

Welcome from Chris Murray MBE, Independent Chair of WRSE

I would like to begin by stressing how much we value all the feedback we received during consultation on our draft regional plan for South East England earlier this year. We're also benefitting from the findings from independent research that was carried out with both household and non-household customers from across each of the 31 water resource zones in our area.



Chris Murray

Input from customers and a wide range of stakeholders has played a vital role throughout the development of our proposals, enabling us to make excellent progress in achieving our ultimate goal of delivering a plan that will secure future water supplies for customers, while protecting and enhancing the environment, and benefiting wider society.

As you can read further on in this newsletter, we will be publishing our consultation response later in the summer, followed by our revised draft plan. Along with the four other regional groups, we're very grateful to Defra for allowing us the additional time needed to complete further work on our plan, such as taking into account the 1,000 consultation responses we had. We very much look forward to sharing our Statement of Response and updated plan with you at the end of August this year. We're confident that the additional wait will be very much worth it.

As we get closer to the publication of our revised plan, I would like to thank all the

core Water Resources South East (WRSE) team, colleagues from our six member water companies and all the members of the WRSE Strategic Leadership Team for all their hard work. Without their efforts, together with the engagement and challenge we have received through our various consultations, we wouldn't have been able to produce such a robust and well-developed plan.

I was delighted to join Jean Spencer, Chair of the National Water Resources Framework steering group, and others, in updating the board of regulator Ofwat on the proposed regional plans. This included providing board members with insight into the particular challenges faced in the South East of England, and how our plan is addressing these.

We responded to a range of questions from the Ofwat board, with a strong focus on the deliverability of our plans – in particular,

meeting the challenging targets for reducing demand for water in the first ten years. They were also keen to understand more about the extent of our environmental ambition, acknowledging how prominently it featured in the plan, as well as learn about meeting the needs of other sectors and the extent of use of catchment management / nature-based solutions.

Jean and I also recently presented to senior colleagues from the Environment Agency (EA), with Paul Hickey, Managing Director for the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID), in attendance. As above, people were very interested in our work and encouraged by the extent that our plans are seeking to protect and support nature.

Chris Murray MBE,
Independent Chair,
Water Resources South East.

IN THIS EDITION:

- [Responding to feedback on our draft regional plan \(Page 2\)](#)
- [The Environment Agency's view on the draft regional plans for England \(Page 2\)](#)
- [An update on the current water resources situation \(Page 3\)](#)
- [The role for water in improving our environment \(Page 4\)](#)
- [The latest on progress with two key reservoir schemes in the South East \(Pages 4 & 5\)](#)
- [On safari with WRSE's Lee Dance and the South East Rivers Trust \(Page 6\).](#)

Important update on response to draft regional plan consultation

We have now reviewed all the feedback we received during our consultation on the draft regional plan for South East England – we had nearly 1,000 responses in total. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to give us their views, and we are very grateful for all the comments we received.

We are continuing to develop the regional plan, alongside our six member water companies, regulators and the four other regional water groups. This includes responding to the feedback we have had in from stakeholders and customers, and incorporating new requirements from government and regulators - such as the interim and longer term targets set out in the national [Environmental Improvement Plan](#). We're also updating information about individual schemes - for example, costs, delivery dates and environmental information.

Our work will enable us to produce a comprehensive response to the consultation and a revised draft regional plan. The revised draft regional plan will inform the six water

company revised draft Water Resources Management Plans (dWRMPs).

To complete the various updates, we have received agreement from Defra to delay the publication of our consultation response document and revised draft regional plan until the end of August 2023. This reflects the significant amount of work needed to revise our South East plan, align the six water company dWRMPs and reconcile our plan with the revised plans being produced by the other regional groups.

All six water companies which are members of WRSE will each be publishing a Statement of Response and a revised dWRMP at the end of August. After that, five companies will be awaiting a final review by Defra of their revised draft plans, and Southern Water will carry out a re-consultation using its revised draft plan. All of the above has been agreed with Defra also.

We appreciate that many people are keen to understand how their feedback has been



considered and to see the next version of the draft regional plan. However, it is vital that we carry out the next phase of work thoroughly and use the most up-to-date information to ensure our plan remains robust and evidence-based.

We look forward to sharing our consultation response and revised draft plan with you later in the summer. We're planning to hold a webinar in mid-September to set out further detail and answer questions. We'll confirm details for this soon.

