

Draft Water Resources Management Plan 2024: Annex 6: Stakeholder and customer engagement

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from
**Southern
Water** 

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this Annex is to provide a summary of the key customer insight that has been used in development of the Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). In this document we have summarised insight from 3 main areas of engagement:

- Feedback from customers and stakeholders on the draft regional water resources plan (2022)
- Foundational insight on customer preferences (2020-21)
- Feedback on the draft Drought Plan (2021)

This Annex also provides a summary of the pre-consultation work we undertook for the WRMP24 for the purpose of understanding customer priorities and those of the people they represent, share best practice and identify possible collaborative opportunities.

2. Customer Insight

The insight from of key customers has been used in development of the Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). The 3 main areas of engagement were:

- Feedback from customers and stakeholders on the draft regional water resources plan (2022)
- Foundational insight on customer preferences (2020-21)
- Feedback on the draft Drought Plan (2021)

Insight and engagement from a range of sources has helped in the development of the WRMP24. In total, we have **engaged with over 3,000 customers and stakeholders**, with a particular emphasis on the use of deliberative approaches and to ensure high quality research¹. Our breadth of engagement has been with households, businesses, stakeholders, future customers and harder to reach audiences to hear to a wide range of customers **views**.

On initial discussion customers are often **surprised at future challenges of water scarcity**. Water tends to be viewed as an abundant resource with limited experiences of shortages, perceptions that it's 'always raining' and being an island surrounded by water. Upon further exploration, **customers understand the challenges** of population growth, climate change, environmental protection and **support action be taken to ensure a resilient water future** the South East.

Customer preference starts with **making use of what water is already there** and therefore want to see demand measures to reduce leakage and improvements to water efficiency. However, they also want to see supply side solutions that **help address the root cause of water scarcity** for future generations and want the risk of emergency drought restrictions reduced.

Through all our engagement there is a **high level of priority placed on environmental protection**. Therefore, the focus on **reducing abstraction is welcomed**, although customers are looking for more detail from plans on how this will be achieved.

There is also a high level of **support for a collaborative approach** to long-term planning for water resources, resilience to drought and unexpected events. We have seen customers support the sharing of resources, although they would like to know what would happen without these resources, as well as **local level impacts** to help customers decide whether specific strategic resource options are the right choice for them. They support an **adaptive planning** approach that looks at the different scenarios and pathways.

From engaging on the regional resources plan, customers have shown **support on the focus for demand levers**, although are concerned on what feels like an over heavy reliance on demand management. Customers **welcome the balance of new supply options** in the emerging plan and like that there were multiple options - so no reliance on one more than others. The two measures that receive a more mixed response are desalination and water transfers from other regions. Evaluation of in the emerging regional plan reveals some support but heavily qualified by need to mitigate some key concerns, especially on cost and environmental impact.

¹ [Engaging water customers for better consumer and business outcomes | CCW \(ccwater.org.uk\)](https://www.ccwater.org.uk)

Overall, there was a good consensus that an acceptable plan will protect the environment, have a strong focus on education and demand management, increase the level of resilience and continue to drive down the risk of emergency drought measures, and incentivise companies to minimise waste.

2.1. Objectives

To deliver high quality insight that enables the WRMP to provide a plan that develops solutions that best meets our customer needs, now and for the future.

Area of Insight	Objective
Feedback from customers and stakeholders on the draft regional water resources plan (2022)	To understand key feedback on the regional plan, areas of support and challenge for the Southern Water impacted schemes.
Foundational insight on customer preferences (2020-21)	To have a solid understanding of customer preferences on demand and supply solutions.
Feedback on the draft drought plan (2021)	To have greater understating of customer support or challenge during drought conditions.

2.2. Approach and Methodology

In September 2019 we launched our Customer Participation Strategy which included ongoing engagement with customers and stakeholders about the services we provide, planning for the future and how best to meet their needs. Our approach is centred around 12 principles to ensure meaningful participation from our customers and high quality customer insight.



Figure 1.1: Customer Participation Principles

In the development of the WRMP24 we have used insight from our ongoing programme of engagement as well as bespoke activity to support key areas. These include: the use of deliberative research with informed customers through our consumer groups (e.g. Water Futures Programme); the use of less informed customers to bring in fresh perspectives; and partnering with other water companies to engage a wider group of customers on common issues – to allow for a robust cross-regional view. The range of customers engaged with include household, future, businesses, stakeholders and consumers from across the South East – all recruited to represent the demographics and locations across our region. In total just over 3,000 consumers and stakeholder have been engaged through this process so far. The projects included are:

Figure 1.2: Supporting Insight Projects and their Approaches

Project/Programme	Project Overview	Approach and sample	Output	
Feedback from customers and stakeholders on the draft regional water resources plan (2022)	Water Futures 2050	Online panel of future customers who come together every few months to tap in and review elements of our long term strategy – focusing on that future view.	1 week online community with 23 participants being introduced to the regional plan and giving their views. Followed by a 90 minute Youth Committee Session to validate the findings. This includes super future customers (14-15 year olds still in education), future customers (16-21 years old) and first time customers (22-30 year olds) spread across our region.	<i>WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2050</i>
	Water Futures 2030	Online panel of household customers which runs alongside our PR-24 programme and allows for regular engagement.	Exploration of the regional plan undertaken by over 40 panellist as part of our online community. These customers are a spread from across the region to reflect the different diverse region we operate within.	<i>WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2030</i>
	Water Futures Business	We used an existing network of businesses from across our region to understand views and feedback on the regional plan – considering businesses who are both reliant and non reliant on water.	This exercise consisted of a 1-week online community and 16x45min depth interviews to gather reflections and deep dive into specific parts of the regional plan.	<i>WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Business</i>
	Water Futures Stakeholder	Specific groups set up to have detailed discussion around the Regional Plan. Southern Water (SW) hosted a series of four 'Expert Insight Panels', designed to gather feedback from its key stakeholders about its Emerging Regional Plan focusing on stakeholders from across the region (Sussex, Hampshire, IOW and Kent)	4 x 2 hour Expert Insight Panel with stakeholders from across each region (CCW, Rivers Trust, Natural England, EA, etc). Focused sessions to really understand the impact and views of expert stakeholders who are embedded within the local community and can give holistic feedback from their area of expertise.	<i>WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Stakeholder</i>
Foundational insight on customer preferences (2020-21)	Water Resource Preferences – Qualitative Phase	Following an evidence review of over 120 documents the research sought to explore a range of areas relevant for choices of resource options. These included the perceived benefits, barriers, preferences and impacts for each. A focus was then placed on helping to assess the preferences of supply and demand side solutions as well as key issues to the environment and resilience.	Approximately 80 customers participated in the research, with separate groups of 7-10 customers for each company. The groups were implemented online from August 2020 to January 2021, featuring two sessions with participants, with a mix of discussion topics and exercises. The groups also completed pre-read and between session 'home-work' exercises. The research explored a range of issues within these topic areas to test customers' broad priorities and help establish a view on what the level of customer support will be for various outcomes.	<i>WRSE Customer Preferences Deliberative Research February 2021</i>

