Who is this briefing aimed at?

This briefing is aimed at all those with an interest in water resources management, including:

- Water companies
- Environmental groups
- Farmers and local businesses
- Regional development agencies
- Regional consumer groups
- Local government

What is happening?

We have developed a new water resources strategy to replace the previous strategy published in 2001.

It’s our job to manage water resources throughout England and Wales and to plan how to use them in a sustainable way both now and in the future.

The new water resources strategy sets out how we believe water resources should be managed over the coming decades so that water can be abstracted and used in a sustainable manner, in the face of increasing pressure and uncertainty on water resources.

Why do we need a new water resources strategy?

Since our last strategy in 2001, thinking has progressed, new information is available and additional pressures have surfaced. Changes since 2001 include:

- new legislation e.g. the Water Act 2003;
- Government policy in England is now more favourable towards water metering;
- new information is known about water resources availability through the completion of Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies;
- population and water demand forecasts have been revised;
- there is more focus on climate change and a political will to drive down greenhouse gas emissions.

Because of these changes, we launched a new Water resources strategy for England and Wales at the end of March 2009, and are developing a separate strategy for Wales which will be available in the coming months.

What is the water resources strategy?

The water resource strategy includes a series of actions that we believe need to be taken to deliver a secure water supply and to safeguard the environment in the future. The strategy will enable us to reconcile the sometimes conflicting needs for
water, and manage water resources so that there is enough water for people and the environment in the decades to come.

The strategy aims for:

- adaptation to and mitigation of climate change;
- a better water environment;
- sustainable planning and management of water resources;
- people valuing water and the water environment.

**Why do we need a water resources strategy?**

Why is it good for the Environment Agency?

- It incorporates stakeholder views, giving us credibility;
- It provides clarity on our positions and greater consistency;
- It is an integrated strategy, covering a broad range of our responsibilities;
- It provides the framework for local action;
- The process of delivering a new strategy has developed our thinking as an organisation.

Why is it good for abstractors and users of water whom we regulate and influence?

- It provides information on future water resources which will enable businesses to make more informed choices and decisions;
- It provides clarity on what we expect from those we regulate and influence;
- It provides a consistent, national approach to water resources allowing for targeted effort where it is required;
- It applies the twin track and risk based principles in what we do;
- It allows for greater flexibility in water resource management;
- Views and comments from businesses have been taken into account.

Why is it good for the environment?

- It provides an informed and realistic look at possible outcomes for the environment and attempts to answer the ‘difficult’ questions;
- It enables water and the water environment to be better valued;
- It supports building resilience into the environment;
- It provides for a flexible system to respond to environmental challenges;
- It is an integrated approach.

**What does it cover?**

The strategy sets out how we believe water resources should be managed in the long term. It looks to 2050 and beyond so that we can consider the impacts of climate change.

It looks at the measures that we believe are necessary for all sectors of abstraction and use, in order to adapt to the uncertainties of climate change, and the actions we can take to help mitigate against these effects. The actions will help us ensure that both water supplies and the environment are safeguarded in the future.
How will the strategy be implemented?

**Regional action plans**
We have not produced specific regional water resources strategies. Instead regional action plans are being developed from the national actions to show how they will be translated locally. River Basin Management Plans and water company Water Resources Management Plans will be the route where many of these actions are delivered. This will allow a targeted approach to water resources management and will allow the different priorities and pressures to be reflected locally.

**Regional implementation group**
We have set up a regional implementation group with a representative from each Environment Agency region. This group is overseeing the development of the regional action plans.

How was the Strategy developed?

**Water Resources Strategy Consultation**
During 2007 we published a consultation ‘Water for people and the Environment: Developing our water resources strategy for England and Wales’ on the development of our water resources strategy. A summary of consultation responses was produced. Both documents are available on the water resources strategy internet pages.

**Strategy modules**
Throughout the development of the strategy we published a series of modules covering some of the major water resources issues. These modules provide much of the evidence and supporting information that feeds into the strategy.

**Water Resources in the South East of England**
In October 2007 we published our module Water Resources in the South East. The purpose of this module was to encourage water companies to consider the ‘art of the possible’ in terms of demand management. The launch of this document was followed by a workshop which gave those involved in managing water resources in the south east and in similarly stressed areas an opportunity to contribute to the debate. The summary ‘Water for the future – Managing water in the South East of England’ has been published to the internet.

**Carbon and energy use in water resources**
This module considered the carbon emissions associated with different water supply and demand management options and how, as a regulator, we could play a role in helping water companies reduce their emissions. A summary ‘The greenhouse gas implications of future water resources options’ has been published to the internet.

**Allocation of water resources**
The purpose of this module was to help us identify potential improvements to the abstraction licensing system to help obtain access to water resources in the future, whilst retaining environmental protection. We investigated potential alternative models for water resources allocation which may be necessary to manage water resources in the future. We published the final report ‘Alternative ways to allocate water’ and a technical summary of work on this module during February 2009.
**Water Resources in 2050**
By considering how future demands, environmental needs and resources may change by 2050, this module has been used to analyse whether the strategy actions will be flexible enough to cope with a range of potential future scenarios. A science summary 'Climate change and river flows in the 2050s' has been produced and is available on our external publications catalogue on the internet. We have also published a Demand for water in the 2050s summary document on the internet.

**Governance, policy and legislation for water resources**
This module considers whether the organisational and legislative aspects of water resources management will be appropriate for the future. Early thinking in this area has helped us to provide our response to the All Party Parliamentary Water Group’s inquiry into the water industry. We have conducted an international comparison of water resources management in developed countries. This work also looks at what we can do differently in the short term with our existing powers. The summary report Governance, policy and legislation for water resources has also been published on the internet.

**State of the water resources environment – current state and future pressures**
This module identified the current and future pressures on water resources and set the scene for the strategy. We published the State of water resources environment report in December 2008 and a copy can be found on the internet.

**Where can I get more information?**
See the Water Resource Strategy pages on our website.
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wrs

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