



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**September 30, 2009**

### **Waterwatch calls on WICS to rethink new service delivery plans**

*Water industry watchdog condemns consultation process, casts doubt on new retail competition proposals*

For immediate release

Waterwatch Scotland (WWS), the independent consumer watchdog for Scotland's water industry, has accused the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS) of failing to properly involve stakeholders in a recent consultation exercise and has demanded that WICS urgently review its procedures.

WWS' comments are contained in its response to *The Water Industry Commission for Scotland: New Areas in Retail Competition* which sets out WICS' proposals to reallocate metering, trade effluent and connections, disconnections and reconnections from wholesale to retail providers.

WWS Chief Officer Gary Womersley says the Commission could have done more to engage with stakeholders

"The way that this consultation process has been presented makes all the suggestions feel more like a 'done deal,' which is extremely disappointing given the importance of the changes. We cannot, therefore, be sure how widely these changes are supported."

While WWS recognises that the introduction of competition in April 2008 has brought benefits to customers, the watchdog is still disappointed that WICS has failed to resolve already existing teething problems before suggesting further changes to service delivery. This includes deterioration in customer service and greater bureaucracy which has made it increasingly difficult for customers to have their complaints dealt with properly.

In addition to its failure to remedy existing problems, WWS has also accused WICs of failing to address Scottish Water's lack of innovation - best illustrated in SW's failure to allow customers to install data-loggers which prevents them from pursuing water efficiency initiatives. WWS has not been persuaded either of the merits of WICS' suggestion to set up yet another subsidiary company (MeterCo) to deal with metering issues - and seeks assurances that associated costs will not be passed on to customers.

WWS Chief Officer, Gary Womersley says there are further issues over waste:

“Among our other major concerns is WICS’ proposal to transfer trade effluent sampling and consent monitoring from Scottish Water to the retailer, especially at a time when we have registered a greater number of trade effluent contacts. We would also need to be convinced that customers will not be left covering the costs should any risks materialise.

“We would urge WICS to engage with us as a matter of urgency to fully to ensure customers’ interests are protected and convince us that services will not be damaged as a result of some of these rather questionable proposals.”

**-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.

Issued on behalf of Waterwatch Scotland, Corporate Office, Forrester Lodge, Inglewood,  
Alloa, FK10 2HU