	Water Resource Preferences – Quantitative Phase	A project to engage across the South East region to provide a robust view on customer preferences around demand and supply side options for resource planning. The survey was implemented to provide results that are representative of all households in the South East of England and non-households connected to the public water supply in the region. substantially from household customers.	A total of 2,295 household respondents and 365 non-household respondents completed the online survey. The survey was developed from two stages of qualitative testing: (a) learnings and findings from the deliberative research and (b) iterative testing through 10 one-to-one cognitive interviews. The survey material was piloted (with 52 customers) and then implemented via a soft launch to test the choice task on customer preferences for demand and supply options.	<i>WRSE Customer Preferences Quantitative Research March 2021</i>
Feedback on the draft Drought Plan (2021)	Drought Plan groups	Specific groups set up to have detailed discussion around the drought plan which was provided to participants prior to the focus groups taking part. We gauged feedback on the plans, comprehension of the plans, as well as support for the principles and their views on how we communicate.	4 x 2 hour group focus groups. 2 groups of household customers who have been part of our Water for Life Hampshire panel, 1 additional group of Water Futures 2030 panellist who are household customers from across Hampshire, Sussex and Kent. 1 group of 8 Portsmouth Water only customers.	<i>Household Customer Engagement – Drought Plan '21</i>
	Water Futures 2030 and Water for Life Hampshire	Deliberative consumer panel which is central to all our insight for strategic planning and PR-24 programme through continuous engagement.	Exploration of the drought plans undertaken by 63 panellists as part of our deliberative consumer panels. These customers are a spread from across the region to reflect the different diverse region we operate within. This was followed up by 5 x 1 hour discussion to review the findings.	<i>Household Customer Engagement – Drought Plan '21</i>
	Water Futures 2050	Our young person's group of future customers who focus on providing insight for our long term strategy – and ensuring customers of tomorrow have their voices heard in our strategic planning.	1 week online community with 46 participants being introduced to the drought plan (10 Portsmouth Water customers). This includes super future customers (14–15 year olds still in education), future customers (16-21 years old) and first time customers (22-30 year olds) spread across our region. Followed by 6 x 75 minute focus groups reviewing the plans in more detail.	<i>Future Customers and Drought overview '21</i>
	Non-Household Consultation	We used an existing network of businesses across our region and that of Portsmouth Water to engage these customers on the proposed drought plan.	25 x 1 hour interviews with business customers (mix of those who are reliant on water for their product /service). This included 8 businesses from the Portsmouth Water operating area.	<i>Business Customer report – Drought Plan '21</i>
	Expert Stakeholders interviews	Engagement of expert stakeholders, which allowed us to have a broader view of what our customers from different backgrounds and cultures need during drought conditions.	6 x 1 hour interviews with representatives of harder to reach customers who represent both Southern Water and Portsmouth Water customers (including signposting services, housing services, language assistance and supported living representatives).	<i>Expert stakeholder report – Drought Plan '21</i>
Additional Insight Sources	Water Recycling Semiotics	To understand cultural, social and perceptual barriers to the acceptance of recycled water and identifying ways to overcome them. Semiotics is the analysis, deconstruction and exploration of meaning all around SW by using expert interviews and data analysis.	10 x SW and partner technical experts. 5 x cultural experts. Analysed over 400,000 data points from sources such as media, publications, entertainment, industry websites etc.	<i>SW Semiotics of Water Report Nov '20</i>

2.3. Customer Perceptions of Water Scarcity

Most customers act with surprise on learning that the South East is under water stress. Drought is a terminology that is understood but relates to images of arid landscape, deserts or countries that feel very distant, both culturally and geographically, to the UK. As such, preparing for '1 in 200' year drought is not widely understood.

Water is simultaneously valued and taken for granted. On reflection customers understand the vital role it plays in our lives, but overtime has become invisible. With high quality drinking water instantly available, even the more recent introduction of combi-boilers and boiling hot taps in domestic life, mean a plentiful supply of water is available without even thinking about it. In the UK water is signalled to be in abundance; 'we're an island', 'it's always raining', 'Blue Planet', 'extreme storms' and other cultural cues are continually reinforcing the perception of abundance. In 2018 we had the hottest summer since 1976, and in 2020 saw a number of heatwave period without any significant water restrictions to customers. This continues to reinforce the belief of abundance.

Water is seen as either 'good' or 'bad'. It's good when it's part of the natural or human world, such as in rivers, reservoirs, for use in healing and vitality. It's bad when it's part of the destructive or processed world, such as storms, flooding, pollutions or full of chemicals. Demand solutions that either already make efficient use of the water we already have (such as leakage and PCC) and supply solutions that sit firmly in perceptions of 'good' water such as reservoirs and natural groundwater are customer's first choice for water sources.

For any solution to succeed we need to engage with customers and stakeholder clearly on the need. To help customers understand the impacts of climate change and population growth on water stress, but vitally the need to act in protecting the environment.

2.4. Feedback from Customers and Stakeholders on the Draft Regional Water Resources Plan (2022)

Towards the end of 2021 and throughout 2022 at Southern Water we conducted a research project through our BAU engagement channels to understand views from different audiences on the Draft Regional Water Resource Plan.

Using our Water Futures Programme, we were able to engage with household and future customers (including those who are harder to reach and from diverse backgrounds), as well as non-household customers and stakeholders from across our operating area. From the table below you can see the range of approaches to ensure the voices of these audiences were given a platform to feedback and give their views on the proposed plans for the region. In this section below we have summarised the key findings from our deliberative research to help understand customer and stakeholder views, differences, and concerns on the Draft Regional Water Resources Plan.

Figure 1.3: Supporting Insight Projects for the Draft Regional Water Resources Plan and their Approaches

Project/Programme	Project Overview	Approach and sample	Report/output
Water Futures 2050	Online panel of future customers who come together every few months to tap in and review elements of our long term strategy – focusing on that future view.	1 week online community with 23 participants being introduced to the regional plan and giving their views. Followed by a 90 minute Youth Committee Session to validate the findings. This includes super future customers (14-15 year olds still in education), future customers (16-21 years old) and first time customers (22-30 year olds) spread across our region.	WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2050
Water Futures 2030	Online panel of household customers which runs alongside our PR-24 programme and allows for regular engagement.	Exploration of the regional plan undertaken by over 40 panellist as part of our online community. These customers are a spread from across the region to reflect the different diverse region we operate within.	WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2030
Water Futures Business	We used an existing network of businesses from across our region to understand views and feedback on the regional plan – considering businesses who are both reliant and non reliant on water.	This exercise consisted of a 1-week online community and 16x45min depth interviews to gather reflections and deep dive into specific parts of the regional plan.	WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Business
Water Futures Stakeholder	Specific groups set up to have detailed discussion around the Regional Plan. Southern Water (SW) hosted a series of four 'Expert Insight Panels', designed to gather feedback from its key stakeholders about its Emerging Regional Plan focusing on stakeholders from across the region (Sussex, Hampshire, IOW and Kent)	4 x 2 hour Expert Insight Panel with stakeholders from across each region (CCW, Rivers Trust, Natural England, EA, etc). Focused sessions to really understand the impact and views of expert stakeholders who are embedded withing the local community and can give holistic feedback from their area of expertise.	WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Stakeholder

2.4.1. Summary of findings²

There was concern at the extent of the potential scarcity, although customers are reassured that water companies are working effectively together on this. Customers welcome a focus on reducing abstraction, but require more detail on what the actual plan is i.e. how it will be achieved.

Customers have prioritised upper catchments as they like the trickle-down benefit to the whole catchment; they also prioritise this because of reference to the 'most vulnerable' headwater ecologies being addressed. Having a high degree of certainty about restoring flows and delivering environmental improvement is also a key priority vs focusing on a wider range of catchments and only partially addressing abstraction issues.

² WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2050, WRSE Full Report – Water Futures 2030, WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Business and WRSE Full Report – Water Futures Stakeholder

Customers have generally prioritised nature over humans by placing less emphasis on the catchments where people have most unrestricted access, as this does not necessarily equate to most overall benefit. Future customers were also positive about the plans to reduce abstraction but would need more information to address concerns about how long it would take and similar with non-household customers who found the need for abstraction reduction surprising, but this was not challenged. While they were positive about the proposed environmental benefits, they will require greater reassurance from WRSE about the impact on their business in terms of cost, business disruption from unreliable supply or nearby works, and having to comply with any new policies.

There was no clear overall preference among stakeholders across the region around which catchment areas Southern Water should prioritise for abstraction reduction. Some stakeholders believed that it was more important to prioritise fragile areas, such as upper catchments, while others thought that prioritising the catchment area with the biggest environmental benefit would be the most sensible approach.

Future supplies (2025-2040) - Customer support the focus on demand levers, although are concerned there is a huge emphasis on them

- 1. to reduce their consumption and***
- 2. to meet the costs via bills, which feels like an over heavy reliance on demand management (54%)***

Future supplies (2040-2060) - Customers welcome that with time the balance begins to shift more towards supply than demand, and that different pathways are being considered.

Customers want to see an increase in emphasis on water recycling, though some would also like to see more focus on storage as well, reducing water efficiency to 26% (2040-60) from 54% (2025-40) feels more realistic and less of a burden on customers, but making up the shortfall with transfers from other regions runs the risk of being unsustainable e.g. during drought periods. However, the lower and central pathways increase water efficiency and leakage reduction from 2025-40 figure. With the end of drought orders, it is unclear where the excess water efficiency slack is going to be taken up – by Southern Water or by customers (the latter being more risky).

