

## **Water UK Policy Position**

### **Private Water Supplies**

Water UK supports the ambition of drinking water regulators in the UK to strive to improve the quality of drinking water provided by private water supplies. Water UK recognises that there are roles and responsibilities for a number of parties from the supply owner, the local authority and DWI in delivering these improvements.

Whilst Water UK's members do not under normal circumstances have specific legal duties in this area they do have a depth of experience in managing drinking water quality as well as access to sampling and laboratory facilities. To this end Water UK's members are supportive of providing assistance to local authorities to aid them in meeting their duties. The extent of this support will range from technical advice to training to being subcontracted to carry out sampling and analysis.

Water UK would not support any future proposal for the wholesale transfer of ownership of private supplies without an in-depth assessment of the costs and benefits of doing so carried out in full consultation with all relevant bodies.

#### **What are private water supplies and why are they an issue?**

Private water supplies are those that are provided to domestic or commercial properties not from the public water network or by a statutory water company. These account for in the region of 1% of all supplies.

Private water supplies are governed by specific regulations and require a Water Safety Plan approach to be employed to risk assess these supplies as well as compliance sampling to assure their safety / quality (Private Water Regulations 2009, Private Water Supplies (Wales) Regulations 2010, Private Water Supplies

(Scotland) Regulations 2006, Private Water Supplies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009). These regulations transpose the requirements of the European Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) with respect to private water supplies into UK law.

Private supplies can range in size from individual properties to large supplies serving small housing developments or caravan parks etc. In general the compliance with drinking water standards of private water supplies with drinking water regulations is lower than with public water supplies (0.03% non-compliance in English public water supplies compared to 7% non-compliance of private supplies in 2013).

It is often argued by private supply owners that, despite the lower overall quality, there is a degree of immunity developed by consumers. Whilst this may hold true for consumers drinking the water regularly the transient nature of populations at sites such as caravan parks means that many consumers may not be as immune.

### **Who is responsible?**

In England, Wales and Scotland local authorities are responsible for enforcing private water supply regulations with owners being ultimately responsible for quality. Local authorities must carry out risk assessments on private water supplies serving more than a single domestic property. In Northern Ireland the responsibility lies with the drinking water regulator.

In England and Wales local authorities have until December 2014 and February 2015 respectively to complete this task. Drinking water regulators are responsible for reporting on the performance of private supplies each year.

Unless there is a connection to the public water supply or a local authority requests an alternative supply in the event of quality or quantity of supply problems there is no statutory responsibility for water companies. Where there is a connection, for example to be used as a backup or as an onward distribution, then the public water company will have a duty to enforce water fittings regulations.

**What do water companies currently do?**

In England and Wales approaches taken by water companies vary but all offer some form of support to their local authorities for example through advice and training to environmental health officers, aiding in the delivery of risk assessments and advice on enforcement actions. In Northern Ireland DWI NI provide this advice, support and training.

Water companies have a network of water quality samplers and access to analytical facilities. In some cases access to these services available on a commercial basis. Not all water companies have the commercial arrangements available to support this but any service offered would be out with the standard regulatory framework and therefore not limited to fixed geographical boundaries associated with the incumbent water company.

**Potential for transfer of ownership**

To date there has been no proposal from government or regulators to seek legal changes to mandate the transfer responsibilities for private supplies to public water supplies. However the idea has been raised in discussions and is seen by some as having benefits, particularly in driving improvements in quality and resilience as well as reducing a burden on local authorities.

Water UK does not support any form of legal changes that would mandate the wholesale transfer of ownership of private water supplies into the public supply without full consultation on the costs and benefits. Water UK considers that the costs to connect such systems to the public network could be disproportionate to the benefits and therefore policy decisions of this nature would need to be supported by an in-depth assessment.

Opportunities may arise during planned network upgrades that could offer private water supply owners the possibility of connecting to the public supply. Water companies will consider private supplies in the locality of such activity on a case-by-case basis.

### **Further information**

Further information can be found at the following websites:

- [Private Water Supplies](#)
- [DWI \(England and Wales\)](#)
- [DWQR \(Scotland\)](#)
- [DWI \(Northern Ireland\)](#)

Dr Jim Marshall  
Policy and Business Adviser  
Water UK  
[jmarshall@water.org.uk](mailto:jmarshall@water.org.uk)

August 2014