

# News



Website: [www.wrse.org.uk](http://www.wrse.org.uk) Email: [contact@wrse.org.uk](mailto:contact@wrse.org.uk)

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## CONSULTATION SPECIAL EDITION

### Foreword from Chris Murray MBE, Independent Chair of WRSE

Welcome to the first WRSE newsletter of 2022, which comes at a crucial time for water resources planning across the country and in the South East, with consultation on our emerging regional plan continuing apace. I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to give us their views on our plan so far. **Remember, our consultation is running until Monday 14 March 2022. To find out more and have your say, please visit our consultation website.**



CHRIS MURRAY

An incredible amount of work by so many people has gone into developing our plan - a process which started over two years ago - and it's very encouraging to see the level of engagement so far, including from many different stakeholders and the media. By early February, nearly halfway through the consultation period, [our consultation website](#) had been visited more than 3,200 times and a total of over 590 people had joined our consultation webinars.

Our emerging plan sets out the actions that could be needed to avoid a potential one billion litre per day shortfall in water supplies within the next 15 years, a figure that could rise to 2.6 billion litres of water daily by 2060. These are huge numbers and, as such, the plan is going far beyond anything that has ever been achieved in regional water resources planning before – considering a complex range of solutions from reducing demand for water, through to creating major new infrastructure, including increased water transfer connections from other parts of the UK.

The stark reality is that our water resources are under increasingly significant pressure, with the effects of climate change already starting to bite. That's why the plan, which will provide secure, reliable and resilient water supplies for many generations to come, is so important.

However, having a robust plan is only half the challenge. If we are to achieve

what is needed - including responding to population growth, protecting the environment and delivering high-quality services for customers - implementing the plan is imperative and 'No regret' investment decisions need to be made in a timely way. Such decisions will need to balance the cost of investing for the future against the possible highly negative impact of not doing so sufficiently for society, nature and the economy, particularly in our region, which is facing the biggest potential water supply deficit in the UK.

Looking beyond water company supply area boundaries is the only way to meet our region's future water needs – no one company can do this alone and the degree of collaboration, between the water industry, regulators and stakeholders, is ground-breaking and impressive. This approach will be needed more than ever going forwards, to ensure everyone is playing their part in building and delivering an adaptive regional plan that is flexible enough to meet the challenges we could face.

A key highlight for me is the level of environmental ambition in our plan. Yes, making sure taps keep running and toilets keep flushing is hugely important, but so is protecting the natural environment that we are all so dependent upon. In particular, with the South East containing so many of the world's rare chalk streams, we must reduce our reliance on these delicate and endangered eco-systems for water

supplies, as well as truly harnessing the power of nature-based solutions, of which there are more than 200 in our emerging plan, across 25 river catchments.

The feedback we receive during our consultation on our emerging plan will help us develop our draft best value regional plan, which will be used by the six WRSE member water companies to derive their individual draft Water Resource Management Plans, or WRMPs. Our draft plan will be the subject of a further stage of consultation.

You can find out more about the next steps in further developing our regional plan on page 37 of [our consultation document](#).

In closing, I would stress that our consultation marks the end of a key part of the planning process. However, at the same time, we're really only at the beginning of unlocking the huge potential of working in a regionally and nationally coordinated way, to deliver major benefits for customers, the environment and wider society. It feels like an enormous leap forward for the water industry and I feel very privileged to be a part of it.

With best regards,

**Chris Murray MBE,**  
Independent Chair, WRSE.

# Consultation highlights so far and next steps

*Consultation on our emerging regional plan for the South East got underway on 17 January 2022 - with the WRSE team joining representatives from the four other [regional water groups](#), as well as a range of senior stakeholders, for a national webinar. This was focused on the historic milestone of the regional groups each publishing their initial plans for the decades ahead.*

The session was hosted by Jean Spencer, Chair of the [National Water Resources Framework](#) Steering Group, and was attended by more than 270 people from over 200 different organisations, including local authorities, trade associations, community organisations, farming groups and Government.