Young people also supported the WRSE plans for 2025-40 and 2040-60 overall, seeing the plans as thorough and achievable. They felt confident that the plans would address water scarcity issues in the South East and create security water resources in the future, however some needed to see more information before they could feel confident that the plans would ensure the environment was protected or be cost effective. These feelings for the most part were replicated for stakeholders across the four regions – they largely believed that the plan has struck the right balance between demand and supply solutions, and regarding the risks associated with delivering these solutions. However, stakeholders in Sussex, Kent and Hampshire stressed that Southern Water should not rely solely on demand management, at the expense of investing in the network.

Businesses were also positive about the WRSE plans for 2025-40 and 2040-60. The range of solutions proposed were seen to comprehensively address the predicted water shortfall and planning separately for each of the pathways was considered sensible. NHCs were sufficiently reassured by the plans to only engage with them to a limited extent.

Information on government interventions encouraging and genuinely interesting, but they are very critical of the long timelines for implementation

Almost universal acceptance that TUBs and NEUBs are a necessary evil. Additionally, they are seen as a good way of targeting wasteful and high users of water and customers feel it is good that will target business as well as consumers. Some question how effective they are though, given difficulties in policing them and

some questions around why this is built into the plan rather than being a last resort fall back option – building into the plan make it feel as if they are being normalized. There is support, as ever, of water companies being more ambitious in tackling leakage for their part.

Positive response to the balance of new supply options in the emerging plan, and feels like there are multiple options so no reliance on one more than others

- Aquifer Storage and Recovery is particularly welcomed as being innovative and making a positive environmental difference
- Water recycling feels like a big part of the emerging plan and feels intuitively sustainable and environmentally friendly – though some are keen to reiterate the need to provide the necessary assurances on water quality here
- Building new reservoirs is also identified as a positive part of the plan, with the associated environmental, health and community benefits
- There is a desire for Southern Water to ensure that the more environmentally friendly and cost-effective measures are a primary focus in order that bills remain as affordable as possible
- There was a feeling amongst stakeholders that all the proposed solutions presented could have a role to play, but it was suggested that more monitoring and analysis would need to be put in place to ensure that no environmental damage is caused, and that the proposed solutions are the most cost-effective ones. Water collection systems and catchment management were the most popular options presented across the four regions.
- Businesses fundamentally trusted that the experts at WRSE knew what they were doing when making the plans – they are happy with limited information being provided.

The two measures that receive a more mixed response are desalination and water transfers from other regions.

Desalination tends to polarize response with customers, with some seeing huge potential in coastal areas of the Southern region but others put off by the high price tag and environmental damage it causes. Transfers from other regions are not felt to promote as sustainable or self-reliant a solution and are seen as being risky in terms of continuity of supply during drought months and potential high cost.

For stakeholders - desalination was generally negatively received, with concerns expressed about the carbon intensity of this approach and its by-products.

Evaluation of the transfers in the emerging plan reveals some support but heavily qualified by need to mitigate some key concerns esp. on cost and environmental impact.

Water transfers were broadly viewed as a fallback option with stakeholders, due to the costs of infrastructure and worries about wider national water resiliency. There was noticeably more support for water transfers in Kent and Hampshire.

Catchment solutions seen as positive for the environment, showing good will on part of water cos, but need to consider balance between what is innovative vs experimental.

Acknowledgement that these schemes may only produce a small amount of water and that they do 'not form part of our cost-efficient solution' somewhat undermine much of the overall good associated with them.

Young people want to see Southern Water investing in more environmentally sustainable infrastructure and doing so today rather than waiting until the future. Ultimately, they felt that Southern Water should pay for this investment from their own profits, as it was both their responsibility to do so and would ensure the longevity of their business (and water supply) in the future. However, they were prepared to pay higher bills to cover this investment if needed, as long as bills remained affordable.

For businesses, the thorough nature and range of solutions proposed, along with the inherent trust that they had in the expertise behind the plans, was sufficient to reassure them that the risk of potential disruption to their water supply would be minimal. However, they require more information about the cost implications for them and their businesses so they can accurately forecast their finances.

2.5. Customer quotes on the Regional Water Resources Plan

“It really put into perspective how much water is consumed. I would never have thought that 145 litres per person were consumed daily. It’s quite staggering to realise how much we take access to water for granted.”

Future customer

“I agree that upper catchments would have an effect on catchment areas as a whole, therefore it is important to reduce abstraction in these areas to minimise negative consequences.”

Future customer

“It makes sense to use water efficiently and not waste it, to be able to supply water to areas that need it, and to protect the environment. I don’t know what other priorities they would have.”

Business Owner

“I would like some more detail; how much is based on pop growth, usage, industry? Not specific figures, but a little breakdown of the estimate a bit more.”

Business Owner

“Southern Water has been successful in protecting the environment while supporting population growth. I also applaud efforts to reduce abstraction, while putting in place leakage and demand reduction systems, and this needs to continue.”

Kent Stakeholder

“Government and Ofwat regulations are not fit for purpose for addressing these challenges. Rather than allowing you to invest to support these huge transformations to the system, you are expected to cut your margins, meaning this whole thing is doomed to fail.”

Hampshire Stakeholder

“The environment has to be one of the key drivers in any decision...we need to protect for the future generations both on a nature level and a resource level. The cost is a bit eye watering when you look at the figures though.”

Household Customer

“It’s a clearly laid out plan but the reliance on demand management is a little bit worrying and I’d say a risk especially as this relies on consumers helping minimize their water use.”

Household Customer

2.6. Foundational insight on Customer Preferences (2020-21)

Through 2020 and 2021 the six WRSE companies - **Affinity Water, Portsmouth Water, South East Water, Southern Water, SES Water, Thames Water** worked with four companies - **Anglian Water, Severn Trent Water, South West Water, United Utilities** – to conduct a collaborative research project on customer preferences.

The first stage was an evidence review which compiled a range of insights from companies' PR19 and WRMP19 customer research. The review included over 120 documents submitted by the ten companies. The purpose is to provide a consolidated view of the customer evidence base structured around a set of research questions related to: (i) resilience outcomes; (ii) demand measures; (iii) supply side solutions; and (iv) the wider policy context for long-term water resource planning. This evidence review included the research that Southern Water had carried out to that date, including relevant reports for PR19, WRMP19 and ongoing work for the Water for Life Hampshire programme.

For this foundational insight summary below we have focused on the key findings from this collaborative research as it provides the most rounded and robust view on customer preferences for resource solutions across the South East.

Figure 1.4: Supporting Insight Projects on Customer Preferences

Project/Programme	Project Overview	Approach and sample	Output
Water Resource Preferences – Qualitative Phase	Following an evidence review of over 120 documents the research sought to explore a range of areas relevant for choices of resource options. These included the perceived benefits, barriers, preferences and impacts for each. A focus was then placed on helping to assess the preferences of supply and demand side solutions as well as key issues to the environment and resilience.	Approximately 80 customers participated in the research, with separate groups of 7-10 customers for each company. The groups were implemented online from August 2020 to January 2021, featuring two sessions with participants, with a mix of discussion topics and exercises. The groups also completed pre-read and between session 'home-work' exercises. The research explored a range of issues within these topic areas to test customers' broad priorities and help establish a view on what the level of customer support will be for various outcomes.	<i>WRSE Customer Preferences Deliberative Research February 2021</i>
Water Resource Preferences – Quantitative Phase	A project to engage across the South East region to provide a robust view on customer preferences around demand and supply side options for resource planning. The survey was implemented to provide results that are representative of all households in the South East of England and non-households connected to the public water supply in the region. substantially from household customers.	A total of 2,295 household respondents and 365 non-household respondents completed the online survey. The survey was developed from two stages of qualitative testing: (a) learnings and findings from the deliberative research and (b) iterative testing through 10 one-to-one cognitive interviews. The survey material was piloted (with 52 customers) and then implemented via a soft launch to test the choice task on customer preferences for demand and supply options.	<i>WRSE Customer Preferences Quantitative Research March 2021</i>

2.6.1. Summary of findings³

- Overall, our research has shown the high level of priority that participants placed on environmental protection.
- There is also a high level of support for a collaborative approach to long-term planning for water resources and resilience to drought and unexpected events. Participants had a good and increasing awareness of climate and population pressures and are reassured that companies are planning for future risks.
- There is support amongst participants for reducing the risk of emergency drought restrictions. The experiences of people through 2020 and the COVID-19 has made the implications of restrictions on day-to-day activities less abstract and a better reference point for gauging impacts that are tolerable and those that are to be avoided.
- Participants also supported the sharing of resources, but more detail needs to be provided on the strategic context (availability of water by location), what would happen without these resources as well as local level impacts to help customers decide whether specific strategic resource options are the right choice for them.
- Determining whether a plan across multiple companies is acceptable may be challenging, given expectations of customers that a good level of support will need to be evident for all companies (including 'supplier' and 'recipient' areas).

