# Concerns over Met Office rain forecasts amid Devon tourism losses



A recent report published by Woolacombe Bay Holiday Parks has raised concerns over the accuracy and presentation of Met Office weather forecasts, asserting that ambiguous predictions may be contributing to significant financial losses within Devon’s tourism sector. The report focuses on the potential economic impact these forecasts have on local businesses, especially those dependent on visitor numbers.

The investigation centred on weather predictions made for Woolacombe, a popular coastal destination in Devon. Prior to the Easter period, several Devon tourism businesses expressed worry that forecasted spells of rain might deter tourists. The Woolacombe Bay report, which tracked Met Office forecasts over a 53-day period, suggested that warnings of rainfall were often overstated or misleading.

According to the research, over 40% of the days studied had a forecasted 10% or greater chance of rain, yet on 16 of those days no rain was recorded at all. The report examined weekly weather benchmarks set by the Met Office a week in advance and compared them to actual weather data obtained from Weathercloud.

Despite the report not labelling the forecasts as outright incorrect, it criticised the manner in which probabilities and timings of rain were communicated, which may be open to misinterpretation. The report highlighted that a forecast indicating a substantial chance of rain could lead potential visitors to cancel plans, even though the rain might only occur briefly or during times less disruptive to outdoor activities.

As an example, the report cited Wednesday 26th February, when the Met Office forecast displayed a 50% average chance of rain during the day, with peak probabilities of 80% at 9 am and 60% at noon. In reality, all rainfall fell between 4 am and 7 am, leaving the remainder of the day dry. Another instance referenced was Friday 28th March, with forecasts indicating over a 40% chance of rain throughout the day, but only 1.2mm of rain actually fell at midday, an amount deemed insufficient to impact outdoor plans.

Rick Turner, director of The Big Sheep amusement park in Devon, was contacted by Woolacombe Bay and voiced criticism of the Met Office’s forecasts. He stated that while daily predictions can be “frequently incorrect,” his strongest objections lie with week-ahead forecasts which tourists often consult when deciding on last-minute holiday destinations. Mr Turner claimed these forecasts “seem to be invariably wrong and misleading”, causing significant financial setbacks.

Speaking to the (DevonLive), Mr Turner said: “My message to the forecasters is to either get it right or don’t do longer term forecasts which are costing my North Devon theme park £100,000s and the whole industry millions of pounds each year in lost bookings and business. Talk about the areas which are going to be enjoying dry and sunny weather rather than looking for the rain which you find exciting to be forecasting and often incorrectly.”

The Met Office responded to the report by reaffirming its commitment to continuous refinement of forecasting methods. A spokesperson said: “Thanks to this commitment to accuracy, our four-day forecast is now as accurate as our one-day forecast was 30 years ago.” They also highlighted the variety of platforms through which forecasts are provided, including YouTube presentations, written online forecasts, and a weather app featuring live rain radar and detailed contextual information.

The spokesperson further advised that users should engage with the textual forecasts alongside icons to understand the uncertainties involved, noting: “It is always important for people to read the text around the forecast and not simply look at the symbols.”

The report and ensuing dialogue underscore ongoing tensions between meteorological forecasts and the impact of perceived inaccuracies on regional businesses reliant on tourism. While spells of rain did affect the region over the Easter weekend as initially predicted, the debate continues around how weather information should be conveyed to avoid economic repercussions for Devon’s visitor economy.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.woolacombetourism.co.uk/news/impact-misleading-weather-forecasts> - This URL provides information on the impact of misleading weather forecasts on the tourism industry in Woolacombe, supporting the report's findings on economic losses. It highlights the concerns of local businesses regarding forecast accuracy.
* <https://www.woolacombe.co.uk/media-press/met-office-costing-devon-businesses-millions> - This resource delves into how Met Office forecasts, with potential inaccuracies or misinterpretations, affect Devon businesses financially, aligning with the report's assertions about economic impacts.
* <https://weather.metoffice.gov.uk/forecast/gcj5079ep> - The Met Office weather forecast for Woolacombe shows the changing weather patterns, which can be compared to the report's discussion on forecasted rain versus actual weather conditions.
* <https://weather.metoffice.gov.uk/forecast/gcj5016uw> - This URL offers specific weather conditions for Woolacombe Beach, including rain probabilities, which can be compared to the report's examples of overforecasted rainfall.
* <https://www.devon-tides.com/woolacombe-beach-tide-times> - While not directly related to weather forecasts, this URL provides general weather and tide information for Woolacombe Beach, contributing to the broader context of tourism and outdoor activities in the area.