



NEWS RELEASE

October 2, 2009

Waterwatch: Consumers' priorities still ignored

Although introduction of competition in April 2008 has brought benefits, more still needs to be done to align water industry priorities with the needs of consumers, says Scotland's water watchdog

The Chief Officer of Scotland's water watchdog is calling for water industry stakeholders to do more to ensure that domestic consumers benefit from improved services and non-domestic customers benefit from the competitive pricing and improved services envisaged with the passage of the Water Services (Scotland) Act 2005.

Gary Womersley, Chief Officer of Waterwatch Scotland (WWS), will tell those attending today's Holyrood magazine-organised conference: *Managing Scotland's Water: Balancing the Challenge* that, while the introduction of retail competition in April 2008 has indeed brought benefits to non-domestic customers, more needs to be done to align water industry priorities with the needs of domestic consumers.

"Scotland's water consumers have yet to fully receive the sort of innovative service that they deserve," says Gary Womersley. "While last year's legislation gives us much to be proud of, there has been an unwelcome spin-off in terms of greater levels of bureaucracy that make it increasingly difficult for customers to have their complaints dealt with promptly, or priorities taken seriously.

"At WWS we are all too aware that, after years of under-investment, the water industry has taken enormous steps, strides even, to bring the industry's infrastructure up to date. We know that the industry is driven by EU directives on drinking water quality and the water environment. That it has to deal with unforeseen pressures in the form of climate change – which means our water infrastructure struggles to cope with sewer overflows over a long, damp summer and with empty reservoirs over a snowless winter.

"Scotland's water consumers are nothing if not sophisticated – and they certainly understand the pressures placed upon Scotland's water industry today. But when things go wrong, they want them put right first time – and with a minimum of fuss. And you don't need to be sophisticated to realise that, apart from all the grand planning and all the EU directives, Scottish

Water can get it almost all right by better understanding consumers' priorities and putting them more at the heart of their service delivery.

"Consumers' priorities and perspectives are something WWS understands best. If industry stakeholders and customers are to truly benefit from the innovative legislation introduced last year - then the best thing the industry can do is listen to and engage with us."

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

To seek an interview with Waterwatch Scotland, please contact John Macgill or Andrew Ritchie on 0131 556 0050 (including out of hours)

Waterwatch Scotland (WWS) is the national complaints handling authority for all domestic and non-domestic water customers and customer representative body for the water industry in Scotland.

WWS is independent of Scottish Water, government and other water/sewerage service providers. Its role is to:

- Investigate Complaints
- Represent Customers' Views & Interests
- Influence Policy
- Inform & Advise

WWS' responsibility for second-tier complaints handling means that WWS can take forward individual customer grievances against Scottish Water or other providers.

WWS can also make statutory recommendations to Scottish Ministers, Scottish Water and other service providers, and industry regulators: Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR) and the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS).

From time to time, WWS receives complaints which are of such importance or have a public-interest impact beyond the specific complaint itself, that WWS will issue a formal report on the complaint and greater issues raised.

In addition to the making of such formal reports and the findings and recommendations made, a key role of WWS is to continue to work to ensure that such recommendations are adopted in the interest of customers to mitigate and prevent future occurrences.

Conference details:

Managing Scotland's Water: Balancing the Challenges

Venue: Radisson SAS Hotel, Edinburgh

Date: Friday Oct 2, 2009

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