2.7. Overview to Supply / Demand options preferences⁴

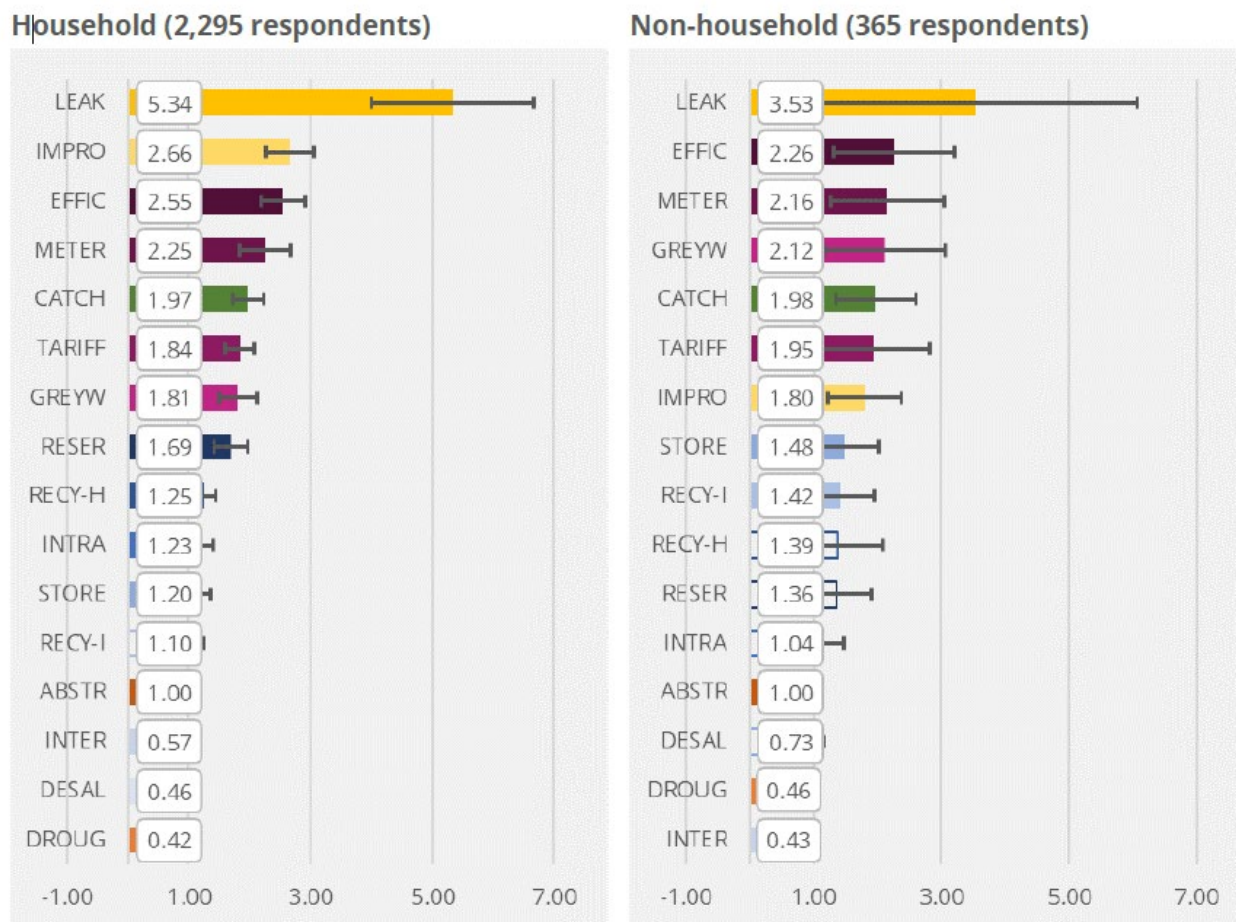
The customer preference results show a clear priority order for demand and supply for customers (Figure 5). The starting point is ensuring that the current system is efficient; practically this mean reducing leaks and removing constraints in the water supply network. After this, efforts should be focused on being more efficient with the water that is currently supplied and helping customers use less water, along with actions that deliver wider benefits and public value, such as catchment management initiatives. Respondents then saw the role for new resource schemes and inter-/intra-regional transfer options at the next level down. Beyond this were the least preferred options that have potentially significant negative environmental impacts, including increased abstraction and greater reliance on drought orders and drought permits as short-term measures.

This priority order for options was largely consistent across the household and non-household samples and household customer segments. Some differences were, though, observed for household respondents assessed to be in potentially vulnerable circumstances due to a dependency on water. These respondents were more likely to prefer abstraction from rivers and less likely to favour measures that have the potential to impact on their uses of water.

³WRSE Customer Preferences Deliberative Research February 2021

⁴WRSE Customer Preferences Quantitative Research March 2021

Figure 1.5: Customer Preferences for Water Resource Options



Customer preference - options

Theme

Efficiency

- Leakage detection and reduction (LEAK)
- Improvements to the current water supply system (IMPRO)

Demand

- Universal metering (METER)
- Using tariffs to encourage water saving (TARIFF)
- More efficient use of water in homes (EFFIC)
- Using grey water to rainwater collection and use (GREYW)

Environment

- Catchment management (CATCH)
- Extra drought measures (DROUG)
- Taking water from rivers and groundwater (ABSTR)

Resources and transfers

- Reservoir to store water (RESER)
- Storing water underground (STORE)
- Taking water from the sea (DESAL)
- Recycling treated wastewater for household use (RECY – H)
- Recycling treated wastewater for industrial use (RECY – I)
- Transferring water from other regions (INTER)
- Transferring water within the South East region (INTRA)

NB: The sections below provide summaries from customers on the key foundational considerations in relation to water resource options.⁵

2.7.1. Key findings – environment

One of the biggest messages to come from the deliberative research was how important a consideration the environment is for participants. The overall view was that water companies should not plan to harm the environment. “In this day and age” it was deemed unacceptable that long term plans to secure water supplies and improve resilience of the water system to drought and unexpected events would be at the expense of the environment. In addition, participants also wanted companies to ensure plans are sustainable.

In all groups, concern for the environment was the number one driver for views and this was consistent across all demographics. Service levels are important, but there was the view that they are at a high level and not a priority over protecting the environment from damage. Accordingly, in voting exercises the environment tended to be the top priority.

2.7.2. Key findings – resilience

There was a great deal of support for companies working together to build resilience across regions. Most participants felt this was efficient and fair, especially as water is seen as belonging to everyone. However, the support shown for collaborative working was accompanied by a strong message from participants that all companies have a duty to “get their house in order” and working together is not a reason to avoid using available water resources sustainably and responsibly.

Participants felt it was sensible to plan for a range of futures. For example, people could not have envisaged a year like 2020 with record temperatures in spring/early summer alongside a pandemic, but recognised that whatever resilience plans are in place they ‘worked’, and water kept flowing. There was also recognition that the COVID-19 lockdown has increased confidence around the general public’s ability to cope with certain lifestyle restrictions, including some of the aspects of rota cuts, such as shutting essential shops and schools.

Most participants felt that weather patterns are becoming more extreme. Alongside this, there was a good level of understanding that the population is growing and that resources need to be managed to match these changes, especially in the South East. Whilst participants agree that we cannot firmly predict the future, it is possible to predict that resourcing may get harder, so they wanted services to be resilient to different future scenarios, however unlikely they may seem.

There were no concerns among the groups about being overly prepared for future risks. Insurance associated with overbuilding infrastructure was not seen as an issue. The view among participants tended to be that it was that it is “better to be safe than sorry”. Many felt that “we will use the infrastructure eventually”. Participants across the groups felt that WRSE’s resilience planning metrics (that measure certainty; likelihood of restrictions; impact on the environment; and flexibility) are measuring and balancing the right things, with certainty being their highest priority.