Environment Agency publishes feedback on draft regional plans

The Environment Agency (EA) has issued a report setting out its view of the five draft regional water resources plan for England.

The EA describes the plans as “a positive step forward” as, when implemented, they should “improve resilience to extreme droughts, ensure we are prepared for the future impacts of climate change, serve a growing population and thriving economy and mark a transition to longer term planning to protect and improve the environment”.

However, the report also states that “there remains significant more work to do to fully achieve this”. This includes the following areas of highlighted by the EA:

- In some cases, faster delivery of planned abstraction reductions is needed

- The water industry needs to ensure appropriate consistency between water company and regional plans
- The plans require further refinement and improvement to meet the relevant guidelines, legal requirements, and the EA's expectations
- “Significant and urgent action is required to design, plan, and build” new supply options that will take at least 5 to 10 years to deliver
- There has been limited numbers of options for new water supply schemes identified in some plans. The EA expects further exploration of options as plans progress, to enable choices
- The updated plans need to clearly set out how the Government target of reducing household water use by 20 per cent by 2038 will be delivered – currently, the

draft plans would result in a 17 per cent reduction

- In terms of the goal of bringing non-household water use down by 9 per cent by 2038, the draft plans would achieve a reduction of 1.8 per cent. Therefore, further work is needed to demonstrate that the plans will meet this non-household target.

The report finishes by stressing the importance of a focus on delivery and monitoring progress, as the regional plans are finalised and implemented. That's in the context of the plans “marking a step-change in ambition for investment in both reducing water demand and increasing water supplies”.

Water resources back in the spotlight

A prolonged spell of hot, dry weather during May, and the country's hottest June on record, saw demand for water increase significantly across the UK, with South East Water implementing a Temporary Use Ban for its customers in Sussex and Kent, preventing the use of hosepipes and other equipment to water gardens, clean cars and fill swimming pools.

The company said it had no choice after demand in its area reached “record levels” last month, meaning it needed to provide an additional 120 million litres of water a day – a 22 per cent increase on what it typically supplies. South East Water explained that the ban is needed to ensure there is enough water for both essential uses and to protect the environment.

Other companies in the South East of England, including Affinity Water, Portsmouth Water and Southern Water, have urged their customers to use water wisely. Elsewhere, South West Water warned that water resources in its region were at tipping point due to increasing summer demand, as it appealed to customers, businesses and visitors to reduce their water use where possible.

It all seems a long way from rainfall late in the spring that helped top up water resources

across much of the country to healthy levels. For example, in mid-May, total reservoir capacity across England was at 92 per cent, following the wettest March for 40 years, which, in turn, came on the back of the driest February in three decades.

All this further highlights the need to invest in increasing the resilience of water supplies for the decades ahead, something that is happening via the five regional water resources plans for England, as well as the individual company plans that sit under these.

Plans to maintain water supply resilience have been discussed by National Drought Group (NDG) members amidst the ongoing hot and dry weather. Chaired by the Environment Agency, the group also includes senior decision makers from government, water companies and key farming and environmental groups.

At the NDG's recent latest meeting, members were briefed that:

- The Environment Agency is clear that planning for increasingly extreme weather is essential, in order for everyone to be prepared for the impacts these events cause - both drought and flooding
- Water companies, retailers, regulators, as well as the agricultural and environment sectors, must prepare now, as bouts of hot, dry weather become more consistent, taking forward improvements for managing and responding to future droughts

- All sectors are undertaking precautionary planning in the event that hot, dry weather continues into the summer, and continue to work closely together to support water supplies across the country

- The farming sector is working to improve drought resilience, to ensure water availability for the short and long term, helping overall food security.

Simon Hawkins, Chair of the NDG and Director Operations South East and East at the Environment Agency, said:

“The recent heatwave has served as a reminder that we need to prepare for weather extremes and act now to ensure resilient water supplies.

“The Environment Agency, water companies and partners are working collaboratively to handle drought risk across the country; with our staff managing abstraction licences to balance need, ensuring water companies implement their drought plans, working with farmers to manage resources, and rescuing fish in areas where river levels are extremely low.

“We all have a role in easing pressures on our precious water supply to protect the environment, our wildlife and ensure clean and plentiful water for future generations.”



Water - At the heart of improving the environment

Water is central to government plans to restore nature, improve the environment and increase prosperity.

