

## National framework Senior Steering Group summary June 2021

The national framework senior steering group held its eleventh meeting on 29 June 2021. This was the fifth virtual meeting held and was chaired by Jean Spencer. The meeting focused on multi-sector planning and delivery in the agri-food sector, how to manage the risk of demand savings not being realised and the uncertainties identified in regional plans around environmental ambitions.

The agenda was shaped to help manage the following risks from the risk log maintained by the regional coordination group:

- The challenge in understanding non-public water supply water needs (including agriculture, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage)
- The risk that, despite investment in managing demand, it is not possible to reduce consumption to the levels water companies and regional groups are aiming for. This could have substantial impacts on the plans which are very sensitive to projected demand
- The risk that investments are not made to reduce leakage and help customers manage demand including per capita consumption (PCC) or progress is not made as expected
- Uncertainty around scale and scope of ambitious environmental water needs resulting in failure to make necessary decisions or to meet government, eNGO, customer, Environment Agency, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales expectations or to introduce inconsistency across regional groups.

The meeting included an update from the NFU on its integrated water management strategy, a brief from Waterwise on its Senior Water Demand Reduction Group, a piece from MOSL on public water consumption by the non-household market, updates from Water UK on its affordability work and its leakage route-map, an overview from Blueprint for Water of its 10 headline asks and the expectations for regional plans from the Environment Agency and Natural England.

The meeting kicked off with updates from Ofwat, Defra and Natural England. Ofwat has published its 'PR24 and beyond: Creating tomorrow, together' document and highlighted some major themes in the document concerning how to get a better look over long term solutions, planning, and targets for the sector in PR24 as well as how to deliver better environmental and social value. RAPID has published 'The Regulatory and Commercial Framework for Strategic Water Resources Solutions' discussion document.

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The final date to provide responses to these documents ends on the 22nd and 21st July respectively.

Defra intends to publish its response on water efficiency following consultation shortly as well as the final National Policy Statement for water resources infrastructure and a consultation on the strategic policy statement. Defra also plans to consult on its environmental targets including a water demand management target in the Autumn.

Natural England is set to share its position on Regional Planning in July, with a focus on habitats regulations. It has set up an internal working group to identify any barriers that may arise and flagged that there may be an issue around regional plans which include transferring water out of protected areas.

The NFU provided feedback on the outcome of the launch of its Integrated Water Management report. The launch of this report was successful and the NFU has begun to consider how to translate high-level strategic 25-year regional plans to catchment level for farmers.

Waterwise introduced its Senior Water Demand Reduction Group. The purpose of this group is to advise the water sector, government and regulators of the progress, ambition and required actions needed to reduce water demand in England across leakage, household and non-household water consumption. The next meeting is set to take place in the Autumn.

MOSL presented information on non-household market public water consumption. MOSL noted that challenges within the water industry, as well as non-household customers overall relationship with water as resulted in low uptake on water efficiency services. MOSL offered to set up a data sharing agreement with regional groups to support resource planning.

Water UK provided an update on its work to understand the scale of investment needs in the sector over coming periodic reviews. Water UK has been working with companies to pull together a broad qualitative assessment of the possible pressures to emerge from PR24 and beyond. Water UK also provided an update on its plans to set out a leakage route-map in the Autumn. This work will support companies to achieve the leakage reductions they have agreed to which were also set out in the national framework.

Blueprint for Water presented its 10 updated 'headline asks' for the regional Water resources plans. It also thanked Regional groups and regulators for the help that they had provided in setting up its webinar programme for eNGOs.

The Environment Agency set out its expectations for regional plans on the environmental destination area. It stressed that scenarios should be treated as a starting point and expects “reconciliation plans” to consider BAU 2050 and protected areas as a minimum future requirement. The EA intends to send Regional groups a letter explaining the EA's position around environmental destinations.

Natural England set out its expectations for regional plans. Regional plans' long-term environmental destinations must consider the water needs of protected sites and areas. Natural England reminded regional groups that HRA and SEA must be undertaken for relevant areas.

SSG held a discussion around the environmental risks, led by Jean Spencer. Defra and Ofwat highlighted the need for Regional Groups to consider best value and value for money throughout the reconciliation process. Regional groups discussed the impact of pace of delivery and magnitude on the schemes to be selected in plans, and highlighted uncertainties around abstraction licencing. Regional groups have included water quality, flood management and abstraction reductions in their plans.

SSG briefly reviewed the November forward look. The November meeting will hear from the regional groups on the development of their plans and how they are managing dependencies between the regions through a reconciliation process. To close the meeting Jean Spencer thanked all attendees for their contributions.