⁵ *WRSE Customer Preferences Deliberative Research February 2021*

2.7.3. Key findings – service levels

Hosepipe bans and non-essential use bans were not seen as significant concerns. The view was that they do not occur very often and had limited impact for most customers. Therefore, most participants felt they were not a priority for improving future service levels - although there was also no appetite for an increase in the frequency of these restrictions, either.

In contrast, severe drought restrictions (rota cuts or standpipe supply) were considered to be extremely serious by participants. Restrictions on day-to-day life due to COVID-19 have given participants a clearer understanding of what impacts are tolerable, and which are not, particularly in terms of essential services. Among participants there was a good level of support for continuing to reduce the risk of severe restrictions from the industry standard of 1 in 200 year.

A voting exercise showed that, whilst some were comfortable with the current level of risk, the majority would prefer to see a further reduction in risk. There were mixed views, though, as to how far the reduction in risk should go beyond 1 in 200 years.

Participants felt very strongly that reductions in risk of emergency drought measures need to be achieved via sustainable investment and protecting the environment. Only in the most extreme situations would protecting the environment be a lower priority than people - i.e. it would be more important to get water to homes than leave it in already-stressed rivers. However, as noted previously, participants did not want long term plans to deliver security of supply under normal circumstances at the expense of the environment.

2.7.4. Key findings – supply and demand options

Participants favoured demand options over supply options. In principle, it is better to use less and waste less water than develop new or increase the use of current resources. However, some participants were concerned about the reliability and certainty of water savings from demand options; in particular, how much people will be willing or find it practical to change their behaviour, especially when water is needed the most (i.e. during a drought).

Therefore, the general sense in the groups was that water companies need to be pragmatic and assess whether demand management is enough on its own, or whether a combination of demand and supply measures is more realistic. Participants considered that demand measures need to be in place, but there was recognition that new supply options would also be needed in light of the resilience planning issues that had been discussed (changing climate and weather patterns, population growth).

Participants also felt very strongly that companies should have their “house in order” by ensuring that leakage levels are appropriate, and the right levels of metering and water efficiency support measures are in place. These measures – along with other actions by Government and manufacturers - were seen as very important if companies are to encourage customers to reduce their usage and/or share resources.

Overall, reservoirs, managing land use and catchment management were the most popular supply options across the groups, with these options being considered as ‘more natural’. For the most part this was due to their familiarity and certainty, and because of the potential for wider wildlife, recreation and amenity benefits. Participants were open to other supply option technologies, such as water recycling and desalination, but were sensitive to cost as well as the potential environmental impacts in terms of energy, use of chemicals, and waste production. Participants were accepting of local transfers and, whilst receptive to larger scale water transfers, they considered such transfers should only be used if absolutely necessary. They did not support tankering, seeing it as unsustainable and a short-term emergency response only.

2.7.5. Key findings – sharing resources and associated policy issues

Sharing resources

Overall, participants are supportive of sharing water resources. They feel that water “comes from the sky and belongs to everyone”. There are, however, limits to their support particularly from the “supplier” point of view, with participants more willing to see water transfers out of their region when there is a lower potential impact on themselves (e.g. in terms of water quality), and less willing if the “recipients” (companies and customers) have higher wastage.

Policy issues

Participants largely supported the three national policy issues associated with water resources, though their support was caveated. They considered the proposed target to reduce leakage by half to be reasonable; and supported the use of green energy, but only if at a reasonable cost. Whilst they all agreed that reducing water usage was positive, there were mixed views as to whether the target of a 20% reduction across households overall was fair or realistic without quite fundamental changes to the way we use water. Participants were also supportive of investing now for future generations, but expected affordability to be taken into account.

What is an acceptable plan?

Overall, there was a good consensus that an acceptable plan will protect the environment, have a strong focus on education and demand management, increase the level of resilience and continue to drive down the risk of emergency drought measures, and incentivise companies to minimise waste.

What level of support does a plan need to have?

Participants recognised the complexities of agreeing a regional plan. The most popular view across the groups was that most customers in each of the companies need to agree to the plan. The views of customers of “supplier” companies were considered especially important. Therefore, there is the need to see the level of customer support for sharing water across each company and not just the total aggregate “result”. Participants considered that the required majority in each company should not be overly high, as they did not want to set an impossible task. However, the process needs to include protections for financially vulnerable customers who may be less likely to find a plan acceptable on cost grounds. Around 70% support was suggested in one group as a suitable threshold for customer acceptability and this was also appealing when tested in further groups.

Demand

Although participants were supportive of demand measures, it was also evident that they recognised their limitations, in that they can be hard to implement and difficult to sustain. In particular, water companies cannot force people to save water. While demand-side options may be preferable, participants’ preference for them was tempered by the expectation that they would only be effective with a proportion of the customer base and that the measures could only go so far.

Participants also considered that water companies must play their part through leakage reduction but recognised some of the issues in addressing leakage.

Education

Customers considered education an essential first step to reducing water usage.

Although most participants were conscious of the environment, they were concerned that people 'take water for granted'. Many argued that we need to view water as a more precious resource, and education is the first step towards that. Some participants took the conversation a step further by recognising the need for financial incentives to ensure educational measures are effective.

The challenge of changing behaviour

Participants recognised that demand measures may have limited effect.

Although education and demand-reducing measures were favoured, there were concerns about people being reluctant to change their behaviour, and an unfair weight of responsibility falling on a minority who were keen on reducing their water usage.

Views on the efficacy of demand measures are shaped by wider experience.

The discussion around demand measures and the reliance on behaviour change is one area where the wider COVID-19 context was seen to influence participants' thinking. Specifically, some felt that responses to COVID-19 restrictions had shown that public cannot always be relied on to change their behaviour. This led them to question how wise it is to depend on behaviour change to save water. Given this and forecast population growth, demand management alone was not considered a reliable enough measure. Notwithstanding, other participants said they were encouraged by the more conscientious behaviour some people have displayed during the pandemic.

The role for demand measures

Customers see demand measures as one component of a rounded approach.

In general, across the groups, the view tended to be that water companies should not have an over-reliance on demand-reduction measures but rather should follow a holistic approach. An overall plan should be formed around educating customers, encouraging metering and use of water-saving devices, along with supply options. Some participants also noted that industry and agriculture also have a role to play.

Grey water measures

Lack of familiarity is a barrier to participant support to grey water measures

In general, there was a preference for measures that participants were familiar with, whether that was through experience, education or television and other media. In the groups, some participants indicated that grey water recycling felt confusing and it initially had lower levels of support. Following discussions, participants responded well to the idea of grey water, but they needed more information to understand how it would be implemented (e.g. in new builds, in businesses or in older homes). Respondents suggested that social support in installing grey water devices in homes would improve view on the method.

Supply

Overall, the discussion in the deliberative groups indicated that participants preferred supply options that were seen to be reliable, produced large amounts of water, and were lower cost. Participants also tended to prefer options that they considered to be 'more natural' and seen to enhance the environment. A further distinguishing feature was the potential for, and scale of, any negative environmental impact such as chemicals and energy usage.

2.8. Feedback on the Draft Drought Plan (2021)

Through our existing insight programmes we were able to gather the views of customers who were well-informed and had good knowledge of the industry and our practices, as well as the views of existing customers who were less informed but could provide a fresh perspective – this was achieved through our existing Water Futures 2030 panel. We also used our youth panel to gauge reactions to the Drought Plan from a young

people's viewpoint – Water Futures 2050. Both of these panels consisted of an online community of participants managed by one of our partnered research agencies.

In addition to the BAU insights, we also commissioned standalone pieces of research to focus on what businesses felt about the Drought Plan and how this might have differed amongst households.

One of our priorities when we undertake research is ensuring that we are as diverse and inclusive as possible, whilst learning through interactions about how we are able to engage with harder to reach customers. As part of the Drought Plan consultation – we reached out and spoke with 6 expert stakeholders who represent harder to reach audiences (Citizens Advice, housing associations, language assistance reps, supported living, etc.).

This approach meant that we were able to reach a large number of customers from across our entire region, from different backgrounds/cultures, as well as customers at different life stages. This range of customers we spoke to really gives us a robust overall reflection of their views on the drought plan.

