

# SUMMARY OF PUBLIC MEETING

## 19th March 2025 - Dymchurch Village Hall

### UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF DYMCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

### SEAWATER QUALITY & LOCALISED FLOODING

#### Attendees:

- Representatives of The Environment Agency
- Representatives of Southern Water
- OfWat
- Internal Drainage Board
- Kent County Council
- District Council

---

The meeting was introduced by the Chair of the Parish Council, **Cllr. Dougie Young**, who outlined the current situation regarding Dymchurch Beach's "poor" water quality classification.

#### Part I – Bathing Water Quality

Representatives from each agency gave presentations on their roles and statutory obligations. They were asked to identify key reasons for the decline in water quality and outline specific measures being taken to address the situation.

#### OfWat

- Provided an overview of its role in regulating water companies and holding them accountable.
- Acknowledged improvements but stated that Southern Water still has a long way to go to meet expected standards.
- Recognised the need for increased investment, with a **quadruple rise in investment** allowed to reduce pollution in rivers and bathing waters.
- **£12 billion** allocated over five years for England and Wales, equating to **£6.5 million per day** spent tackling these issues.
- Southern Water has been set targets for waste reduction and phosphorus reduction.
- Stressed that financial investment alone is insufficient and a **cultural change** within water companies is required.
- **Southern Water ranked in the lowest category for 2023/24** but is reportedly improving.
- **Penalties of £126 million** were paid by Southern Water after OfWat found a failure to upgrade wastewater treatment works on time.

- Confirmed that performance-related bonuses are **not** paid through customers' bills.
- The **Waters Special Measures Bill** will further hold water company executives accountable.
- More information: [OfWat website](#)

### Environment Agency

- A presentation was provided and can be viewed at **Appendix 1**.

### Southern Water

- Works in partnership with **The Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Board, Highways, and Councils**.
- Finding pollution sources is like "**looking for a needle in a haystack**," so the community is encouraged to report concerns.
- **87 designated areas** are under investigation, including Dymchurch.
- A presentation was shown (**Appendix 2**) covering investigations such as:
  - Leaking assets
  - Blockages
  - Misconnections (where foul waste enters drainage systems)
- Issues **outside** Southern Water's control:
  - **Road run-off**
  - **Agricultural run-off**
- Assurance was given that all reports would be investigated.

### Internal Drainage Board (IDB)

- **Rob Monje**, IDB Engineer Clerk, explained that the IDB **does not directly control seawater quality** but manages significant water resources in the Marsh.
- Stated that identifying pollution sources is **complex**.
- Highlighted that **very little water is released from the Marsh during summer**, questioning the link between drainage and seawater pollution.

### Leader of the District Council – Jim Martin

- Acknowledged the **dedication of agencies** but emphasised the **lack of a confirmed pollution source**.
- Expressed concern that **sewage discharges from Hythe** appear to correlate with high pollution readings.
- **Over 1,600 discharges** occurred last year; **330 discharges** recorded over winter.
- Despite scientific explanations, he remains unconvinced that discharges do not affect water quality.

### **Kent County Councillor – Tony Hills**

- Suggested **closer collaboration between agencies**.
- Noted that **climate change and rising sea temperatures** may be factors.
- Called for more **analysis of pollution flows in Hythe Bay**.
- Raised concerns about the **health impacts of pollution**.

### **District Councillor – Tony Cooper**

- Submitted a **letter from MP Tony Vaughan** for inclusion (**Appendix 3**).
- 

### **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

1. **Q: Where can I access Southern Water's data?**
  - It was confirmed that this can be shared and should be easily obtainable.
2. **Q: Is there a correlation between hospital admissions and seawater quality?**
3. **Q: Why has action taken so long since issues were first noted in 2019?**
  - It was explained that the usual pollution sources (e.g., bird faeces) have always existed, but the cause of the decline remains unidentified.
4. **Q: To OfWat – What are your powers to set timescales for improvements?**
5. **Q: Where has the allocated investment gone?**
  - **£240 billion** has been invested since privatisation.
  - Leakage reduced by **40%**, and drinking water quality has improved.
6. **Q: Is there a link between cruise liner discharges and pollution?**
  - **No**; discharges from vessels are not permitted.
7. **Q: Does the Environment Agency have sufficient resources?**
  - **Yes**, the EA confirmed they are fully resourced.
8. **Q: Why is testing only conducted between May and September?**
  - **Legal requirement**; a review is ongoing to enable year-round testing.
9. **Q: Will an independent expert assess the link between sewage discharges and pollution?**
  - **Yes**, Southern Water will engage an independent expert.
10. **Q: Can funding be secured for year-round water testing?**
  - **No response was heard.**
11. **Q: How does E. coli in sediment affect readings?**
  - **No response was heard.**

12. **Q: Can real-time water quality data be made available?**

- **Difficult due to testing constraints.** Experimental buoys are being trialed but have inconsistent results.

13. **Q: What happened to Ultra Violet (UV) water treatment?**

- Some confusion remains; **New Romney uses UV, but it's unclear if Hythe does.**

14. **Q: Where did the penalties against Southern Water go?**

- **£120 million refunded to customers; a portion went to The Treasury.**

15. **Q: Are treatment plants sufficient for increasing environmental changes?**

- Southern Water confirmed **future upgrades** are planned.

16. **Q: What are the chances of Dymchurch Beach improving from "poor"?**

- A move from "poor" to "sufficient" is possible but **not guaranteed.**
- The EA's **Applied Step Change** procedure could accelerate improvement.

17. **Q: Is routine testing done across The Marsh?**

- **Not regularly, but concerns can be reported to Southern Water.**

18. **Q: Why is investment not prioritised in high-need areas?**

- 90% of bills are **targeted by the EA and Government.**

19. **Q: Can Southern Water share the independent modeller's report on waste flow?**

- **Yes,** they will provide additional information.

20. **Q: How much data is publicly available?**

- **All data is available via the EA and Southern Water websites.**

---

**Closing Statement by Chair**

The Chair **emphasised the need for proactive rather than reactive measures** and **ongoing communication** among all agencies.

---