

Planning and managing water resources

Our Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) explains how we plan to maintain water supplies across the North West in the long term. It provides a comprehensive statement of our water supply and demand forecasts to 2035 and the actions we plan to take for a sustainable water supply, taking into account the predicted impacts of climate change.

Our approach to water resource management is to:

- Balance supply and demand to ensure a reliable supply while protecting the environment and minimising the impact on customer bills
- Adapt to meet the challenge of climate change through helping customers use water more efficiently, tackling leakage and making our supply system more robust
- Respond to increasing drought risk, ensuring abstraction is sustainable and responsive to climate change adaptation
- Ensure our plans meet the needs and priorities of our customers and other stakeholders, by taking account of their views during our planning

In May 2008 we published our draft plan for consultation. In January 2009 we produced a Statement of Response that describes how we have taken account of the views we received and a revised Draft WRMP that has incorporated the comments received from consultees. We hope to publish the Final WRMP later in 2009, after the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has approved it.

The revised plan includes the West-East link, a new 55 kilometre long pipeline, due for completion in 2011. Once built, it will enable up to 100 million litres of water a day to be transferred between Merseyside and Greater Manchester, helping to secure supplies to customers in Manchester and the east of our region if there's a problem with the Haweswater Aqueduct. It will also allow us to respond to future pressures without any adverse effect on customers – for example, by protecting supplies from the effect of climate change which is predicted to make the north and east of the region more prone to drought.

All water companies are required by Government to produce a Drought Plan and to review it regularly. Our current Drought Plan was published at the beginning of 2008, after a consultation period, and sets out what we'd do to maintain water supplies to customers in the event of a drought. Within it, we've identified trigger levels in the event of a water shortage for the implementation of actions including increased customer communication, drought permit applications to the Environment Agency to alter our abstraction licences and the imposition of hosepipe bans.

This approach ensures that we don't have to resort to drastic measures such as standpipes or restrictions on supply. Overall, the plan sets out all the options we have in a drought and the processes and timescales involved to undertake courses of action.

In the year ahead, we plan to start the replacement of our water resource monitoring system. This will improve operational monitoring and regulatory reporting of our water supply system including reservoir storage, water production, leakage and low pressure at customers' properties. The new system is programmed to be commissioned for the 2009/10 reporting year and represents an investment of over £1million.