



Dear Colleague,

I am writing on behalf of GMB London Region following concerns raised by members at a recent meeting of the GMB Regional Council.

The meeting was attended by a packed hall of members, who heard from guest speakers Cliff Roney and Feargal Sharkey. Cliff is a former Thames Water employee who featured in the Channel 4 docuseries *Dirty Business*, and Feargal, the well-known water campaigner, gave detailed and compelling accounts of the serious challenges facing the water industry, the effectiveness of its regulation, and the deteriorating condition of rivers across England and Wales.

These issues matter deeply to households, workers, our members and communities in London and far beyond. In that context, I am writing to seek your views and clarification on a number of important points.

A wide range of concerns were discussed at the meeting, including long term trends in river pollution, sewage discharges, the resilience of water infrastructure and the effectiveness of regulatory oversight. Both speakers, alongside our members working in the industry, pointed to publicly available data and reporting which suggest that large-scale sewage discharges into waterways remain an ongoing and serious problem.

Environment Agency data continues to show widespread pollution and significant numbers of discharge incidents across the country. We believe there are real and pressing concerns about the frequency of these spill events and the impact they are having on ecosystems, public health and the use of rivers and coastal waters by the public.

There are also longstanding concerns about compliance with environmental regulations, including the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations and standards flowing from the Water Framework Directive. Greater clarity is needed on how compliance is measured, how enforcement decisions are reached and what action is taken where breaches occur, including in cases of unlawful sewage releases.

Our members have also expressed frustration at the way Ofwat exercises its regulatory powers, particularly where water companies appear not to be meeting their statutory obligations. We would welcome a clearer understanding of how enforcement decisions are made and what mechanisms exist to ensure companies are held to the environmental and operational standards expected of them. Concerns have also been raised, including in media reporting such as a Guardian special report, about the closeness of relationships between Ofwat, water companies and consultancy firms operating across both.

Regional Secretary: Warren Kenny

GMB London Region, John Cope House, 152 Brent St, Hendon, NW4 2DP Tel: 020 8202 8272

www.gmb.org.uk/join  /GMB London Region  @GMBLondonRegion  @gmbldondonregion

www.gmbldondon.org.uk

UNIONLINE
YOUR TRADE UNION LAW FIRM
0300 333 0303
www.unionline.co.uk

In addition, GMB wishes to raise concerns about the financial structures of some water companies, including the build-up of substantial debt and the implications this may have for customers, workers and the long-term resilience of critical infrastructure. We believe there should be far greater scrutiny of how regulators assess financial risk and how the public interest is protected.

We remain hopeful that changes to water legislation and regulation can address some of the shortcomings of the current framework. In light of these concerns, we would be grateful for your response to the following questions:

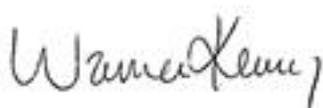
- How will current and future legislation ensure strong oversight of sewage discharges and protect river and coastal water quality?
- What steps are being taken to ensure that Ofwat is able to exercise its regulatory powers effectively in relation to performance, compliance, and enforcement?
- How does the Government plan to maintain the resilience and reliability of water infrastructure in London and the East, particularly during periods of high demand or system failure?
- What assurances can be given to customers and workers affected by the financial instability reported in parts of the sector?
- How will the Government ensure transparency around any proposed changes to environmental directives or water sector regulatory frameworks?

Our members also stressed the importance of ensuring that councillors and other local representatives are engaged in ongoing discussions, as many are themselves customers of Thames Water or other regional providers. We will continue to work with them to raise awareness of the issues affecting their communities.

Finally, we would like to encourage you to attend a drop-in session hosted by the Sewage Campaign Network in Portcullis House, Room U, today (Tuesday 17 March) from 1pm. Those attending will include individuals involved in Channel 4's recent exposé on water companies, *Dirty Business*, alongside Cliff Roney and Feargal Sharkey.

We would welcome any information or insight you can provide and look forward to your response.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Warren Kenny'.

Warren Kenny
Regional Secretary
GMB London Region