The [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\)](#), which was published earlier this year, includes a key aim around delivering “a clean and plentiful supply of water for people and nature into the future”. That will be achieved by facilitating infrastructure projects – to increase sources of water supply, reducing leakage, and increasing water efficiency, including in new developments and retrofits.

The revised draft regional plan for the South East of England will align with the targets set out in the EIP. For example, the following:

- Ensuring water companies are delivering a 50 per cent reduction in leakage by 2050, with interim goals of a reduction of 20 per cent by April 2027 and a fall of 30 per cent by April 2032
- Increasing resilience to drought by working with regulators and water companies to reduce use of public water supply, per head



of population, by 20 per cent by April 2038 – that’s from the 2019/20 baseline figures. Reductions of 9 per cent by April 2027 and 14 per cent by April 2032 are included as interim targets.

The push to reduce average water use will also see the roll out new water efficiency labelling and the Government delivering the ten actions in its ‘Roadmap to Water Efficiency’. This includes reviewing water efficiency options in planning, building regulations and through voluntary schemes for non-household buildings (for example, offices). It also encompasses developing clear guidance on ‘water positive’ or ‘net zero

water’ developments and roles for developers and water companies.

Government intervention, through new policies, will be key in bringing down the amount of water people typically use each day, and this has been factored into the development of our regional plan.

Following on from the EIP is [the Government’s ‘Plan for Water’](#), which was launched in April. This sets out further actions to keep both customers’ taps and rivers flowing in the decades ahead. For example, launching a new National Policy Statement on water resources, so that key water supply infrastructure – such as reservoirs and water transfer schemes – can be built more quickly.

An additional strand to reducing demand for water will be to encourage water companies to consider how to rapidly increase smart meter installations for household and non-household customers, so that customers have a much better understanding of how they use water and how they can make small changes to use less.

South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) moves a step closer

Ofwat has given the green light for investigations to continue into a major new reservoir in south Oxfordshire, which would provide water for customers across the Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water areas.

The South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) scheme is one of nine proposals for new reservoirs in England included in the five draft regional plans.

It’s also part of a suite of twelve infrastructure projects being moved to the next stage of development as part of the regulator’s ongoing efforts to deliver more sustainable and resilient water supplies for the future.

The overall package of a dozen proposed solutions, from seven different water companies, also includes recycling water and transferring water from where there is more to where there is less.

The various projects will now receive ring-fenced funding to further investigate the technical issues and environmental impacts to inform decision-making by companies on the best-value solutions.

The programme of infrastructure investment is being overseen by the [Regulators Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development \(RAPID\)](#), an alliance of water regulators in England and Wales with support from the Consumer Council for Water (CCW), Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

While RAPID has endorsed taking these plans to the next stage of development, the ultimate decisions will be taken through the Water Resources Management Planning (WRMP) process overseen by UK and Welsh Governments. The schemes will also need to obtain planning permission and other permits.

Paul Hickey, RAPID Managing Director said: *“The water sector needs to act now to secure the future needs of customers and the environment.*



An artist’s impression of the completed SESRO scheme

“Finding new sustainable and resilient ways to maintain water supply across the country is vital, and all the more pressing given climate change, the increase in population and economic development.

“These schemes we are moving to the next stage of planning could meet the needs of millions of customers while safeguarding the environment.”

Major contracts awarded for Havant Thicket Reservoir scheme



How Havant Thicket Reservoir could look once completed

In a major step forward, Portsmouth Water has appointed Future Water MJJV Limited to build the flagship Havant Thicket Reservoir in southern Hampshire – a contract worth £167 million. It will be the first large-scale new water storage reservoir in the UK since the 1980s and is being progressed under an innovative partnership between Portsmouth Water and Southern Water.

In addition, a new £41 million tunnelled pipeline, running to and from the reservoir, is set to be installed by Ward & Burke Construction Limited.

Havant Thicket Reservoir is an environmentally-led scheme that will secure critical water supplies for the South East of England, an area that's already under serious water stress. It will also help protect environmentally sensitive chalk streams and create a new green leisure facility to benefit local communities and wildlife.

Once completed in 2029, the reservoir in Havant will hold approximately 8.7 billion litres of water and be able to supply up to

21 million litres of water each day. It will be one mile from east to west, half a mile from north to south, with a new wetland on its northern shore. A new two-mile long pipeline, which is designed to be largely tunnelled, will also be built to fill the reservoir in the winter with surplus water pumped from nearby Bedhampton Springs. It would also be used to draw water from the reservoir to supply customers when it's needed.

