INFORMATION NOTE: THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

Do you have concerns about our impact on the water environment? Maybe you know of rivers or lakes that are badly polluted or lack water. Perhaps you have noticed a drop in the number of fish in your local waters or seen weeds taking over rivers and lakes. This note explains how CCWater is involved in implementing legislation to tackle these issues and sets out how you can become involved too.

CCWater’s role is to represent the views of water consumers across England and Wales, and to make sure that consumers’ interests are at the heart of decisions about the water sector. One of the ways that we do this is by becoming involved in the implementation of water legislation such as the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The WFD is a major piece of European legislation to improve and sustain the quality of all inland, estuarial and coastal waters both in the United Kingdom and in other EU countries.

Across England and Wales there are 11 river basin districts (RBDs), ranging in size. For example, Thames RBD is home to over 13 million people and covers 16,133 square kilometres. The much smaller Dee RBD is home to around 500,000 people covers only 2,251 square kilometres. The Environment Agency is responsible for developing and publishing the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for each RBD. These plans were published in December 2009 and set out how the requirements of the WFD will be met.

We think that it is important that water customers know what these plans are and how to become involved in the process. They are available on the Environment Agency’s website and we encourage you to read them.

Overall, we felt that the RBMPs were heading in the right direction. The overall balance of costs against benefits indicates that the plans represent reasonable value for money. But there is a lack of even handedness in implementing the WFD: water companies bear over 80% of the cost burden even though agriculture and other sectors share responsibility for a lot of pollution.

Our main concern is that implementation of the WFD may have a significant impact on water companies’ costs and therefore on water customers’ bills over the next 18 years. We raise these concerns through our ongoing membership of national WFD stakeholder groups and regional RBD Liaison Panels.

We want to make sure that all schemes to improve the water environment are based on sound science, have been subject to robust analysis and are the most cost effective measures to implement. In short, the costs of
schemes should not outweigh the benefits. In this way, we are working to ensure that customers do not bear unreasonable costs in meeting WFD requirements, and that the costs they do bear are fair and affordable.

If you have any questions about the impact of WFD on customers then please call Sarah Thomas, WFD Policy Manager on 0121 345 1021.

You can take action to improve the quality of the water environment in the following ways:

In the house and garden:

- Water companies use a lot of energy to treat water and to then pump it to your house. Reducing how much water you use can help to reduce the impact on the water environment and the amount of energy used. You can save water by:
  - not overfilling the kettle;
  - making sure the washing machine and dishwasher always have full loads;
  - taking shorter showers;
  - installing water efficient devices and appliances.
  This will reduce carbon emissions by both the water company and by you. It should also save you money as you will use less electricity.
- Dispose of paint thinners, motor oil, and other hazardous materials responsibly. When these materials are tipped down the drain they can end up polluting rivers and other watercourses and water companies incur costs in cleaning them out of the water. These costs are then passed on to you in your bills.
- Do not pour fats, oils and grease down the drain as they can lead to blockages in sewers with the result that some houses can be flooded with sewage. Similarly, products such as face wipes, disposable nappies, or cleaning cloths should be put in the bin rather than flushed down the toilet as they can also cause a blockage.
- Maintain any household plumbing, drains or private sewers that carry waste away from the home to prevent pollution of the water table. The house owner’s responsibility is both inside and outside the property boundary, until the point where your pipes connect with public sewers.
- Make sure that waste water pipes are connected to the waste water sewerage system. If these pipes are connected to surface water drains, this may cause pollution in local water courses.
- Use slug pellets and other garden pesticides sparingly. The chemicals used in these products can enter the water cycle.

In the community:

- You can also volunteer with your local wildlife trust or conservation group to help remove alien species such as Japanese knotweed or Himalayan Balsam from streams, rivers and lakes. This will help improve the biodiversity of water bodies. Your local wildlife trust will have more information on this.