

Mr David Black
Senior Director of Water
Ofwat

29 August 2019

Dear David,

I write as Chair of both the Wessex Water Catchment Panel and the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership to express concern over the disallowance of funding for partnership working in the draft determination for Wessex Water.

The Catchment Panel is made up of representatives from government agencies, local authorities and a range of NGOs. Its role is to scrutinise Wessex Water's environmental performance and to advise on how this might be maintained and improved.

Over the current Business Plan period, the Panel has been pleased with the Company's partnership approach to delivering its environmental duties efficiently and effectively, often enabling wider benefits to be achieved in collaboration with both regulatory and non-governmental stakeholders.

For the past two years, the Catchment Panel has been working in collaboration with the Wessex Water Partnership to scrutinise the Company's draft business plan and associated performance commitments, rewards and penalties. The Catchment Panel has been extensively involved in shaping and creating stretch in the bespoke performance commitments and ensuring that there is no double counting with other commitments. Future roles of the Panel will include maintaining the stretch, scrutinising performance on an ongoing annual basis and assessing whether reward or penalty is justified. Already there have been several meetings of Panel sub-groups (all members external to WW) focussed specifically on each of the bespoke performance commitments; E4 SSSIs, E6 Bathing Water Amenity, and E7 Catchment Partnership. These have been working on the detail and making sure it is clear what will be delivered and by when.

I was pleased to see that Ofwat had supported the investment in partnership working in its IA of the Wessex Water Business Plan, but then was concerned to learn that this investment had been disallowed in the Draft Determination.

It is helpful that Ofwat recognises the importance of partnership working and the opportunities that this presents to deliver more for customers than the company can do in isolation. Customers have welcomed this. I understand the issue with insufficient definition, and this is an area to which members of the Catchment Panel have given particular attention. More work has now been carried out on the definition of the activities to demonstrate their potential to mitigate low probability and high consequence risks.

Partnership working has been exceptionally good at raising wider awareness of the threats to the water environment and Wessex Water's role in helping to address them. Partners have raised awareness on how the wider public can help Wessex Water to reduce risks in high consequence areas.

As Chair of the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership (BACP), I see the benefits of Wessex Water's partnership approach very clearly. The Company co-hosts the BACP along with the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust and, as a result of their professional and financial support, the Partnership is strong and well respected. The stable foundations provided by Wessex, have given confidence to local authorities, government agencies and others to contribute both financially and in kind enabling the delivery of some great projects improving the water environment across the catchment.

Without Wessex Water's investment in partnership working, there is a serious risk that much of the progress in catchment partnership working made in the Wessex area over the past decade will stall. Such is the key role that Wessex Water plays.

I would, therefore, ask that Ofwat give serious consideration to reinstating the specific allowance for partnership working.

Yours sincerely,

Richard

Dr Richard Cresswell MBE
Chair, Wessex Water Catchment Panel
Chair, Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership.