

From: [REDACTED]
To: Ofwat P and O
Subject: Comments on Southern Water's performance
Date: 20 October 2021 22:37

Dear OFWAT,

I understand that following the deadline of October 21st you will be reviewing comments from all customers and stakeholders in regards to the performance of Southern Water in 2020-21.

As a customer of Southern Water I would ask you to consider my letter in these proceedings.

I swim in the sea at St Leonards on Sea, and am very aware that Southern Water release raw sewage into the sea at intervals. Southern Water is permitted by the Environment Agency to spill wastewater only under extreme circumstances, and yet they have repeatedly released sewage into the sea at St Leonards and Hastings, over the last three months, apparently every time it rains. The beach has been out of bounds to locals and tourists due to pollution for much of the summer

According to Southern Water's own website, the number of spills in East Sussex increased every year between 2017 and 2020, more than trebling to over 5,000 annually.

The beach at Bulverhythe was severely polluted by burst sewage pipes at the end of July 2021, damaging marine life, the local fishing industry and recreational use of the beach and the attached beach huts:

<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.southernwater.co.uk%2Four-performance%2Fflow-and-spill-reporting&data=04%7C01%7Cofwatpando%40ofwat.gov.uk%7C6b6cfd2095a46427d1a08d99411c1f1%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637703626250874344%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IjEkaWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&data=I92NbRCST1eY66EFVseJB3Y4mWO8Dh9ziML8ykdWzjw%3D&reserved=0>

In the recent case brought by the Environment Agency covering 16 wastewater treatment works and one CSO across Kent, Hampshire and Sussex, the court heard that Southern Water “deliberately presented a misleading picture of compliance to the Environment Agency, hindering proper regulation of the company”, relating to the period between 2010 and 2015. The court found that widespread and long term breaches of environmental law were caused by “deliberate failings”, with instructions and co-ordination coming from the very top of the Southern Water chain of command, including senior lawyers. This is disgraceful:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-90m-fine-for-southern-water-following-ea-prosecution>

<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sas.org.uk%2Fnews%2Fsouthern-water-slammed-with-record-fine-for-sewage-pollution%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cofwatpando%40ofwat.gov.uk%7C6b6cfd2095a46427d1a08d99411c1f1%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637703626250874344%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&data=Y4WPdS8FdSg1QOCoo2Ew05GB%2FXDUROH0DfWBQGGX9YY%3D&reserved=0>

In 2020 alone, Southern Water was responsible for over 20,000 separate storm overflow events, with a duration of over 201,000 hours in total (the true figure is likely higher). That is equivalent to what should be almost 23 years' worth:

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/21e15f12-0df8-4bfc-b763-45226c16a8ac>

Southern Water paid around £900 million to shareholders between 2009 and 2019. They made over £200m profit for each of the past three years:

https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fenvironment%2F2020%2Fjul%2F01%2Fengland-privatised-water-firms-dividends-shareholders&data=04%7C01%7Cofwatpando%40ofwat.gov.uk%7C6b6cfd2095a46427d1a08d99411c1f1%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637703626250874344%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&data=SwKYYVclMfJhC770ZBTULQWs_hdaDE2t4zFB8SIEh80%3D&reserved=0
<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sas.org.uk%2Fnews%2Fsouthern-water-slammed-with-record-fine-for-sewage-pollution%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cofwatpando%40ofwat.gov.uk%7C6b6cfd2095a46427d1a08d99411c1f1%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637703626250874344%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&data=Y4WPdS8FdSg1QOCoo2Ew05GB%2FXDUROH0DfWBQGGX9YY%3D&reserved=0>

In this context, Southern Water's CEO's £550,900 bonus is obscene and unconscionable. Our community has no choice but to use Southern Water, and, while we are happy to pay a fair price for a well-delivered essential service, we object vocally and collectively to subsidising profit for shareholders and directors, with bumper dividends paid out while crumbling infrastructure goes neglected and we all pay the price for ongoing environmental devastation, health risks and loss of business for our community.

Given the evidence of deliberate deception, obstruction and illegality in the pursuit of profit, and the ongoing high incidence of pollution events, I see no reason to have faith that Southern Water is genuinely engaged in the process of significantly improving its environmental performance. I see a toxic corporate culture where it's cheaper to pay even record-breaking fines than it would be to discharge their environmental responsibility in compliance with the law.

My personal belief is that an essential service that requires a “natural” monopoly, such as water, should not be for profit, but should be owned as what it is: a public good. Southern Water have demonstrated that privatisation, where profits are everything and true responsibility is nothing, is a lousy idea.

I also feel the amount of my water bill should reflect the incredibly dire customer service we are experiencing until these issues are adequately resolved.

I would be grateful if you could respond with how the above will inform the review and the outcome.

I am also one of some 200+ concerned citizens who form the Hastings and St Leonards Clean Water Action Group, we would welcome a conversation with you on this matter you can reach the group at [REDACTED].

Kindest regards,

[REDACTED]