# Water executives face scrutiny over pollution and pay amid legislative changes



During a session of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Louise Beardmore, the chief executive of United Utilities, acknowledged the company's inadequacies in addressing sewage dumping. This admission comes after the latest government data revealed that United Utilities was responsible for the highest level of pollution among water providers in England in 2023, discharging sewage into the country’s waterways for 3.6 million hours throughout the year.

Beardmore's comments were made to Members of Parliament (MPs) as she defended her substantial salary package, which totals £1.4 million, including a bonus of £420,000. She stated, “I’m very alive, as is the board, on the focus of executive remuneration. Two-thirds of my remuneration is regarding outcomes for customers and the environment. And shareholders are entirely paying for that, it is not passed over to customers in terms of customer bills.” However, she also conceded, “Our performance isn’t good enough … we have one of the highest rates of internal sewer flooding across the country.”

The chief executive attributed the increased pollution levels partly to the installation of additional monitoring equipment designed to measure sewage spills, as well as the notably wet conditions experienced in 2023. This acknowledgment comes at a time when United Utilities plans to raise consumer bills by 32% over the next five years, with these funds earmarked for a £13.7 billion investment plan across the region from 2025 to 2030.

The committee also heard from Liv Garfield, the chief executive of Severn Trent Water, who expressed her deep disappointment with the rise in pollution associated with her company. Garfield, the highest-paid water CEO in the country, was recently awarded a £3.2 million pay package, which included a £584,000 bonus, despite the company facing a £2 million fine for discharging 260 million litres of sewage into the River Trent. She remarked, “I am committed to get to zero dry-day spills,” indicating a strong intent to mitigate the issue. Garfield attributed the sewage problems to the extensive length of pipes under Severn Trent’s management and the increasing demands posed by climate change, stating, “We need to get better at keeping up with climate change.”

The discussions are set against a backdrop of recent legislative changes, specifically the water (special measures) bill, which allows the regulator to curb bonuses for executives at polluting water companies. In response to this development, Garfield indicated her support for legislative oversight, noting, “I love the fact we live in a nation where legislation arrives and we fall in line with it. I welcome all legislation that comes out of these hallowed halls.”

As both leaders faced scrutiny regarding their performance and financial rewards, the session underscored the significant concerns surrounding water pollution in the UK and the accountability of its top executives.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://theweek.com/environment/how-british-lakes-and-rivers-became-sewage-dumps> - This article supports the claim that United Utilities has been involved in illegal sewage dumping, specifically into Lake Windermere, highlighting the company's environmental permit breaches.
* <https://www.morningstar.co.uk/uk/news/AN_1729172178806184800/united-utilities-accused-of-illegally-dumping-sewage-into-windermere.aspx> - This source corroborates the illegal dumping of sewage by United Utilities into Windermere, emphasizing the failure to report significant amounts of pollution to regulators.
* <https://goodlawproject.org/peak-flow-water-companies-dump-more-sewage-than-ever/> - This article provides data on the extensive sewage discharges by water companies in England, including United Utilities, which had the highest number of hours of discharges in 2023.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the original context for the discussion about United Utilities and Severn Trent Water executives' comments on sewage dumping and executive remuneration.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/> - This link to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee supports the context of the session where Louise Beardmore and Liv Garfield made their statements.