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Date: 27 October 2021

CC. Toby Willison, Director of Environment and Corporate Affairs

Dear Ian McAulay

The impact of Southern and South East storm drainage systems and water treatment on the visitor economy

We, the South East Destination Alliance, are writing to you as a collective of some of the South and South East's most important visitor destinations. We represent a £12 billion visitor economy, working with accommodation providers, visitor attractions, hospitality, and leisure providers of all sizes to promote the performance and growth of the industry. A full list of the Alliance members can be viewed [here](#).

We have become increasingly alarmed that this visitor economy, particularly in coastal areas, is being severely impacted by Southern Water's practice of releasing untreated waste into rivers and coastal waters when infrastructure capacity is extended during storm conditions. We understand that there were as many as 174 such releases per 10,000km of untreated waste water in 2019.

Managing the direct impacts of Southern Water's practices on our visitor economies has become a priority for destinations across the South and South East and are an unwelcome additional pressure at a time when the industry is trying to recover from the biggest challenges it has faced in living memory. As a collective of key destinations, we understand the pressures on pumping stations and that they can be overwhelmed in storm conditions. However, our understanding is that overflows are intended to be used only in extreme weather to relieve pressure on the sewage system. The frequency of storms caused by climate change coupled with extensive planned development across the South East, suggests that the emergency provision of releasing waste water and sewage into the sea will only become more common unless Southern Water changes its practices and invests sufficiently in building capacity.

To put these impacts into context, the South East coastal visitor economy alone in a normal year is worth over £6 billion to the wider South East economy. Each waste water and sewage dump into the sea and beach area not only has severe consequences for public health and coastal marine life, it is damaging to the reputation of our coastal destinations and is thus hugely detrimental to the visitor economy and the hundreds of thousands of jobs it supports. Businesses experience an immediate and long-term loss of income. Each cancelled day visit to a coastal destination by a family of 4 equates to, on average, £144: each cancelled overnight stay from a family of 4 on average equates to £788. To lose just one family holiday for each notification to a destination in 2019 equates to over £137,000 ... the real cost probably extends to many millions as a direct result of the irresponsible practices of Southern Water.

In 2019 Southern Water issued 174 notifications, the highest number across the country (in 2020 Southern Water failed to notify of many, presumably because the number was even higher).

We are aware that Southern Water is currently having direct discussions with many of the destinations that are directly affected following each notification. However, each discussion is happening discreetly and limited to each individual local authority. With this in mind, as a collective, we have two key asks of Southern Water:-

1. That Southern Water join a destination round table meeting with the purpose of explaining to all, how you are moving forward to swiftly manage current systems, minimise discharges and compensate those affected.
2. The facilitation, through this South East destination collective, of regular engagement, communication, transparency, and a planned approach to managing the negative impacts on our visitor economy.

We welcome your engagement and earliest response to this request, on the following details; fdownnton@tourismse.com, 07932 248627.

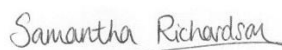
Yours sincerely,



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Chair
Destination Alliance
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SOUTH EAST



Fran Downton
Chief Executive
TOURISM
SOUTH EAST



Samantha Richardson
Academy Director
National Coastal Academy





Managing Director
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Will Myles



Jo Williams
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