Private ownership 'not the answer' to clean up southern water

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Weak regulation of private water companies has failed, and they should be taken in house to give the system the badly needed investment our water systems

GMB, the union for water workers, has criticised the sale of Southern Water to foreign investors - claiming that the new owners won't bring the commitment and investment needed to flush out the problems in the Southern Water.

Australian infrastructure bank Macquarie has taken a majority stake in Southern Water for more than £1bn.

Southern Water supplies water and treats sewage for around 4.7m people in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

In July the company was <ins>fined a record £90m</ins> for deliberately dumping between 16 and 21 billions of litres of raw sewage into protected seas over several years to avoid costs and penalties.

That was on top of an earlier dispute in 2019, where <ins>Southern Water</ins> agreed to <ins>pay a record £126m</ins> in fines and payments to customers for "serious failures" in its sewage treatment works and for deliberately misreporting its performance, while Thames water have also received recent fines.

A GMB investigation showed the nine privatised water company shareholders made more than £6.8 billion in just five years, while 2.4 billion litres of water was wasted through leaks every single day in England.

Gary Carter, GMB National Officer, said:

"Southern Water has failed, and regulation of the water sector is weak and just not working.

"Whilst far away private owners have pocketed billions of pounds that should have been used to maintain our water systems; our beaches, rivers and oceans have been poisoned to give them a few extra quid.

"Swapping private owners won't bring the investment and commitment to the environment required to flush out the problems that face our water system.

"The waters in the South East need cleaning up and it's time to bring back the tap into public ownership, where the needs of local customers and Southern Waters employees are out first."