

Finding innovative solutions to the problems facing the UK water sector

“Water is a vital natural resource, and it has never been more important to effectively conserve and manage its use. The recent drought in the South East of England followed by last Summer’s devastating floods, both highlighted the important need to carefully manage our water supplies. The needs and lifestyles of our growing population are increasing the pressure on our resources. The effects of climate change are likely to increase these pressures.

We invited Phil Woolas MP, Environment Minister at DEFRA to give his observations on the issues involved

“The UK has a well developed policy framework for water supply based on a twin track approach which is geared to managing demand and conserving resources. This ensures that water companies look at the full range of options for reducing demand before considering approaches to provide new water supply resources.

In February, we published *Future Water*, the Government's new Water Strategy for England which sets out our evolving priorities for water. It outlines a vision for water management for 2030 which shows how we must all take action and work together to ensure a secure water supply and a protected and enhanced natural environment.

Parliamentary Water Group

This was echoed by the report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Water, which took account of all those involved in the use, supply and management of water. In short, if we are to effectively conserve and manage water we must learn to value it.

Water companies have a significant role to play as they have a statutory duty to develop 25 year water resource management plans that outline how they will meet the current and future demand. These plans must also take account of multiple pressures that include population growth, and the impacts of climate change.

We must all play a role in using less water, but if you own your own company you will know that alongside the environmental benefits there is an added incentive: There are potentially large financial rewards to be had from becoming a water efficient business. It really makes

good business sense for managers to assess their water use regularly and ensure they are developing innovative water efficient solutions.

Defra provides support to the business community to use water more efficiently in several ways. The Government funded Envirowise programme provides a source of useful advice across a range of sectors, including water, to enable businesses to increase profitability whilst reducing their environmental impact.

Additionally, we encourage businesses to get involved in saving water through the Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme for Water Efficient Technologies. Under this scheme, businesses can write off 100% of investments against profits in the year of investment when purchasing any of the designated water technologies and products listed on the scheme's website.

There are also many opportunities for businesses to get support to reduce their water use.

Award winners

The Informed Executive has featured the Environment Agency's Water Efficiency Awards 2009, in an analysis on page 46 of this edition.

Past winners of the Awards demonstrate that becoming an environmentally aware business need not be detrimental to your profits.

For example the winner of the 2007 Business & Industry category was Pitstop, a drive-through hand car wash and valeting centre in Swansea. As water is 85 per cent of Pitstop's consumable costs their project included resolving the disposal of foul water, saving money on

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water bills and making the business more efficient and profitable. Since the company installed a closed loop water recycling system their use of mains water has fallen by 60 per cent. Annual savings on both water and electricity bills means the system will have paid for itself in less than four years.

Entries for the 2009 series

The Environment Agency's 2009 Water Efficiency Awards is now open for nominations from any organisation who can demonstrate how they have raised awareness of the importance of water efficiency, saved water through a change in practice, or developed a solution for water efficiency.

There are real savings to be made from becoming water efficient and I'd like to challenge all businesses to develop innovative solutions to better manage and reduce their water use. §