

Water Targets Expert Advisory Group Terms of Reference

1. Background

The Environment Bill brings about urgent and meaningful action to combat the environmental and climate crises we are facing and acts as a key vehicle for delivering the bold vision set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

An important aspect of the Environment Bill is the power to set at least one long-term, legally binding environmental target for water. We are currently considering water targets on reducing pollution from agriculture, wastewater and abandoned metal mines, and a target to reduce water demand. Setting targets will provide a strong mechanism to deliver long-term environmental outcomes. This will build upon progress towards achieving the long-term vision of the 25 Year Environment Plan and help tackle some of the serious challenges that remain.

In August 2020, we published the “Environment Bill- Environmental Targets” policy paper which sets out our roadmap for methodically developing the evidence base for targets, signals how we plan on engaging key stakeholder groups, and describes our initial thinking on possible objectives for targets which will be explored during the process.

We believe that the best way to deliver targets is through a robust, evidence-led process that seeks independent expert advice, provides a role for stakeholders and the public, as well as scrutiny from Parliament.

2. Aim and Objectives

The aim of the Water Targets Expert Advisory Group is to provide independent, expert advice to Government in relation to water targets, as required by the Environment Bill long-term target framework. Advice will be provided throughout the target-setting process when commissioned by Defra group (Core Defra and associated agencies and public bodies). Advice will be high quality, impartial and scientific. Advice will help inform Government decision making and development of robust evidence bases for targets.

2.1. Remit

In achieving these objectives, the Water Targets Expert Advisory Group will:

1. Provide guidance throughout the life cycle of evidence development, including recommending appropriate analytical methods, datasets and evidence. This is expected to be required for the following tasks:
 - Indicator development and methodologies for measurement.
 - Scenario development for exploring futures in which targets could operate.
 - Forecasting target trajectories under different scenarios.

- Assessment of target impacts, including spill overs and unintended consequences.
2. Advise on the content of final evidence outputs and interim products, such as:
 - Feasibility assessments.
 - Impact assessments.
 - Risk assessments.
 3. Provide expert judgement in evaluating target evidence potentially including;
 - The level of confidence in evidence and findings.
 - The feasibility, desirability and viability of targets under various scenarios.

The Water Targets Expert Advisory Group will not:

- Decide which targets will be set; this is a role for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- Decide policy roadmaps or pathways for the delivery of the targets.

3. Governance and operating procedures

3.1. Membership

Members will be brought together to represent a balance of relevant expertise needed to meet the Group's objectives.

Selected members reflect our desire to see diversity in experience, specialism and working background (consultancy/academic). This will include people with wide-ranging expertise and research relating to phosphorus and nutrients, water resources and water security, and environmental management.

3.2. Operating procedures

It is expected that the Water Targets Expert Advisory Group will convene every other month for two hours. The first introductory meeting will be scheduled for November 2020.

Meeting agendas and supporting papers will be sent in advance of each meeting. It is anticipated that 1 – 2 hours of preparation time would be required.

Water Targets Expert Advisory Group meetings are expected to be held via web conferencing, with the likely possibility of written correspondence in-between meetings.

Minutes of all meetings will reflect the proceedings and discussions that take place. Minutes will be recorded on a non-attributable basis except where the views need to be recorded (for example, when declaring an interest). Minutes will be circulated with meeting attendees for comment before publication.

3.3. Accountability

The Water Targets Expert Advisory Group will report, via the Chair, to Defra's Deputy Directors of the Water Quality and Water Services teams. The Secretariat function of the

Group will be carried by the Defra Water Targets team with the support of the Environmental Targets Programme team.

3.4. Outputs

The Water Targets Expert Advisory Group will advise Defra group officials on putting together the following products by September 2021:

- Indicator development and methodologies for measurement.
- Scenario development for exploring key drivers and exploring futures in which targets could operate.
- Forecasts of target trajectories under different scenarios.
- Assessment of target impacts, risks and feasibility.
- Fully evidenced target proposals, including measurable metrics, standards to be met, dates by which to be achieved and first interim milestones.

The minutes of all Water Targets Expert Advisory Group meetings will be published and available online.

3.5. Duration of Water Targets Expert Advisory Group

The expectation is that this expert group will be closed in September 2021.

4. Member specific guidance

4.1. Code of Conduct

Members of the Group must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide. All members are expected to abide by the code of conduct set out in Annex A, comprising the seven principles of public life. Terms and Conditions of appointment are at Annex B.

4.2. Register of Interests

All Water Targets Expert Advisory Group members will declare interests that are relevant to the remit of the Group. For example, a member might declare that they, or a relation of theirs:

- is part of a related environmental research group;
- is a practitioner or business owner in an industry that will be a stakeholder in environmental policy and targets; or
- is in receipt of remuneration from any companies, charities or groups that are stakeholders in environmental policy and targets.

To ensure the register is accurately maintained, members will inform the Secretariat of any changes as they occur. The Secretariat conducting these meetings will be responsible for recording these declarations and maintaining a conflicts register throughout engagement with advisors.

4.3. Claiming remuneration and travel expenses

Members may claim travel expenses (when applicable). It is acceptable for members to meet virtually in an online space. Remuneration will be paid at a rate of £39 per hour for time spent in meetings and the time needed to prepare for these meetings.

Members will be paid through Defra payroll; remuneration is treated as income and will be subject to NI and tax deductions.

4.4. Changes to these terms

These terms of reference may be amended by the Secretary of State at any time in consultation with the Water Targets Expert Advisory Group.

Annex A

The Seven Principles of Public Life

1. Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Annex B

Terms and Conditions

- Advisors must not hold any paid or high-profile posts in a political party, nor misuse information gained for personal or political gain.
- Advisors must not lobby against Government environmental target policy or conduct any lobbying in relation to environmental targets.
- Advisors must not engage in specific political activities on matters directly affecting the Environmental Targets Programme.
- Advisors must not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations.
- Advisors must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide.
- Advisors must not discuss draft plans outside the group without permission from Defra.
- Advisors must direct enquiries from the media relating to the Environmental Targets Programme towards Defra officials.
- Advisors may, in the course of their work, address conferences and seminars, or have other speaking arrangements at which the media are present. In these circumstances, members should take care to make it clear that they are speaking in a personal capacity and not as an advisor to the Environmental Targets Programme.