

Key commitments:

Using water wisely

We must use water more efficiently and be careful to avoid pollution in using our drains. We will encourage and incentivise water efficiency measures, for example under the Green Deal. We will encourage voluntary water efficiency labelling to enable customers to choose more efficient products.

We will also collaborate on a campaign to save water and protect the environment, working with water companies, regulators and customers to raise awareness of the connection between how we use water and the quality of our rivers.

Delivering the White Paper

We will produce a new strategic policy statement for Ofwat and revise our social and environmental guidance to reflect the priorities in this White Paper. We will publish a draft Water Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny in early 2012 and introduce a Water Bill as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

6.1 In previous chapters we have discussed how water companies might use water more wisely, might plan and invest in new and refurbished infrastructure, respond to customers' wishes better through the threat of competition and protect the more vulnerable members of society unable to afford their water bills, while making those simply unwilling pay their share. But it cannot just be the water companies, their regulators and Government who act. We all have a responsibility to use our most precious of resources wisely.

6.2 If we do not play our part in reducing water demand, in reducing pollution in our rivers and streams, and in reducing the flood risk from surface run-off from our driveways and gardens, we pay. We pay as competing demands force the price of water up; we pay for the new infrastructure needed to supply water; we pay to repair damage from sewer and surface water flooding; and we pay for the treatment processes needed to clean our water to a drinkable standard. We also face other costs; we must find space for new reservoirs and our rivers and their wildlife will be under greater pressure.

6.3 So if we save water, reduce the pollution going down our drains and if we invest in sustainable drainage systems, we are not only helping society and the natural environment – we are helping ourselves.

6.4 This presents us with some hard choices. Building new infrastructure is expensive, and as water customers we will all pay for it through our bills. New reservoirs may well be opposed fiercely by the communities affected. If we use less water we reduce our need for new storage capacity and the costs we face. As a country we need to decide how to balance our need for water with protection of the environment, and reach a collective judgment on the resources and standards of supply we want – and are prepared to pay for – in the future. Currently, we build capacity in the system to try to meet peak demand in the summer and not have hosepipe bans when we want to water our gardens, fill pools and wash cars. Typically, most water companies plan for temporary restrictions once every 10-20 years. Maintaining these service standards will cost more than reducing our peak consumption of water or choosing to accept more frequent water restrictions.