

Large-scale water transfers

Position statement

July 2011

Our position

- The water resources planning process ensures that water companies consider all reasonable options available to maintain the balance of supply and demand in the process of developing their final water resources management plans (WRMPs). In many cases the options available include assessing both the use of short distance transfers and better sharing of resources between water companies, as well as the use of large-scale transfers.
- Much of the current public water supply system relies on a historical infrastructure that includes some important water transfer schemes; whether as part of water companies' own systems or schemes that we own and operate.
- Water companies' existing WRMPs set out how they will provide for water supply to 2035. These plans do not currently include the need for new large-scale water transfers.
- Investigations have shown that the cost and environmental impact of large-scale transfers of water from the north of England or Wales to the south of England mean that such proposals are unlikely to be necessary to meet current forecast demand. However, both we and companies will continue to reassess the full range of options for future strategic water needs

Issues

- **Costs** - The current set of WRMP assessments have demonstrated that large-scale transfers of water to the south of England from Wales or the north of England are more expensive than the other options available to meet current forecast demand.
- **Environment** - Transferring water from one river to another may result in significant environmental effects, including damage to ecology as a result of different water quality and flow regimes, and the transfer of fish diseases and alien species. These effects could result in a risk of 'deterioration' or failure to meet 'good ecological status' or 'good ecological potential' under the Water Framework Directive.

Solutions

- The water resources planning process ensures that water companies consider all options available to maintain the balance of supply and demand through the options appraisal process. This allows large-scale water transfers to be considered against all other water supply and demand management options. The most suitable set of options is selected as a result of this assessment process based on costs, yield and environmental effects.
- Water companies will consult on their next WRMPs in 2013 providing an updated appraisal of long term needs and options for public supply up to 2040.

- Large-scale water transfers will only be progressed if they are demonstrated to be an economically and environmentally viable option to meeting a forecast water supply deficit.
- There may also be further opportunities for development of greater linkages between existing water company systems, and sharing of water resources to gain some of the same benefits expected of large-scale transfers.
- Water companies plan for droughts, and restrictions on water use in severe droughts are part of water companies' plans, as required by water resources legislation and Government policy. The occasional use of restrictions such as hosepipe bans, in line with companies drought plans, is a planned response and does not indicate that water supply in England and Wales is inadequate.
- We assess the wider needs of all water users and the environment to ensure sustainable water supply for agriculture, power generation and industry as well as public supply. Our previous work ([Environment Agency, Sept 2006](#)) has not shown the need for new large scale water transfers to meet these needs but we will continue to review future requirements and options to manage them sustainably.

Our role

The Environment Agency has a duty to secure the proper and efficient use of water resources in England and Wales.

We produce a water resources planning guideline, setting out detailed guidance and best practice methods for producing WRMPs. This includes guidance on the options appraisal process used to select the most suitable set of water supply and demand options to maintain the balance of supply and demand over the 25 year planning period. We analyse the water companies draft WRMPs and produce representations and advice to governments as part of the statutory process. Our analysis includes assessing whether the water companies have considered all the options available to maintain a sustainable balance of supply and demand.

We also assess the wider needs of all water users and the environment to ensure sustainable water supply for agriculture, power generation and industry as well as public supply.

Role of others

Water companies have a statutory duty to prepare, consult, publish and maintain a WRMP under the Water Industry Act (1991) sections 37 A to D, as amended by section 62 of the Water Act of 2003. Companies use the guidance provided by us to produce their plans. This includes guidance on how to carry out the options appraisal process.

Defra and the Welsh Government have policy responsibility for water resources in England and Wales. Water companies submit their draft WRMPs to the Secretary of State/Welsh Minister. The Secretary of State/Welsh Minister will decide whether water companies can go ahead and publish their final WRMP. The Secretary of State/Welsh Minister needs to be completely satisfied that a WRMP secures the long-term sustainable supply and demand balance for the supply of water.

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The Welsh Government expects appropriate development plans, water efficiency and local solutions to be used in the first place to meet and control expanding demand, rather than large-scale transfers of water. The Welsh Government expects new or expanded demand for Welsh water resources in England to be met only where there is a mechanism by which Wales derives real benefits based on the value of resource used.

Background

Many water resource zones receive water from beyond the zone, either through transfers from one zone's supply network to another, or because some of the zone's sources of water are outside the zone itself. We have produced an updated map showing the major water supply schemes in England and Wales. The map shows the major river, reservoir and groundwater abstractions, water transfers and regulated rivers in England and Wales. Whilst these schemes are primarily for public supply, some of them also provide water for other abstractors and to maintain the environment. This map is available on our [website](#).

Notes

- Environment Agency: Do we need large-scale water transfers for South-East England? (September 2006) (http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/grid_1464452.pdf)
- Environment Agency: Water for people and the Environment - Water resources strategy for England and Wales (March 2009). (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/GEHO0309BPKX-E-E.pdf>)
- Environment Agency: Water resources planning guideline (April 2011). (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/GEHO0411BTWD-E-E.pdf>)
- Water Act 2003, section 62: (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/37/part/3/crossheading/water-resources-management-plans>)