

From: [REDACTED]
To: Ofwat P and O
Subject: Comments on Southern Water's performance
Date: 21 October 2021 11:34:17

Dear OFWAT,

I understand that following today's 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 this letter of complaint in that process for the following reasons:

My local beach at Bulverhythe has been 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. In the recent case brought by the Environment Agency covering 16 waste water 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 2010-2015. 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

<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%7C32d7efd6431244d4003508d9947e0f99%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637704092566235040%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVC16Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=EEG4%2FiPc0%2FZjwHQAdTOW6GGJi2oDdyNYIAWDvd%2Fk34M%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 almost 23 years.

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

Southern Water paid around £900 million to shareholders between 2009-2019 and made over £200 million profit for each of the last 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%7C32d7efd6431244d4003508d9947e0f99%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637704092566235040%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVC16Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=QUbNi39DnHMscKNPNJv2vH9M%2F2T%2FEbF7X0TCXpVvEQ8%3D&reserved=0>

<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sas.org.uk>

<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%7C32d7efd6431244d4003508d9947e0f99%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637704092566235040%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000&data=EEG4%2FiPc0%2FzjwHQAdTow6GGJi2oDdyNYIAWDvd%2Fk34M%3D&reserved=0>

Southern Water is permitted by the Environment Agency to spill wastewater only under extreme circumstances, and yet they have repeatedly released untreated sewage into the sea at St Leonards and Hastings, where I live and swim, over the last three months, apparently every time it rains. I've personally seen wet wipes, tampons and sanitary towels clogged in the outfall grille at low tide. The beach has been off-bounds due to pollution for much of the summer, and I have heard of at least one case of a family swimming because they did not understand that the red flag indicated pollution, and many of the community take the risk to be able to continue to benefit from sea swimming despite the pollution. According to their own website, the number of spills in East Sussex increased every year between 2017-2020, more than trebling to over 5,000 spills annually.

<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%7C32d7efd6431244d4003508d9947e0f99%7C42a92f0e996a41b285123ed237ab8313%7C0%7C0%7C637704092566244995%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000&data=LRCYmLbPOwAFVvew%2BGU%2F6d%2FmMAvav50gsYE66LVRuE%3D&reserved=0>

Southern Waters CEO's £550,900 bonus in this context is obscene and unconscionable. Our community has no choice but to use Southern Water, and I'm happy to pay a fair price for a well-delivered essential service, but I object to subsidising profit for shareholders and directors, with bumper dividends paid out whilst 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. 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].

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]