the respondent for each question

Question	Respondent Group	Number of responses
Q2. Location – Where do you live	All respondents	757
Q3. Please select the age category which best applies to you	All respondents	757
Q4. Where do you participate in outdoor swimming	All consistent responses - Outdoor inland water and costal swimmers	688
Q5. Do you undertake these activities alone, as part of a group or as part of a family with children?	<i>All respondents</i>	757
Q6. In which months do you do you participate in outdoor swimming in Wales?	<i>All respondents</i>	757
Q7. How long have you been using rivers, lakes, reservoirs for inland outdoor swimming?	Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639
Q8. How often do you swim outdoors in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales	Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639
Q9. For which of the following reasons do you choose to swim in rivers, lakes or reservoirs in Wales?	Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639
Q10. Please rank the following factors in order of their importance to you when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs	Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639



Q11. Are there any other factors not included in the list in question 9 that are important to you when choosing where and when you swim in rivers, lakes and reservoirs?	All respondents that answered (optional question)	187
Q12. What do you think puts people off from participating in outdoor swimming in rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales?	All respondents	757
Q13. What safety equipment/information do you look for at outdoor inland water locations (i.e. at rivers, lakes and reservoirs)	Outdoor inland water swimmers (OIWS) - consistent responses	639
Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Designation of OIW)	All respondents	757
Q15. What do you think the barriers are to designating inland waters in Wales?	All respondents	757
Q16. How would you prefer to receive water quality information about designated bathing waters?	All respondents	757
Q17. If an inland outdoor water was designated as a bathing water in Wales what facilities, if any, would you want to see there?	All respondents	757
Q18. Which accreditations would you like to see designated inland bathing water hold?	All respondents	757
Q19. Please use this space for any other comments on designation of inland bathing waters.	All respondents that answered (optional question)	148