Speakers included David Dangerfield, Director of Water, Land and Biodiversity at the Environment Agency, and Paul Hickey, Managing Director at [RAPID, the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development](#). They were joined by panellists including; Stuart Roberts, Vice President at the National Farmers Union (NFU); Ian McAulay, CEO at Southern Water; Giles Stevens, Policy Director at the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC); Ali Morse, Water Policy Manager at The Wildlife Trusts and Chair of Blueprint for Water, as well as Karen Gibbs, Senior Policy Manager at the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) and Nicola Smith, Thermal Energy Environment and Sustainability Manager at SSE (representing Energy UK).

Jean Spencer said: “*We are facing a water crisis in this country and there is a very real risk that, without action, we will face severe water shortages in the next 30 years. These emerging plans are ambitious, but also set out some ‘easy wins’ that can start to make a big difference. More long-term solutions will take longer to bear fruit, but it is vital that work on them starts now.*”

The national webinar was followed a few days later by a WRSE online launch event, during which WRSE Chair Chris Murray, members of the WRSE team and representatives from the six WRSE member water companies and the Environment Agency shared details of the emerging plan for the South East and answered questions from attendees.

## OUR CONSULTATION IN NUMBERS

Over

**590**

attendees across 5 webinars, with the webinar recordings watched over 120 times online

More than

**3,200**

visits to our consultation website so far

Almost

**200**

consultation questions and comments received to date

More than 100 different organisations were represented at the event by over 160 people who attended, including local councillors, agricultural groups, water retailers and large water users from the farming, energy and paper production sectors. Three further local area consultation webinars have also taken place, enabling people to learn more about what's being proposed in the eastern, western and northern parts of the WRSE region. Feedback on the webinars has been very positive, with most attendees saying the sessions gave them a good understanding of the emerging plan. We have posted [the recordings of the webinars](#) online and these have been watched over 120 times already. We will publish answers to the questions we received during the webinars by the end of February 2022.

[Our dedicated consultation website](#) has also proved popular, with in excess of 3,000 visits clocked up so far and our mini-series of consultation videos attracting over 390 views.

### What's next?

Our consultation is running until 14 March 2022, with a live online Q&A session with the WRSE team and representatives from water companies taking place during the week of 28 February 2022. This will be a

further opportunity to put your questions and comments directly to the people developing our plan. To receive details of how to register for this event, visit [www.wrse.org.uk/contact-us](#) to sign up for our updates. We plan to publish our response to the consultation feedback we receive in late April 2022.

Our emerging regional plan for the South East has identified the options to provide water in the right place, at the right time and deliver all the legal and regulatory requirements and policy expectations at the most efficient cost.

The next step is to carry out further assessments of the options and consider factors beyond cost, taking into account the feedback we receive from our consultation. This will enable us to identify whether we can deliver additional value through our plan that will further improve the region's environment and benefit wider society. This is what is referred to as a best value plan and could mean some alternative options are chosen as they deliver greater value to the region, but this could come at a higher cost.

Later this year, we will publish our draft best value regional plan, which will in turn inform the Water Resource Management Plans (WRMPs) of our six member water companies. Our draft plan will be the subject of a further stage of consultation.

# In the media – coverage of our consultation

*Our regional plan is key to the future of the South East and, as such, will affect the lives of everybody living and working in the region in some way. So, raising awareness about the plan, and our consultation on it, via the media has been really important to reach a wide audience and increase people's understanding of and interest in the water resources challenge.*

As well as promoting a press release on the day of the emerging plan consultation launch, WRSE and its member companies proactively approached journalists across regional BBC and ITV news programmes and carried out several TV interviews, explaining more about the long-term investment needed to meet the future water needs of customers, wider society and the environment. This resulted in widespread and in-depth coverage on BBC South Today, BBC South East Today, BBC London and ITV Meridian News – news programmes with a combined viewership of several million people. Millions more also learned about the plan and consultation from the story featuring on the BBC News 24 channel.

The emerging plan publication and consultation was also covered on the BBC News website, where it reached an audience of almost two million people, as well as across many regional newspapers and radio stations. Coverage was achieved in trade publications like Utility Week and New Civil

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## Water firms in south east publish plan to avoid supply shortages

17 January



Engineer, while WRSE Chair Chris Murray was interviewed for The Water Report magazine.

WRSE and WRSE member water companies social media activity has also attracted strong interest, with the various consultation updates posted on LinkedIn and Twitter viewed thousands of times.

Overall, media coverage of the consultation launch was positive, while prompting important discussion of issues such as water recycling and local interest and concern about particular proposed new infrastructure - for example, reservoirs.