2.8.1. Overall summary findings

Impact on Covid on crisis management:

- Current customers are very accepting of levels 3 and 4 restrictions – they understand the need and there are very few indications of resistance (COVID has increased acceptance of rules)
- Business customers impacted by water scarcity need help to explore ways in which they can become more resilient and to raise awareness of how they may be affected by restrictions. They want to do more now to minimise impact in the future.
- For young people – the pandemic has made restrictions feel fairer and more acceptable. Future customers expect a multi-model approach to communication that reaches all at the time of drought.
- For future customers, it is important for the company to emphasise how it is working to play its part and engaging with business and agriculture so the changes seem fair. Young people are also willing to do their part in a crisis once they're on board with the idea (Covid restrictions used as a reference). General consensus is that more needs to be done now to make people aware from a young age about the issues we face.

Implications around the drought plan:

- Customer knowledge of drought in the UK is fairly limited, therefore early engagement would be needed to ensure better understanding of the need for emergency measures. There is a misperception of what drought would look like in the UK – meaning customers are unprepared for the reality of how it would impact lives.
- Household customers feel the Southern Water Drought Plan provides reassurance and is comprehensive in detail, yet accessibly written for customers.
- Demonstrating the link between changes in personal usage behaviours and the impact on droughts is important to help those who currently feel they are already sensible enough, to see what else they could do.
- It is sufficient enough to customers that there is a drought plan – customers don't generally feel they need forward sight of the details. Customers agree with the principals behind how the restrictions are applied though specific exemptions provoke a reaction.

Figure 1.6: Supporting Insight Projects on the Draft Drought Plan and their Approaches

Project/Programme	Project Overview	Approach and sample	Output
Drought Plan groups	Specific groups set up to have detailed discussion around the drought plan which was provided to participants prior to the focus groups taking part. We gauged feedback on the plans, comprehension of the plans, as well as support for the principles and their views on how we communicate.	4 x 2 hour group focus groups. 2 groups of household customers who have been part of our Water for Life Hampshire panel, 1 additional group of Water Futures 2030 panellist who are household customers from across Hampshire, Sussex and Kent. 1 group of 8 Portsmouth Water only customers.	<i>Household Customer Engagement – Drought Plan '21</i>
Water Futures 2030 and Water for Life Hampshire	Deliberative consumer panel which is central to all our insight for strategic planning and PR-24 programme through continuous engagement.	Exploration of the drought plans undertaken by 63 panellists as part of our deliberative consumer panels. These customers are a spread from across the region to reflect the different diverse region we operate within. This was followed up by 5 x 1 hour discussion to review the findings.	<i>Household Customer Engagement – Drought Plan '21</i>
Water Futures 2050	Our young person's group of future customers who focus on providing insight for our long term strategy – and ensuring customers of tomorrow have their voices heard in our strategic planning.	1 week online community with 46 participants being introduced to the drought plan (10 Portsmouth Water customers). This includes super future customers (14-15 year olds still in education), future customers (16-21 years old) and first time customers (22-30 year olds) spread across our region. Followed by 6 x 75 minute focus groups reviewing the plans in more detail.	<i>Future Customers and Drought overview '21</i>
Non-Household Consultation	We used an existing network of businesses across our region and that of Portsmouth Water to engage these customers on the proposed drought plan.	25 x 1 hour interviews with business customers (mix of those who are reliant on water for their product /service). This included 8 businesses from the Portsmouth Water operating area.	<i>Business Customer report – Drought Plan '21</i>
Expert Stakeholders interviews	Engagement of expert stakeholders, which allowed us to have a broader view of what our customers from different backgrounds and cultures need during drought conditions.	6 x 1 hour interviews with representatives of harder to reach customers who represent both Southern Water and Portsmouth Water customers (including signposting services, housing services, language assistance and supported living representatives).	<i>Expert stakeholder report – Drought Plan '21</i>

Communications and education:

- There's a strong feeling from customers that across the board they find it hard to grasp the severity of the measures on their lives. More needs to be done to give context – what does 50-80 litres look like. What changes can they make to help day to day with an emphasis on customers wanting to be better educated?
- An integrated communication plan needs to use multiple channels, build up the relevant messages over time and vary the approach to have the greatest cut through.
- Vulnerable audiences require a higher level of service during severe restrictions, with other household customers supporting their prioritisation.
- Representatives of harder to reach communities felt that the drought plan would benefit from 'community' styled touchpoints such as newsletters, social media and peer to peer advocacy through leaders, service providers and caregivers – a more tailored approach and key to build trust.

“I think the plan is very good as what I read informs me that the plan includes what the water companies do in the event of a drought, what we as customers need to do and how this will affect the environment.”

3. Stakeholder Pre-Consultation Summary

3.1. Objectives

We have collaborated closely with our stakeholders since before the development of WRMP19 to understand their priorities and those of the people they represent, share best practice and identify possible collaborative opportunities.

The full set of pre-consultation feedback and our response is at Annex 5:

3.2. Approach and Methodology

Our approach to pre-consultation for this dWRMP is different than previous plans, as this is the first to be largely informed by the emerging regional plan produced by Water Resources South East (WRSE).

Our pre-consultation stakeholder engagement followed three main strands:

- our business-as-usual stakeholder engagement (including through our existing stakeholder panels)
- supporting WRSE's emerging regional plan consultation
- targeted engagement with statutory and non-statutory consultees and those likely impacted by infrastructure projects.

3.3. Building on our business-as-usual stakeholder engagement

As part of our business-as-usual stakeholder engagement, we host a series of stakeholder panels, meet with key stakeholders and support Portsmouth Water's engagement around the Havant Thicket reservoir.

On 12 January, just ahead of the start of the consultation on the regional plan we hosted our Water For Life Hampshire Stakeholder group where WRSE presented on the emerging regional plan and upcoming consultation. We were joined by representatives from:

- Barings Estate
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- CCW
- Environment Agency
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
- Isle of Wight Council
- Little River Management
- Natural England
- New Forest National Park Authority
- Portsmouth Water
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Salmon and Trout Conservation
- Test and Itchen Association
- Test Valley Borough Council

- Wessex Rivers Trust
- Winchester City Council

In addition, we supported a number of site visits to our Budds Farm Wastewater Treatment Works (WTW) for stakeholders from Portsmouth Water's Havant Thicket Stakeholder Advisory groups, including representatives from:

- Havant Borough Council
- Havant Borough Residents Associations
- Hampshire Bat Group
- Havant Green Party
- Stop the Chop

3.4. Supporting Water Resources South East's emerging regional plan consultation

WRSE is an alliance of the six water companies across the south east of England, and one of five regional groups across the country developing the first regional plans for water resources.

WRSE consulted on their emerging regional plan between 17 January and 14 March 2022 and received approximately 1,150 responses from stakeholders and individual customers from across the South East. These included over a dozen local authorities in our area of operations:

- Canterbury City Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- Hampshire County Council
- Havant Borough Council
- Horsham District Council
- Kent County Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Swale Borough Council
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
- Wealden District Council
- West Sussex County Council

WRSE also received responses from environmental stakeholders interested in our area of operation, including groups with region-wide and much more local focuses. The table in appendix 2 shows all stakeholders who responded to WRSE's consultation.

WRSE launched the consultation on the emerging regional with a co-ordinated media announcement with its six member companies. This resulted in extensive coverage across all the local BBC and Meridian news channels within Southern Water's area. Southern Water's Water Strategy Manager was interviewed, and details of key schemes were highlighted with the general public. The story also featured on a number of local radio broadcasts, in the local and trade press and online.

WRSE developed a dedicated engagement site to host all relevant documents which was visited over 8,500 times during the consultation period. Around 1,100 people registered to use the site with 720 of these completing the consultation survey.

During the consultation period, WRSE ran four webinars – a launch webinar on 20 January and three webinars focusing on the east and west of their region (covering Kent and East Sussex and then West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight respectively) and the northern area. Through WRSE's Engagement and Communications Board we influenced the design of these sessions and WRSE's wider engagement programme.

Our Water Resources team presented at the east and west webinars, as well as the launch event. This included providing more detail on the parts of the regional plan that would be reflected in our draft WRMP. As part of our engagement during the consultation, we proactively promoted the webinars to a wide range of stakeholders and signposted the consultation via email and through our LinkedIn page to ensure as many stakeholders as possible were aware.

