



NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday March 10, 2010

Scottish Water ignoring farmer's drainage woes

Customer's grievances 'serially dismissed' over 20-year period by Scottish Water and predecessor organisations, says water watchdog

Waterwatch Scotland, the independent consumer watchdog for Scotland's water industry, says Scottish Water is ignoring a Banknock farmer's pleas to replace missing or damaged drains which has resulted in repeated flooding and damage to his fields.

The complainant alleges that the removal or damage to drains several decades ago has caused repeated flooding and ground saturation, leading to dangerous underfoot conditions for farm workers and livestock.

Following a full and extensive investigation, Waterwatch Scotland (WWS) is today demanding that Scottish Water (SW) resolves this issue without further delay. The watchdog has also demanded that SW's Chief Executive issues a full and unreserved apology to the complainant for failing to act in the prompt and efficient manner expected of a national public utility company.

The watchdog's report, which has today been sent to Scottish Water, the Scottish Government and the complainant's MSP, catalogues a series of failures on the part of SW and its predecessor organisations to address the complaint dating back to the 1980s, when the complainant first bought eight fields totaling almost 30 acres near Banknock.

Waterwatch Scotland Convener, Heather Brash, says that the complainant almost immediately found the fields prone to flooding, which he attributed to work undertaken by the then water authority, Central Regional Council, when it upgraded the sewer running through the fields in or around 1975.

"The complainant reported flooding incidents to Central Regional Council and requested that it investigate. He continued to pursue his complaint when the new authority, East of Scotland Water Authority, took control and then with Scottish Water which assumed responsibility for water services in 2002. Some 20 years and three utilities later and the complainant is still waiting for the problem to be properly resolved.

“Instead of addressing the complaint, the complainant has met with a culture of obfuscation and excuses. Delay and defer appears to have been the tactic of choice.

“And the delay in robust investigation and remedial action has resulted in the complainant incurring additional costs - and even greater damage to his fields. Despite all this, the complainant has always proceeded on the basis that the necessary upgrading work was imminent. The complainant has shown remarkable patience and restraint over the years, but he has ultimately been served very poorly by Scottish Water and its predecessors.

“It really is totally unacceptable to expect someone to put up with such poor customer service. Scottish Water and its predecessor organisations have ignored their responsibilities and failed to solve problems caused by a poorly executed upgrade prior to the complainant’s purchase of the land.

“The legitimate grievances of one of their customers have been serially dismissed. Waterwatch Scotland is determined to ensure that Scottish Water takes action to finally right these wrongs.”

Notes to Editors

For a copy of Waterwatch Scotland’s full report following its investigation of the complaint against Scottish Water on behalf of the complainant, or to seek an interview with Waterwatch Scotland or the complainant, 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.

Issued on behalf of Waterwatch Scotland, Corporate Office, Forrester Lodge,
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