South East Water's Lee Dance being interviewed by BBC TV

# Summary of our emerging regional plan

The emerging WRSE plan provides an objective and evidence-based solution to understand how much extra water will be needed.

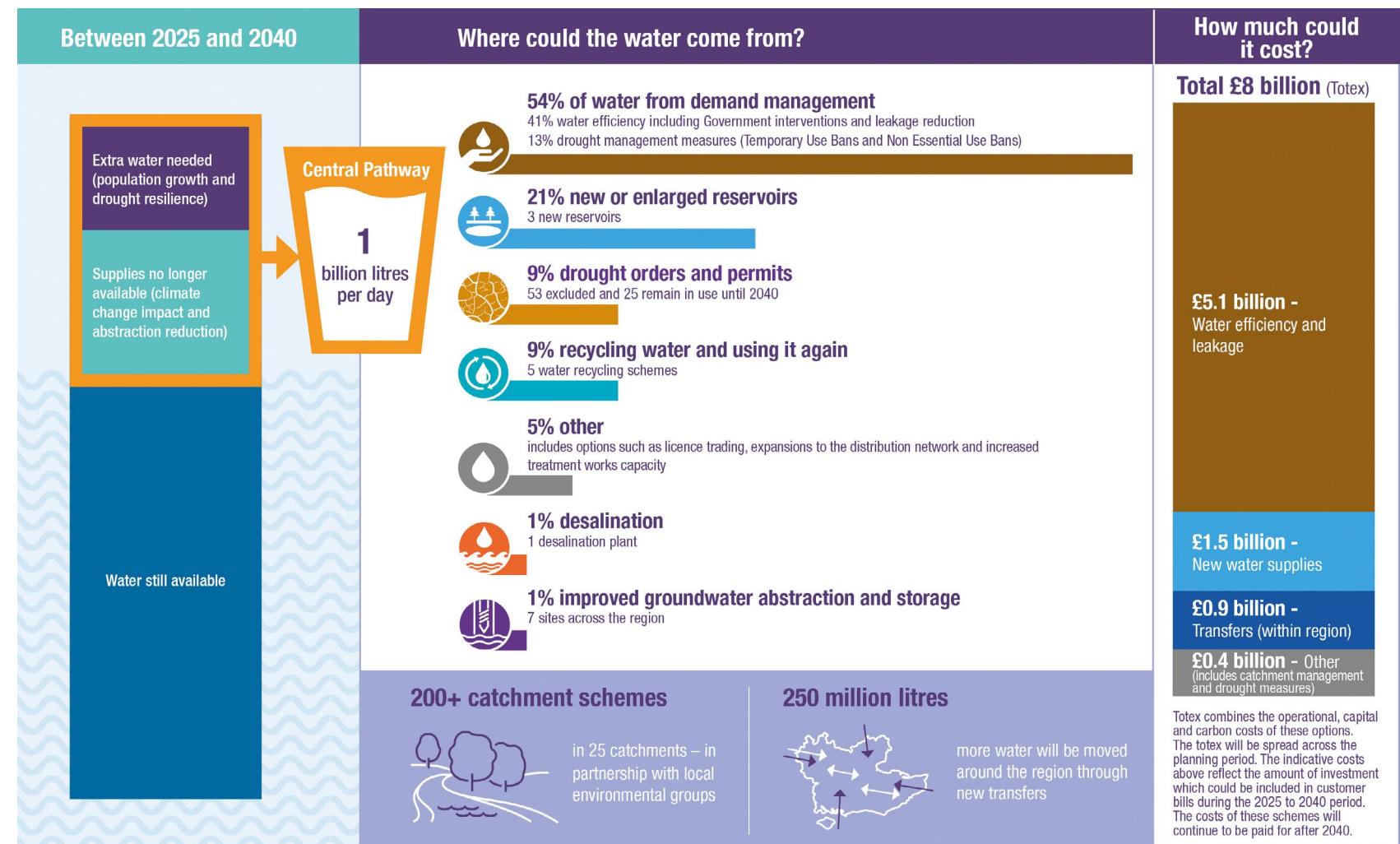
We don't know exactly what the future holds as the further ahead we look, the more uncertain it gets. To help us make the right investment decisions, we are taking an adaptive planning approach, looking across a wide range of scenarios and possible pathways.