Future Water is a joint venture between leading civil engineering contractors [Mackley](#) and [Jones Bros](#), which have a combined total of over 150 years of experience in tackling complex and challenging civil engineering schemes. Having worked across a wide range of sectors including water, energy, coastal protection and flood defence, Future Water MJJV is uniquely qualified to construct the reservoir, a vital new piece of infrastructure.

[Ward & Burke](#) is one of Ireland's principal Civil & MEICA Engineering contractors and has an outstanding track record for innovation. The company has built more than 130,000 metres of tunnels, including for water pipelines, in the UK, Ireland and North America, and has been involved in a wide range of major infrastructure projects.

Bob Taylor, Chief Executive Officer at Portsmouth Water, said: *"This is a major milestone for the Havant Thicket Reservoir project, and we are delighted to have these two exceptional contractors delivering the scheme.*

"We were highly impressed by the proposals put forward by Future Water MJJV and Ward & Burke during the tender process, with both companies being able to call upon vastly experienced teams, with strong track records in successfully delivering major infrastructure."

Mr Taylor added: *"We look forward to working closely with both companies to progress and complete this environmentally led project on time and within budget. This includes honouring our commitment to leave a really positive legacy by creating opportunities for local employment and skills development through the reservoir scheme."*

Havant Thicket Reservoir was granted formal planning permission in October 2021, with a further planning application for the new pipeline expected to be submitted later this year.

For more information, please click [here](#).

Reservoir investment in place

Meanwhile, [Portsmouth Water has secured £325 million in investments](#) to construct Havant Thicket Reservoir.

The banks giving their support include existing lenders ING, Lloyds Bank, Nat West, abrdn, Assured Guaranty, Pension Insurance Corporation and Siemens Financial Services through Siemens Bank.

A £50 million commitment has also been secured from the government-owned bank, the UK Infrastructure Bank, in the first investment of its kind for the water sector. This is in addition to the equity commitment of £150 million from Portsmouth Water's existing shareholders, Ancala Partners, which was announced in February 2023.

Safari to showcase impact of nature-based solutions

WRSE Organisational Director Lee Dance recently joined [the South East Rivers Trust \(SERT\)](#) for a 'safari' to explore the potential value of nature-based solutions in increasing the resilience of catchments and communities.

In recent years, the SERT team has been developing a series of nature-based solutions (Nbs) for water with landowners in the Upper Beult Farm Cluster in Kent. This includes features that hold back water in the landscape, slowing it down and filtering it, so water resources are replenished and flooding and pollution is reduced. For example, leaky woody dams, offline ponds and pasture management.

Lee and representatives from a range of organisations toured woods, wetlands and farmland to view and learn more about the Nbs, which were spread across four local farms. Attendees included staff from Southern Water, which has supported the development of the NbS in the area, as well as contacts from SES Water, the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board, Kent County Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, Waitrose, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF), the Marden farming

cluster, the Forestry Commission and Swale Borough Council.

Cat Moncrieff, Head of Water and Land Stewardship at SERT, said: *"The safari was a great way to demonstrate how nature-based solutions can underpin water resources provision, as well as achieve nature recovery and other social and environmental benefits. For example, [our PROWATER project](#) alone has helped retain more than 60 million litres of water annually.*

"We wanted our guests to imagine what benefits could be achieved if these NbS could be 'scaled up', such as across the whole of the River Medway catchment, of which the Beult is just one part. We were also keen to spark thought and discussion among our guests about potential partnerships and support that could facilitate this ambition."

Lee Dance commented: *"The SERT safari was a fantastic event that really brought to life what can be achieved by taking new approaches to managing water to deliver multiple positive outcomes.*

"Developing a better understanding of the benefits nature-based solutions can provide and improving the way we measure their impact will be important to help inform their use moving forward, via regional plans and



Nbs safari attendees standing in one of the areas used for mob grazing. Below, Leaky Woody Dams slow the flow of water, holding it in the landscape.



company Water Resources Management Plans."

For more details, you can read SERT's blog via: <https://www.southeastriverstrust.org/nature-based-solutions-safari-inspires-others-to-scale-up/>.



A wetland restoration scene on the nature-based solutions safari