

Waterwise UK Manifesto – 2009/2010

Waterwise is the UK NGO focused on decreasing water consumption in the UK by 2010 and building the evidence base for large scale water efficiency. Waterwise is the leading authority on water efficiency in the UK. Between 2005 and 2008 Waterwise sat on the UK Environment Minister's Water Saving Group in England, alongside the water industry and its regulators. Waterwise set up the Saving Water in Scotland Network. For more information on Waterwise visit www.waterwise.org.uk

The issues

Lack of water

The UK has less available water per person than most other European countries. London is drier than Istanbul, and the South East of England has less water available per person than the Sudan and Syria. Water is also scarce in parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and both floods and droughts in the last few years have led to water supply shortages to homes across the UK. More extreme weather events, including wetter winters and drier summers, are predicted. This means less water will be available for us all to use (and there will be increased pressure on the natural environment).

Growing demand

Despite this, the underlying trend is that we are all using more and more water - around 150 litres a day, each, with a third of that water being flushed down the toilet. The trend towards smaller household sizes means higher use per person. And much-needed new homes are placing more demands on water resources as they are built in the very areas where water is already scarce.

Water and energy

To make matters worse, the water we use has a significant carbon footprint, which is adding to climate change. The use of hot water in our homes for bathing, cooking and cleaning accounts for a quarter of our fuel bills, and more than 5% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions. And water company treating, pumping and other processes make up almost 1% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the energy used to pump, treat and heat the water in the average family's home produces the carbon equivalent of a return flight from London to New York.

Action

In this manifesto Waterwise sets out the actions the government should take during the next Parliament to ensure that our homes, buildings and businesses are wasting less water, and that we are fit to face the challenges of climate change. Water efficiency is an essential weapon in the fight against climate change – significantly reducing the carbon footprint of our buildings as well as the UK water industry. But it is also a crucial tool as we adapt to climate change's impacts: homes and businesses of the future will need to be water efficient – to make less water go further.

The UK is now required by law to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050 (and committed to 5-year carbon budgets). To meet this target, a future government will need to place water efficiency at the centre of its policies and actions, alongside energy efficiency. And our homes and buildings – as well as our behaviour – will need to be water efficient to cope with future water stress.

Waterwise calls on the next UK government to take the following steps:

Homes and buildings which waste less water

- To make sure that homes of the future are fit for purpose as climate change takes further hold, work with water companies and other partners to develop large-scale water efficiency retrofit schemes across the UK, including through establishing partnerships. As part of this, mainstream water neutrality as a planning tool across the country, requiring water efficiency retrofitting measures in schools, hospitals and businesses in the same area as new developments, so total water demand does not increase; and include water efficiency in social housing standards
- To help meet the UK's legally binding 80% carbon targets, mainstream water efficiency measures alongside energy efficiency in national retrofitting programmes
- To ensure that we pay for what we use, require all homes in England and Wales to be fitted with water meters by 2020, supported by tariffs to promote efficient water use and protect vulnerable customers; link this with the delivery of smart energy meters in all homes, including by considering the use of technologies which would enable water and energy consumption to be displayed alongside each other in the future

Making wasting less water pay

- To help incentivise the water industry to treat demand management measures equally with plans to develop new resources such as reservoirs and desalination plants, amend UK accounting rules to remove the requirement to treat water efficiency retrofitting programmes as operational expenditure
- To encourage changes in consumer behaviour, introduce fiscal incentives on water-efficient products, and work with key players to develop a national water efficiency label
- To ensure that the full potential of water efficiency measures in mitigating against and helping us adapt to climate change is realised, introduce a duty on Ofwat to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and consider such a duty on the Water Industry Commission for Scotland
- To ensure the public sector leads by example, and to transform the market in water-efficient products, introduce a revolving, spend-to-save fund to help public sector buildings waste less water, supported by procurement standards which reflect the best available technologies on the UK market

Developing the green new deal

- To deliver maximum value from water efficiency in the green economy, target investment and policies at developing sustainably skilled jobs to deliver water efficiency retrofit and metering schemes in homes and businesses, including linking these with energy efficiency projects
- To develop the UK market in water-efficient products, introduce strict water efficiency product standards beyond those which exist for toilets, across other ranges such as taps, showers, washing machines and dishwashers, with these standards being regularly reviewed
- To save water, energy and money in UK businesses, develop a framework, with the third sector, to fund water efficiency audits and retrofit; explore the possibility of delivering this through a revolving, spend-to-save fund