Each pathway (Low, Central and High) reflects a different future scenario, made up of different combinations of population growth, climate change and abstraction reduction, so we can see how much extra water will be needed under each.

Please see [our consultation document](#) for further details.

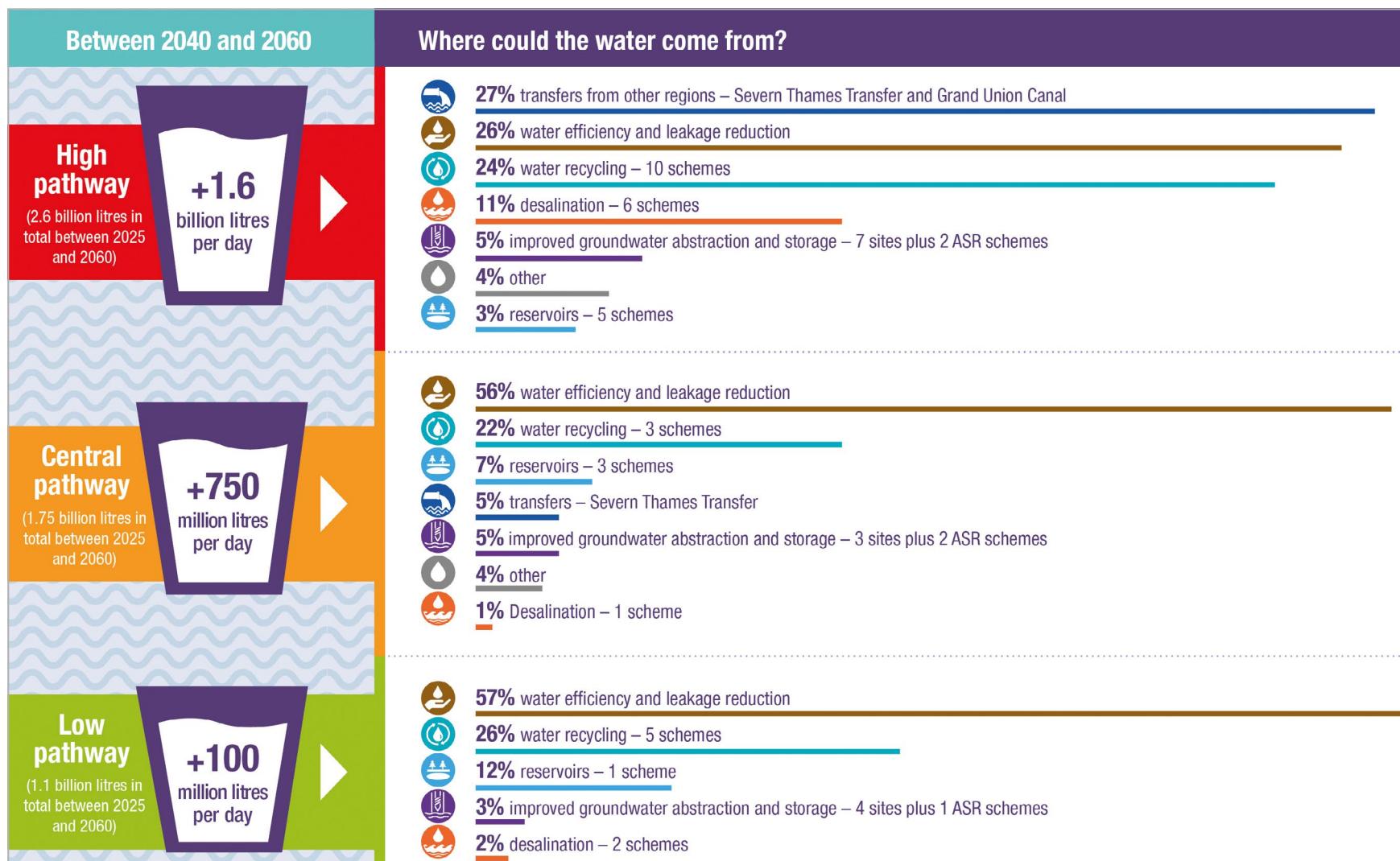
## 2025 to 2040

For the first 15 years, where there is most certainty, we have chosen a central pathway which is most representative of the full range of planning scenarios. It is the period where we must increase the resilience of our water supplies to a one in 500-year drought, so it includes the extra water needed to achieve that outcome too.



