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Monday, 12th February, 2024

To Steve Barclay, Secretary of State, DEFRA and Phillip Duffy, CEO, Environment Agency,

On behalf of the Test & Itchen Association (TIA), the Hampshire River Keepers Association (HRKA), Activist Anglers and fishery members of the Angling Trust and Fish Legal, we are writing to express profound concerns about recent issues at Chilbolton and Longparish involving Southern Water.

Collectively we are deeply troubled by Southern Water's plans to over-pump and discharge screened but untreated sewage wastewater into the River Test. Our concerns are not only about the impact of over-pumping on water quality but also the fact that over-pumping has the potential to mobility sediment which could smother salmon and trout redds.

The River Test is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, an internationally renowned natural resource, and a critical habitat for wildlife, including trout and endangered Atlantic salmon. The river also provides huge economic benefits to local communities through recreational fishing, tourism, hospitality, and retail as well as many other industries and jobs that rely on good quantities of clean water in the Test. Anglers and riverkeepers are the strongest voices for our rivers and without the prompt actions of the TIA, HRKA, the local community, and concerned anglers in bringing the matter to wide public attention, it seems Southern Water would have proceeded to discharge sewage into this sensitive ecosystem at a crucial time in the game fish spawning season.

As Southern Water's CEO now admits this plan was "a mistake", it is clear there are very serious governance questions that need to be urgently addressed. We are also extremely concerned that Southern Water is more widely using this practice. It has been confirmed that over-pumping has also been occurring at Appleshaw, and Penton Mewsey - into another smaller chalk stream, the river Anton. TIA, HRKA, Activist Anglers, the Angling Trust, and Fish Legal seek urgent answers, clarifications, and information as follows:

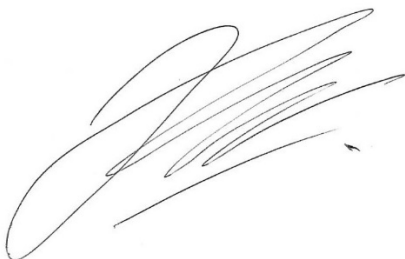
1. It is not immediately clear on what lawful basis Southern Water's over-pumping operations at Chilbolton and Longparish are permitted. Please therefore provide details of the authorisations, permissions and/or regulatory position statement relied upon by Southern Water for its planned over-pumping operations at Chilbolton and Longparish.

2. Please provide the supporting environmental assessments submitted by Southern Water to secure prior approval for its over-pumping operations.
3. Please confirm how the proposed over-pumping locations on the river are selected, what criteria are used for their selection, and whether fishery interests are consulted on the location of planned operations before they are approved by either (or both) the Environment Agency or Natural England.
4. Infiltration into the sewer network in the Test catchment has been an issue for many years. Please provide details of how DEFRA and the Environment Agency ensure that Southern Water's next five-year business plan will address infiltration in the Test and Itchen catchment to remove the need for over-pumping.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to a detailed response addressing these concerns. Separately, we will be contacting the EFRA Commons Select Committee to investigate the situation.

Sincerely,

Paul Vignaux, Executive Director, Test & Itchen Association
Peter Farrow, Secretary, Hampshire River Keepers Association
Jim Murray, Founder, Activist Anglers
Penelope Gane, Head of Practice, Fish Legal
Signed, Jamie Cook, CEO, Angling Trust and Fish Legal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jamie Cook', written in a cursive style.