

Date: 13 November 2025



Lawrence Gosden  
Chief Executive  
Southern Water

**Lorna Ford**  
**Chief Executive**

Town Hall  
Bexhill-on-Sea  
East Sussex  
TN39 3JX

*By email*

Dear Lawrence

**Ref: Bio-bead Pollution at Camber Sands**

As you are aware, Rother district has experienced a major pollution incident along its shoreline since early November 2025. Millions of bio-beads have been deposited on our beaches following an incident linked to Southern Water's Eastbourne Wastewater Treatment Works. We understand that tonnes of bio-beads were released from Eastbourne on 23 October 2025 and the release was caused by a screening filter failure during heavy rainfall.

Rother District Council has several urgent questions for Southern Water:

1. What was the exact date, approximate time, and duration of the release from Eastbourne Wastewater Treatment Works?
2. Why was there no monitoring of the volume of bio-beads released?
3. When did Southern Water first become aware of the release, and how was this identified?
4. Why were Rother District Council and neighbouring councils not informed of this release and its potential hazards at the time it occurred? (Rother officers first observed bio-beads on the beach late on Tuesday 4 November 2025.)
5. Why did Southern Water delay acknowledging responsibility once the pollution at Camber Sands became public?

Our officers have worked tirelessly with volunteers to collect as many bio-beads as possible. We have engaged Nurdle, a specialist company, whose machine can sift and vacuum bio-beads, albeit with limited capacity. While we appreciate the support Southern Water has provided through volunteers, we have requested assistance with larger mechanical equipment to accelerate the clean-up. We understand Southern Water does not currently have such equipment.

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Given that bio-bead pollution is a known issue in Cornwall, the English Channel, and elsewhere, and that smaller leaks appear to occur regularly, we ask:

6. Why does Southern Water, which uses millions of bio-beads in its treatment works, not have appropriate equipment ready for deployment in incidents like this?

The council has been advised that effective removal requires mechanical equipment after spring tides, and that full clean-up may take many months. This presents significant environmental concerns, potential impacts on tourism and the local economy and financial implications for the council, including staff time and equipment costs.

7. What steps will Southern Water take to reimburse these costs, which may continue into winter 2026 and possibly 2027?
8. In light of growing public concern about plastics in the environment. What plans does Southern Water have to phase out the use of plastic bio-beads and replace them with a safer alternative?

We believe this incident may affect beaches from Eastbourne to Dungeness, though shingle beaches may mask the impact.

9. What action is Southern Water taking to assess and clean other affected beaches along the shoreline and to map the areas impacted?

We are also concerned about potentially misleading communications, particularly regarding the volume of bio-beads collected at Camber Sands on Monday 10 November. For clarity: Nurdle informed us they collected approximately 70% of the bio-beads deposited on the two-mile stretch of beach, which is what their machine could handle, leaving 30% still on the beach and millions more in the sea awaiting deposition. Please ensure all public statements accurately reflect this situation.

Finally, we request that Southern Water commission an **independent** investigation immediately, to determine what went wrong, how similar incidents can be prevented, and what measures will be implemented across all sites using bio-beads.

We look forward to receiving your detailed responses as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Lorna Ford  
Chief Executive



Cllr Doug Oliver  
Leader