## 2040 to 2060

In this period, the plan splits into three alternative pathways that cover a wider range of possible scenarios we might face. We'll need to reach the agreed level of abstraction reduction, so it enables us to see which options would be required, depending on how much water needs to be left in the environment. At this stage, we've not chosen a specific pathway from 2040, but are treating each of the three pathways as equally likely.



# The view from our stakeholders

*Insight from a wide range of different stakeholders has been at the heart of developing our plan so far – including understanding different sectors' future water needs and identifying possible new options. The water industry cannot deliver the agreed regional plan alone and we will continue to work collaboratively to ensure we are addressing the climate and environmental emergency facing our region's water supplies.*

*Below is a selection of initial views from this latest consultation from different stakeholders.*

## Sir John Armitt, Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission

*"The collaborative spirit with which water companies and regulators have engaged in forming these regional plans can only be welcomed, especially given the significance of the task at hand to secure England's future water supply and respond to potential challenges created by the pandemic. Like pieces of a puzzle, when fitted together these plans should create a clear national picture of water resource management, which is essential to deliver our recommendation – endorsed by Government – of securing the long term resilience of the water supply in the face of increased drought risk and growing demand."*



For the NIC's full press release, please click [here](#)

## Ali Morse, Chair of Blueprint for Water and Water Policy Manager at the Wildlife Trusts

*"The South East contains some of the most fantastic habitats and species that need to be protected, from iconic chalk streams to coastal wetlands. So, how well customers and stakeholders feel the emerging WRSE plan supports these special places may well act as a litmus test of the strength of the proposals as a whole.*



*"Blueprint for Water members are continuing to review the five initial regional plans to create a collective response to the consultations. In terms of early thoughts on WRSE, we'd like to see more detail on reducing demand from non-household customers, considering that businesses use nearly a fifth of the water put into supply. We also feel the plan needs to include the concept of water neutral development – with housebuilders, councils and water companies working together to offset the demands of development by reducing water use elsewhere. We're pleased that WRSE's plan goes furthest in developing nature-based options, with over 200 schemes identified – we want all the regional plans to help nature recover and thrive, not just reduce harm."*

## Cat Moncrieff, Water Resources Lead at South East Rivers Trust (SERT)

*"It's encouraging to see that the emerging plan builds in forecasting for significant environmental improvements. We're keen to ensure that this high ambition is reflected in water company plans and that reductions in water abstraction are prioritised in areas where they will lead to the greatest environmental improvements for rivers. It's also good to see demand management appearing so prominently as part of the "solution" - we would like to see ambitious demand reduction trajectories, with the right policies in place to support this and increased emphasis on driving down demand among non-household water consumers. Furthermore, we're pleased that catchment and nature-based solutions feature prominently in the emerging plan and look forward to informing and developing these solutions with WRSE / the water companies."*



## Stuart Singleton-White, Head of Campaigns at The Angling Trust

*"Many people will have seen the devastating impact pollution is having on our rivers and The Angling Trust has been fighting to see them cleaned up for years. But much as we need our water to be clean for us and our wildlife to enjoy, we also need to manage how much we use and how much we leave in the environment. And in the South-East, a severely water-stressed region of England, we are quite simply running out of water. The Abingdon reservoir (also known as SESRO) has the potential to not only meet our future water supply needs, but it can also become a major biodiversity and recreational asset for this region."*



## Christine McGourty, Chief Executive of Water UK

*"The future of our water supplies is foremost in the minds of water companies. Working with partners, they have set out ambitious plans to ensure we can meet the challenges of the coming decades and safeguard our water resources for future generations. We want as many people as possible to give their views to the consultation in their region. There is no doubting the scale of this challenge and we all have a role to play."*



For Water UK's full press release, please click [here](#)

- **Consultation on our emerging regional plan runs until 14 March 2022.**
- **The week of 28 February 2022, we'll be holding a live online Q&A session with the WRSE team and representatives from water companies.**
- **To receive details of how to register for this event, visit [www.wrse.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.wrse.org.uk/contact-us) to sign up for our updates.**