In total, 590 people joined WRSE's webinars – including regulators, national trade bodies and water sector stakeholders (such as retailers and members of the supply chain) and local interest groups, elected representatives and environmental groups.

On 1 March, we supported an interactive Q&A through the engagement platform where stakeholders could ask questions and receive a response within a few hours to help them finalise their responses to the consultation. Combined with questions asked during the webinars, WRSE received and responded to over 200 questions from stakeholders.

Through WRSE, we also engaged with the other regional groups as well as our neighbouring water companies. During their consultation, WRSE offered a retailer-specific workshop however interest was extremely limited, so the session did not go ahead. We sent pre-consultation letters to the following retailers operating in our area:

- ADSM
- Business Stream
- Cambrian Utilities
- Castle Water
- Clear Business Water
- ConservAqua
- Everflow
- First Business Water
- Pennon Water
- SES
- Smarta Water
- The Water Retail Company
- Veolia
- Water 2 Business
- Water-Plus
- Waterscan (Including self-supply retailers)
- Wave
- Yu Energy

WRSE's Multi-Sector stakeholder group includes representatives of the energy, paper and agriculture sectors. This group was established to understand the needs of large water using sectors in the south east and identify opportunities for potential collaborative interventions or trades.

In May 2022, WRSE published its response to its emerging regional plan consultation. This summarised stakeholders' views received during the consultation period and outlined how WRSE will move from its emerging regional plan to its best value plan later in 2022. We will continue supporting WRSE's engagement to around its best value plan.

3.4.1. Targeted pre-consultation engagement

In addition to awareness raising communications, we offered 1:1 briefings to stakeholders likely to be impacted by large infrastructure projects being considered in the Emerging Regional Plan such as the Havant Thicket and Blackstone reservoirs and potential desalination sites in the Shoreham area.

The table below shows which stakeholders were offered briefings relating to specific infrastructure projects being proposed through the Emerging Regional Plan in their areas of interest.

Scheme	Stakeholders
Blackstone Reservoir	Andrew Griffith, MP for Arundel and South Downs Adur and Ouse Catchment Partnership CPRE Sussex Horsham District Council – Cabinet members for Planning and Development and ward councillors Horsham District Council – planning policy team Sussex Wildlife Trust WSCC – Cabinet member for Environment and Climate Change (and ward councillors)
Shoreham area desalination	Adur and Worthing Council – Directors and Executive member for Regeneration Shoreham Port Authority Shoreham Power Station East Worthing and Shoreham MP West Sussex County Council – Cabinet member for Environment and ward councillors
Littlehampton Water Recycling	Andrew Griffith, MP for Arundel and South Downs Horsham District Council – planning policy team

An example of one of these letters can be seen in Appendix 3.

One local authority replied to arrange a meeting (Adur and Worthing Councils to discuss Shoreham area desalination). We also received responses from a local MP interested in the Blackstone reservoir schemes and provided him with further information. The Blackstone reservoir scheme was also discussed as part of our ongoing work with the five local planning authorities in the Sussex North area relating to water neutrality issues.

However, local stakeholders who may not have otherwise been aware of the possible infrastructure schemes took part in the WRSE webinars and submitted questions and consultation responses, while some responded with requests for written briefings and more information. These stakeholders include:

- Adur and Worthing Councils
- Blackstone Parish Council
- Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield
- Henfield Parish Council
- Horsham District Council
- Office of Andrew Griffith, MP for Arundel and South Downs
- Office of Mims Davies MP for Mid Sussex

3.5. WRMP24 specific pre-consultation activity

We sent pre-consultation letters to:

- Regulators and government bodies including: the Environment Agency, Natural England, DWI, Ofwat, RAPID, Natural Resources Wales, CCW, Defra, Historic England and the National Infrastructure Commission
- Five licenced NAVs operating in our area
- All five regional water resources groups (including WRSE)
- All five companies in the WRSE region and eight other water companies
- Ten catchment partnerships
- Water retailers for business (see above)
- Four local nature partnerships
- Environmental and water efficiency groups including, CPRE, Rivers Trusts, Waterwise and Salmon and Trout Conservation
- Planning directors and other contacts at 19 local authorities
- Four Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Potential trading partners including DS Smith, British Gypsum and Saint-Gobain (in addition to our work supporting WRSE's multi-sector group)

We received eight responses to our pre-consultation letters from:

- Adur & Worthing Councils
- Environment Agency
- Havant Borough Council
- Historic England
- Horsham District Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Natural England
- Ofwat
- Portsmouth Water
- Salmon and Trout Conversation
- Two responses from one local resident

We wrote directly to all the catchment partnerships in our area to notify them of WRSE's consultation on its emerging regional plan and two (New Forest National Park catchment partnership and East Hampshire

Catchment Partnership) signed up for WRSE's webinars. Additionally, WRMP content was included in a series of workshops run by the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) team in March 2022.

3.5.1. Key feedback from pre-consultation responses

The local authorities which responded to our pre-consultation letter asked questions about and raised concerns about the impacts of potential new infrastructure in their areas, including the associated energy, biodiversity and quality-of-life impacts to their residents.

Two local authorities stressed the importance of meeting the water neutrality challenge in our Sussex North water resources zone alongside the need to support customers and businesses reduce water demand.

The importance of supporting customers to reduce demand for water was expressed by most stakeholders who responded to our pre-consultation letter.

3.6. Key themes from WRSE's emerging regional plan consultation

WRSE's emerging regional plan consultation took a presented a regional view of the south east's water needs. This included options specific to Southern Water, such as water recycling at Havant Thicket reservoir, transfers across the south east – as well as more policy-focused options such as nature based solutions and demand reduction.

Some respondents to WRSE's emerging regional plan opposed it because of the inclusion of specific infrastructure options – including water recycling into Havant Thicket reservoir.

3.6.1. Havant Thicket Water recycling

Around 60 responses received were in opposition to this introducing water recycling from our Budds Farm WTW into the new Havant Thicket reservoir, including from Havant Borough Council, individual local councillors, local Parish Councils, several local environmental and campaigning groups and local residents.

Respondents expressed concern the proposals were a substantial change to the reservoir and that water recycling would alter the nature and water quality in the reservoir – with potential downstream impacts. It was felt this would also impact the proposed ecological and recreational benefits of the reservoir.

Some respondents, particularly local residents, described the proposal as recycling "sewage" into the reservoir, or expressing fears the water would have a high chemical content. This was considered to be wholly unacceptable, in principle, including because residents felt they had not been consulted, and due to perceived potential environmental impacts.

Responses suggested that the reservoir proposal would not have been approved if this proposal had been highlighted earlier, and questioned why there hadn't been more engagement with affected communities.

The carbon and water quality impacts associated with the water treatment processes and proposed lengthy transfer pipelines were also a concern, and it was considered that other better alternatives existed.

3.6.2. Efficient use of water

The demand and leakage reductions proposed in WRSE's plan was supported by the Environment Agency, Natural England and Waterwise, as well as a range of other regional stakeholders. However, the regulators all asked for greater clarity on how these targets will be achieved.

Responses received through WRSE's online questionnaire mostly supported the proposals for supporting customers use less water while reducing leakage. However, some respondents were concerned about the deliverability of these targets.

Several local authorities in Sussex highlighted the water neutrality challenge in our Sussex North WRZ, emphasising the importance of robust water efficiency measures being implemented. Some authorities stated they were already seeking to set standards achieving at least 110l/h/d, and highlighted work that indicated a target of 85l/p/d was achievable. It was also highlighted that local targets were having mixed success at Local plan examinations.

3.6.3. Transfers around the region

There was broad support for the use of transfers between water resources regions and across the south east. The DWI stressed the importance of addressing risks associated with changes in taste and feel of water, potential corrosivity impacts on networks and ensuring the appropriate infrastructure is in place.

Natural England said new pipelines would only be acceptable if it was clearly demonstrated that designated sites and priority habitats had been protected, compensated or suitably mitigated. The Canals and Rivers Trust supported the principle of using its infrastructure to facilitate transfers within the region, as well as between water resources regions.

The importance of ensuring new transfers consider the needs of other abstractors was also highlighted. For example, where a transfer could divert flows relied on by downstream abstractors (such as the agricultural or energy sectors) who may have limited alternative options available.

