

Instant Expert: DEFRA Environmental Targets: Water

In May 2022, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) set out the environmental targets that it considers must move beyond ambitions to become a statutory framework for four priority areas: water, air, biodiversity and resource efficiency/waste reduction. Following public consultation in June 2022, these targets will be put before Parliament for approval in October 2022.

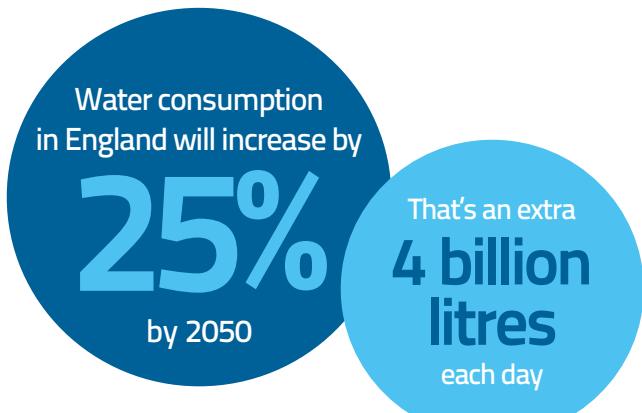


Why has DEFRA prioritised water?

'We need to ensure that there is sufficient quality and flow of water in the water environment to meet the needs of people, the environment and industry. Increased demand and reduced water availability from less predictable precipitation as a result of climate change will affect the environment and reduce security of supply,' says DEFRA.

Overall water consumption in England has been increasing since 2013 and now stands at 138 litres per person per day. [The Environment Agency's National Framework](#) predicts that an additional 25% of the current daily volume of public water supply will be needed in England by 2050, that's an extra 4 billion litres each day.

While there are a number of existing commitments and ambitions on water demand, these are not statutory. The new statutory driver will ensure that all aspects of reducing water consumption – household and non-household – are delivered and that water has the focus it badly needs.



What is the proposed Water Demand Target?

The targets surrounding water recognise the need to improve both water quality and availability. They aim to address pollution caused by abandoned mines and nutrients, and, critically, to reduce the use of public water supply in England. Two-thirds of the capacity needed to meet the expected pressure on the public water supply will be met by demand reduction.

DEFRA's target is to reduce demand per head of population by 20% (against a 2019/20 baseline) by 2037. This models a consumption level of 122 l/p/d, extending beyond existing commitments to reach 132 l/p/d and is seen as vital in reaching the 110 l/p/d we need to meet by 2050.

It's important to note that the 2037 is a shorter timeframe when compared to the three other environmental priorities, in recognition that action on water supports the delivery of the others, including species abundance.



Our View

This is a significant move and one that we fully support. Turning somewhat vague ambitions into statutory focus is exactly what both the water industry and end-users need to expedite action on water efficiency which has been overlooked by many.

[Many water-aware businesses are already acting on water efficiency](#) and will be one-step ahead. Others will be ill-prepared to create the necessary efficiencies without good data and insight on which they can take strategic decisions and monitor progress. Data across the market remains poor and the proportion of long-unread water meters remains high, making it hard to identify and rectify leaks. While this is the case, water customers will need support to achieve efficiencies in line with the targets.

What should I do?

For bespoke advice and support, email info@waterscan.com or call 01243 839 880