



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

By Email
Date: 11 January 2023

Dear [Regional Group Chairs],

A new round of Regional Planning – joint letter

We (Defra, the Environment Agency and Ofwat) are writing to confirm that we expect regional groups to maintain and prepare regional water resources plans for future planning rounds.

Significant progress has been made by regional groups' planning of resilient water supplies in England up to 2050 and beyond¹. The focus on working beyond company boundaries, optimising water supply solutions, engaging other sectors in water resources planning, and working collaboratively on environmental improvement must continue and be built upon.

We believe that regional water resources groups should be front and centre in creating a secure and sustainable future for England's waters in the face of the climate and biodiversity emergency. Regional groups should show strong leadership in a more holistic and integrated approach to water management, exploring opportunities to deliver cross sector mutual benefits. In doing so regional groups must be adequately resourced and have appropriate governance. Key outcomes from the next round of regional plans will be:

- **Greater water supply resilience** with
 - new infrastructure that is delivered when required and creates the greatest long term benefits for society and the environment
 - improved resilience to drought among water using sectors beyond public water supply
- **Improved water efficiency and demand management** by
 - creating plans that incorporate technologies and efficient practices that are employed to increase water efficiency and reduce leakage. Plans should identify, use and champion best practice at many levels and across sectors
 - reducing the risk associated with planned water efficiency not being achieved and supporting targets across business and household water users being met.
- **Environmental protection**, improvement and increased resilience are secured through ambitious environmental planning which
 - ensures the environment is integral to planning future water needs, with improvements prioritised and agreed collaboratively
 - addresses environmental pressures proactively before they become a problem and makes sure solutions are sustainable and shaped by a broad understanding of environmental impacts.
- **Greater value for money**, efficient costs and greater benefits are achieved by
 - developing robust evidence on water needs and the need for infrastructure

¹ West Country Water Resources (WCWR) is, at the time of writing, yet to publish its draft plan.

- scoping a broad and innovative range of options for improving public water supply resilience, including new transfers, cross-company options, cross-sector options developed with third parties and strategic resources
- appraising those options fairly and developing optimal adaptive programmes with appropriate sensitivity testing
- **Effective regional engagement** through
 - maintaining a strategic overview of regional priorities and activities
 - ensuring the public and stakeholders, such as local planning authorities and catchment partnerships, are engaged and inform the plans
 - ensuring regional consideration and representation within national strategic projects

Where regional plans affect Wales then Welsh legislation requirements must be fully considered. For water companies wholly or mainly in Wales and under Welsh Government governance you will need to engage with both NRW and the Welsh Government.

Alongside regional groups and the water industry, government and regulators will continue to co-ordinate and lead the changing face of water resources planning in England. Specifically, over the coming years we plan to:

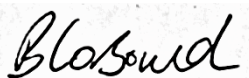
- Continue our open and collaborative approach to develop the refreshed National Framework for water resources, which aims to enhance multi-sector planning alongside improvements in public water supply planning delivered by regional plans
- Continue the Regulators Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID)
- Use the directional powers of section 78 of the Environment Act (2021) to improve the regional planning process
- Review strategic governance arrangements, recognising the continued need for an independent chair.
- Put in place policies and regulation to support demand management.
- Look at cross sector and boundary issues and engage with NRW and the Welsh Government in respect to their views for including parts of Wales within future regional plans.

We hope you will welcome the confirmation in this letter that there will be another round of regional plans, and we look forward to working constructively with you to ensure we have secure and well-planned water resources in England.

Yours sincerely



Richard Thompson
Deputy Director
Water Management and
Investment
Environment Agency



Beth Corbould
Director
Policy and Outcomes
Ofwat



Davide Minotti
Deputy Director
Water Services
Defra

CC
Natalie Hall, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Tracy Dunford, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Laura Moss, Drinking Water Inspectorate
Nicholas Adjei, Drinking Water Inspectorate
Kat Broadhead, Natural England