

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF WATER CONSERVATORS

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT ON ITS POSITION IN RESPONSE TO THE DEFRA CONSULTATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL TARGETS

This is a Statement by The Worshipful Company of Water Conservators. It is a City of London Livery Company, focussed on the long-term health of our water resources and the broader environment. Our members include senior professionals from water, environmental and related industries and regulators, along with others who share our passion for water and the environment. Our experience and knowledge ranges from the complexities of environmental sciences, through the application of engineering to deliver the goals identified by those sciences, and the subsequent management of the assets created. We are mindful of the impact of any decision relating to the water environment, be it environmental, social or economic.

The two current Defra consultations on environmental targets and storm overflows have created even more focus in the media on water management issues. And this highlights a matter which transcends those raised in the consultation documents, but which fits best into the concepts of the 25-year Environment Plan - namely the ‘carrying capacity’ for the resources, domestic and imported, of the United Kingdom ... how much population can the country sustain even with the sorts of mitigation measures envisaged in the two consultations?

This matter was last addressed by government by referring it to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which reported in 2011: ‘Demographic Change and the Environment’ the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution analyses demographic trends in the UK and their potential environmental impacts.

It concluded that, in 2011, current trends suggested we can expect a growing population in the UK – fuelled by increasing life expectancy and net inward migration – and an increasing number of households, more of them occupied by only one person. But these trends do not apply uniformly across the UK and the Royal Commission was struck by the intense graininess of the situation at all levels (Chapter 2). Where people are, and how they live, have major environmental impacts. More importantly, policies to influence behaviour and consumption may be more effective than any attempt to constrain or even reduce population size.

The Royal Commission found that the sheer number of people is not likely to be the most significant influence on environmental quality in the UK over the next 40 years: the impact of any population on the environment is mediated by the way people live – their consumption patterns, the energy and water they use, and the waste they generate. If we are serious about reducing the impact of population on the environment, these issues need to be given at least as much attention as overall numbers (Chapter 3).

There is a relationship between the size of the population and certain basic environmental services, such as water supply and quality, energy use and waste generation. But the Royal Commission found that this relationship was not as clear as might be expected. It was also surprised that, to the extent that they were aware of the challenges ahead, public bodies and service providers had to cope with very varied circumstances and were preparing for them in a range of different ways. As mentioned, the way population is distributed is crucial to any

understanding of environmental impact – where people live, work and travel affects the environment in the broadest sense (Chapter 4) and this suggests that there needs to be a thorough evaluation of the role of the planning system to ensure that proper account is taken of the impact of growth or depopulation (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, the Royal Commission sets out its views on what should be done.

At the same time the government's Office for Science Foresight projects were reporting on allied matters

So it raises many sensitive social matters beyond those addressed in the planning framework, some of which have been highlighted again in the conclusions of COP 26. It focuses on how we will live in future and hence what we need to do now to prepare for that future .And this most certainly underpins any progress on water management policy.

The Company submits that it might be time to appoint another similar review body to revisit the conclusions of 2011, and determine if they are still relevant.

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