Responses through WRSE's survey were supportive of the principle of using transfers, but some opposed specific transfers within the region (such as a transfer from Thames Water into our region from the proposed SESRO reservoir).

Respondents agreeing commented transfers increase the ability to move water to where it is needed. Many respondents supported the use of canals and rivers ahead of pipelines due to their potential wider cultural and environmental benefits. Some also contrasted this with potential opposition to more traditional infrastructure solutions.

Concerns were raised about the potential financial and environmental costs of pumping water long distances, alongside the lack of detailed information about the carbon impacts of proposed transfers and how this would be mitigated.

4. Appendix 1 – Future Insight Planned for dWRMP 24

Programme	Approach	Method	Timing	Output	Partner
Water Futures 2030	Deliberative panel of 35-40 household customers from across the region, with a spread of demographics and segments	Online moderated week long community with video tasks and options to ask friends / family	Mid-Late July	Agency Report	Relish Research
Water Futures 2050	Deliberative panel of 35-40 future customers from across the region, with a spread of demographics and ages (14+yrs at school, further education and first time bill payers)	Online plenary session, moderated week long community and individual tasks	Mid-Late July	Agency Report	Britain Thinks
Water Futures Stakeholder	4 groups of stakeholders (IOW, Hampshire, Kent and Sussex) with a total of c50 stakeholders from a range of organisations	2 hour online focus groups (1 per region) with information shared by Southern Water and breakout discussions	Mid-Late July	Agency Report	EQ Communications
Water Futures Business	Deliberative panel of 40 businesses responsible for water at their business. 20 from businesses reliant on water for their end product, 20 users. Range of industries and sizes (although does not include major business)	Moderated pre-task through online community questions – with follow up depth interviews	Mid-Late July	Agency Report	Britain Thinks
Water Futures and Vulnerability	Deliberative panel of 20 customers with vulnerable circumstances from across the region	Telephone depth interviews and follow up online support (as needed)	Mid-late July	Agency Report	Turquoise
Water Futures and Diverse Cultures	Deliberative panel with 8-10 community leaders and stakeholders who represent communities from diverse cultures , where English isn't their first language	Online depth interviews	Mid-Late July	Agency Report	Relish Research
Water Futures Committees	Small groups (6-8) from the deliberative panels to review the outputs and ensure it represents their views for WF2030 and WF2050	Online groups	Mid-August	Agency Report	Relish and Britain Thinks
Community Engagement	Pop up stands in specific locations (6 locations) – currently planning: Shoreham, Ford, Aylesford, Southampton, Henfield, Kent coastline (TBC)	Face to face engagement with local community for 1-2 days	Late July	Independent Feedback from Agents and signposting to consultation	Zest
Bespoke Research – WRMP, DWMP, Southern Water Strategy	6 x online focus groups across with fresh customers (not engaged in the deliberative panel) from the region in areas with the greatest likelihood for disruption in long term resources plan. Customers would be recruited from the community engagement above and customer lists	Online focus groups across a number of days	Mid-August	Agency Report	Relish Research
Quantitative Household Validation	800 household customers from across the region with a spread of demographics and segments	Online survey	Mid-August	Agency Report	Relish Research

5. Appendix 2 – respondees to WRSE’s emerging regional plan consultation

Government: Environment Agency; Natural England; OFWAT; DWI; Historic England
MPs: James Gray MP
Regional/Local Government: Mayor of London; Cherwell District Council; Oxfordshire County Council; East Hampshire District Council; Crawley Borough Council; South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Council; Dacorum Borough Council; Waverley Borough Council; Kent County Council; Cotswold District Council; Havant Borough Council; Wealden District Council; Mid Sussex District Council; Swale Borough Council; PUSH - Partnership for Urban South Hampshire; Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council; Canterbury City Council; Test Valley Borough Council; West Sussex County Council; South Downs National Park Authority; Horsham District Council; Hampshire County Council; East Sussex Fire and Rescue; together with individual elected Councillors
Parish/Town Councils: East Hanney; Minstead; Charney Bassett; Horam; East Hendred; West Hendred; Rowlands Castle; Minstead – New Forest; Storrington & Sullington; Letcombe Regis; Willingdon & Jevington; Ardington and Lockinge; Burwash; Billingshurst; Heathfield and Waldron; Great Haseley; Woodmancote; Brightling; Yalding; Slaugham; Stroud Town Council; Wantage Town Council
Regional groups: Water Resources West
Business/Consumer organisations: Consumer Council for Water (CCW); Waterwise; NFU; Country Land and Business Association; Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce; Home Builders Federation; Energy UK; British Marine
CPRE Branches: Kent; Vale; Sussex; Oxfordshire; Hertfordshire
Wildlife Trusts: Sussex Wildlife Trust; Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
AONB organisations: Cotswolds AONB
Canals, rivers and environmental organisations: Canal and River Trusts; The Inland Waterways Association South East Region; Rivers Trusts in the South East; Cotswold Canals Partnership; Cotswold Canals Trust; Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation; Wilts & Berks Canals Trust; Darent River Preservation Society; Upper Itchen Initiative; Stroudwater Navigation Archive Charity; The Revival Association; Chalk Rivers Action Group, River Thame Liaison Group; Friends of the Ems; Cotswold Canal Connected Partnership; Stroud Valleys Canal Company; Salmon & Trout Conservation; Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond; Ver Valley Society
Campaigning organisations: GARD; Wantage and Grove Campaign Group; Chiltern Society; Faversham Society; Havant Green Party; Oxfordshire South and Vale Green Party; Mayday Action Group; Hendreds Environment Group; Fairer World Linfield, Central Sussex Climate Network; Greening Westbourne; Willingdon Residents Association; Rowstock Residents Association; Planning Oxfordshire’s Environment and Transport Sustainably (POETS)
Other organisations: MOSL; NHS – EPPR; Castle Water; Arqiva; RWE; Everflow Water; Clearwater Property; AA Compliance & Consulting Ltd; Thakeham Homes; Jonathan Fisher Environmental Economics; H Walker and Son; ADLU; Oak Leaf Forest School; St Helen and St Katharine School; Royal Agricultural university; The UK2070 Commission
Individual residents in areas affected by schemes, and members of the public

6. Appendix 3 – example of targeted pre-consultation letter

Blackstone reservoir

Good morning / good afternoon,

Earlier this week, we wrote to you to let you know about WRSE's upcoming consultation on their emerging regional plan – the first region-wide plan looking at our future water resources needs.

About WRSE

In case you weren't already aware, WRSE is an alliance of the six water companies that supply drinking water across the South East and has been working with government, regulators and stakeholders to develop its emerging regional plan.

Their plan includes an early outline of the schemes, policies and interventions identified through extensive modelling needed to secure sustainable water resources to 2060 and beyond.

WRSE's plan will inform our water resources management plan (WRMP), which we'll consult on later this year. It's crucial for us that our stakeholders have the opportunity to respond to WRSE's consultation – as their feedback will shape our own plans later this year.

Potential new reservoir at Blackstone

I wanted to draw your attention to a specific scheme that features in WRSE's emerging regional plan.

WRSE's modelling has identified the potential for a new reservoir at Blackstone, near Henfield. Water from the Eastern Branch of the River Adur would be captured during high flows and stored in the new reservoir, before being treated and supplied to customers across West Sussex.

This scheme has been considered during previous versions of our water resources management plan but has not been chosen before. However, it has now emerged as a potential option due to the increased resilience it could deliver by allowing us to capture and store water in winter, when flows are higher, to be used during warmer months. Subject to the more detailed work we need to undertake, it may become a preferred option in our WRMP.

We understand the development of such a significant infrastructure project may cause concern in local communities, which is why I wanted to make you aware of it as early as possible. More detail will be included in WRSE's consultation, which begins on 17 January.

The option is at an early stage of development, and we will undertake thorough modelling and options analysis as it progresses. This investigative work includes understanding the environmental impacts and concerns raised by local stakeholders.

As we highlighted earlier this week, [WRSE is holding four webinars](#) to provide more detail on its emerging regional plan throughout the consultation period. Their webinar focusing on the west of their region, taking place on 1 February, will focus on solutions in West Sussex – including the proposed reservoir.

Given the potential significance of the proposed project, I'd be happy to arrange a briefing to discuss it in more detail, alongside the links between WRSE's regional plan and our own WRMP.