

Committee on Climate Change
7 Holbein Place
London SW1W 8NR

The Rt. Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

12 February 2016

Dear Liz

Taking forward water abstraction reform

I am writing to offer my support for the proposed reforms of water abstraction published last month. As my Adaptation Sub-Committee has advised, population growth will create additional demand for water while climate change is expected to reduce the amount of water in the environment that can be sustainably withdrawn. My Committee has highlighted the importance of abstraction reform in successive progress reports and in our first Statutory Report to Parliament on the National Adaptation Programme last summer.

Since then we have published updated projections of water availability to inform our work for you on the next UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. The findings from this research suggest that, under a high population and high climate change scenario, more than a third of demand might not be met in approximately 60 of the 296 UK catchments in the analysis, and in numerous others no water at all may be available for abstraction. There remains a high degree of uncertainty in projections of future seasonal rainfall and what this might mean for the frequency and intensity of water shortages and drought. Therefore a flexible water licencing system which can be adjusted to reflect changing water availability from future weather patterns and the pace of population growth is critical.

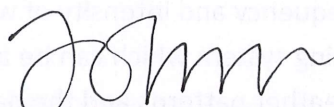
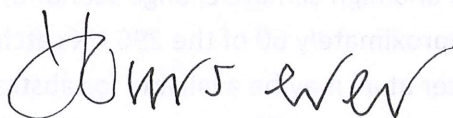
We note that continued work by government and regulators is needed to ensure the reforms are successfully implemented by the early 2020s. As I stated in my letter to

Ministers at the time of the consultation, the transition to any new system will need to be carefully handled to avoid past profligacy being rewarded at the expense of those that have managed water efficiently. The choice of which catchments to classify as 'enhanced' should be also based on where the projections suggest water is most likely to be scarce in the future as well as where shortages already occur.

The above estimates of water availability assume that water resource management plans are delivered in full by water companies between now and the 2030s. If delivery falls short projected deficits will be even more pronounced. Continuing investment in leakage reduction, water storage and new sources of supply will be needed along with sustained reductions in demand. When scrutinising water company business plans for the next price review, customer challenge groups must balance keeping water bills low in the short-term with the need to adapt now to the long-term pressures from climate change.

The ASC's updated water projections also highlight how maintaining the minimum flows needed to sustain healthy and clean rivers will increasingly affect how much water is available for human use. Decisions on the setting of environmental flows will have a major influence on the functioning of freshwater ecosystems in the future. It will be important, therefore, that the potential ecological consequences of any long-term reduction in environmental flows is fully assessed and accounted for.

As my committee highlighted in its statutory report last year, delivering abstraction reform, alongside further efforts to tackle pollution, is vital for ensuring that we have a clean, safe and healthy water environment in the future. The importance and urgency of abstraction reform is such that we strongly recommend including the necessary primary legislation in the next Queen's speech. During the process of securing legislation and introducing reforms my committee would be pleased to provide any further advice and support as you might require.



PROFESSOR LORD KREBS Kt FRS
Chair, Adaptation Sub-Committee