

Water Efficiency Strategy for the UK

A Summary





Why do we need a strategy?

Climate change and population growth are increasing pressures on water resources in the UK. A recent Water UK report identified that we are facing longer, more frequent droughts - and will face more acute droughts in future than previously thought, right across the UK. Significant innovation and increased water efficiency have an essential role to play in helping ensure we have enough water for people, the economy and the environment now and in the future. We need to tackle water and fuel poverty - and water efficiency cuts bills and energy use. It's also central to moving to a more customer-led water sector which can keep up with other sectors.

There is already a great deal of excellent water efficiency work involving a range of actors being undertaken across the UK - through setting out focussed recommendations and actions, this strategy is providing a framework via which we can drive even more ambitious water efficiency action and ensure future work is focussed on key areas.

The strategy was developed in consultation with the water sector - including Waterwise supporters and the Water UK-supported steering group. It sets out a blueprint to deliver a vision of a UK in which all people, homes and businesses are water-efficient, and where water is used wisely, every day, everywhere.



How far are we from best practice?

Water consumption per person varies across the UK and even within water company regions. On average in England and Wales we use 140 litres per person per day - 150 in Scotland and 145 in Northern Ireland. Some great work is happening already, but an international assessment released in May 2016 ranked London 34, Birmingham 28, and Manchester 26 out of 50 major cities for water efficiency (Copenhagen ranked first).

The strategy sets out recommendations and actions to help the UK reduce water consumption. These include reviewing approaches to per capita consumption and using this to inform how demand management indicators are used in Ofwat's outcome delivery incentive mechanism for the 2019 water company periodic review.





Water, people and communities

Water efficiency requires people and communities to get on board in one way or another. The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions to support behaviour change and greater customer engagement and participation linked to water efficiency. These include setting up a Water Efficiency and Customer Participation Leadership Group; undertaking more research on developing a water-saving culture and a national water efficiency communication platform; and increasing the scale and quality of integrated behaviour change and home retrofitting and metering programmes.



Water Wise Cities - improving water efficiency in our urban environment



There are many ways in which we can save water in our cities, towns, homes and businesses - new and old. The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions to progress water-efficient homes and buildings - including planners requiring a 100 litre per person per day water efficiency standard in new homes; and developers being incentivised to install water-efficient devices via reduced or zero connection charges from water companies. Partnership approaches to refurbishing homes, including with social housing, and joining-up water and energy efficiency programmes form key actions.





Products and labelling

Innovative water-efficient products are being developed all the time, but customers aren't always aware of them. An effective water labelling scheme is essential for transforming the market so that consumers can be informed about and buy water-efficient devices. The European Water Label and the Waterwise Checkmark currently apply to products in the UK, but these aren't universal to all stores and all water-using products.

The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions to inform consumer choice on water-efficient products for use in homes and buildings. These include supporting product innovation and smart metering; addressing issues with current products such as the 4% of toilets leaking on average 215 litres per day; and updating the Waterwise/ Bathroom Manufacturers Association Water Calculator website to reflect changes to water efficiency standards and to support incentive schemes on developer charges.



Water company delivery and regulation

Governments and regulators across the UK have made it clear they want to see increased water efficiency in water company planning and investment. Ofwat needs to ensure it reflects its high ambition on water efficiency in its operational work for PR19.

The Blueprint for Water coalition has called for a 'water neutral' PR19, where companies ensure there is no overall increase in the amount of water abstracted from rivers and groundwater despite increases in population and climate change. Water efficiency will be essential to this.

The UK is one of the few countries in the developed world not to have either full water metering or a clear programme to implement universal metering. At present 50% of households in England and Wales are metered (and very few in Scotland and Northern Ireland): this is projected to increase to around two thirds by 2020 - all other customers pay a set amount and use as much as we like.

The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions for water companies and regulators to drive more ambitious water efficiency. Smart meters can help engage customers in wasting less water and roll out should be scaled up; water companies need to be free to introduce metering for all their customers even when not in areas of water stress; and targets around water consumption should form part of the rewards and penalties programme water companies agree with their customers and Ofwat for 2020 to 2025.





Water efficiency in retail competition

Through retail competition for water, business customers are free to change from their existing monopoly water company to another water supplier – now the case in Scotland and England. The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions for monitoring retail competition and providing support to retailers to ensure water efficiency is offered and mainstreamed. This includes working with stakeholders to clarify market codes and market operation in relation to water efficiency and water resources planning, to ensure large scale non-domestic water efficiency can be delivered.



Integrated water management and resilient infrastructure

Water efficiency shouldn't happen in isolation as this can miss the added benefits of tackling other pressures such as drainage and flooding.

The strategy sets out key recommendations and actions for combining water efficiency with sustainable drainage programmes; opportunities for distributed infrastructure; and innovations based on adoption of wide-scale big data analysis and open data.



Next Steps

A Water UK-supported Water Efficiency Strategy Steering Group has been formed to deliver against the actions in the Waterwise strategy. Waterwise will report annually on progress and review the strategy in 5 years time.



waterwise



Waterwise, 180 Piccadilly, London,
United Kingdom, W1J 9HF

T: 044 (0)207 917 2826
www.waterwise.org.uk

Waterwise is grateful for the continued funding of its gold, silver and bronze supporters, which enables us to be thought leaders, including in developing this strategy.

