

National Framework Senior Steering Group Summary March 2022

The national framework senior steering group held its thirteenth meeting on 15 March 2022. This was the seventh virtual meeting held and was chaired by Jean Spencer. The meeting focused on feedback from the Regional Groups on their consultation on the emerging regional plans, including emerging risks, a forward look to the next round of regional plans in the autumn and a look forward to the next national framework.

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

- The risk that there is a lack of alignment between regional plans – in particular the risk that strategic transfer schemes do not line up between plans
- The regional plans agreed in September 2023 are not reflected in water resource management plans and Defra Secretary of State or Welsh Government/ Welsh Minister direction to publish.
- Water companies don't cascade regional plans into Business Plans e.g. subsequently take a different view on priorities – affordability, other investment needs (asset maintenance/CSOs)
- Uncertainty around pace, scale and scope of ambitious environmental water needs resulting in failure to make necessary decisions or to meet government, eNGO, customer, EA, NE, NRW expectations or introduces inconsistency across regional groups.

The meeting began with an update on responses to the letter from the independent chair of the Senior Water Demand Reduction Group (SWDRG) to the Defra Secretary of State on the progress of demand reduction. The SWDRG received responses from 2 water companies, the Environment Agency and a ministerial letter. Defra also provided a verbal update. Defra has opened its [consultation on seeking views on the new targets under the Environment Act 2021](#) and will also be holding a consultation on its policy on water labelling later on this year.

The Regional Groups presented the item on the feedback on the Regional Plans from the consultation, including emerging risks. Key themes that emerged from the consultation included feedback on demand management strategies, environmental destination and multisector collaboration. Key risks included differences in expectations around environmental destination work, concerns about the deliverability of meeting water demand reduction targets and queries around the consistency of the evidence and detail that is to be included in regional plans about strategic water resource options.

Jean Spencer led the item on a forward look to the next round of regional plans in the autumn. The SSG members were presented with a timeline of when the regional groups plan to consult on their plans and how these plans fit alongside the water company water resource management plans, also being published this autumn. There was a discussion on improvements that could be made to the consultation process, what could be done by regional groups and stakeholders in order to facilitate successful engagement with the consultation and whether there was appetite for a national approach to the consultation which would demonstrate how the regional plans fit together.

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The Environment Agency presented an item on its approach to refreshing the National Framework for Water Resources. The SSG members were asked for their views on what the refresh should entail. There was overall support from SSG attendees on the proposal for the refresh and the group highlighted the importance of working collaboratively in this area. The group suggested that the framework include:

- More clarity around what regional plans can provide to the agricultural sector through using a multisector approach
- Explanation as to how the environmental benefits and natural capital accounting outputs can be used to help inform decision making
- An evidence base that draws on what has been delivered by companies and others in the water sector at a national level
- A stronger role for customers in developing the framework
- Clarity around bill impacts for customers
- Updated assumptions on demand management and distribution
- An equal focus on non-household and household demand reductions including consistent messaging across both markets
- Explanation around where the estimates of the regional groups for environmental destination needs deviate from figures set out under the business as usual and enhanced scenarios
- A schedule which sets out when the National Framework will be updated going forward.

It was also suggested that the revised national framework could highlight the progress that has been achieved through the previous national framework.

SSG briefly reviewed the June forward look. In this meeting SSG will hear from the regional groups on lining up the plans for the autumn consultations, including bringing out any major issues and pivot points, a forward look to the plans on communications for the autumn consultation and an update from the SWDRG on the prioritisation of its recommendations. To close, Jean Spencer thanked the item presenters and the attendees for their contributions to the meeting.