

# Water Resources in the South East

South East companies working together to ensure there is enough water long-term



As the South East of England copes with a possibly long drought, work continues on a well-established project to identify long-term measures to secure water supplies for customers of the region's water companies. The South East is the most densely populated region of the UK, with more than 18 million people. As the current drought demonstrates, water companies in the region are facing increasing pressures in maintaining public water supplies due to continuous population growth, high demand and the impact of climate change. They must balance this by taking into account wider environmental considerations – particularly the need to protect important habitats.



Ardingly Reservoir - November 2011 - Courtesy of South East Water

## Water Resources in the South East Regional Modelling Project

Together with government departments and regulators, the companies have set up the Water Resources in the South East (WRSE) Regional Modelling Project. It aims to identify strategic options which they can consider for inclusion in long-term water resources management plans – particularly for the next 25 years. It is exploring opportunities for sharing existing and new resources while meeting environmental objectives. At the same time it is evaluating alternatives for managing demand for water – all of which are intended to minimise the costs to customers.

### The partners

The WRSE Group consists of the following organisations who are contributing to the project:

- Central Government through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- Regulators in the form of Ofwat and the Environment Agency (EA).
- Key stakeholders such as the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) and Natural England (NE).
- The principal water supply companies in the South East: Portsmouth Water, South East Water, Southern Water,

Sutton and East Surrey Water, Thames Water, Veolia Water Central and Veolia Water Southeast. Other water supply licensees and key stakeholders are also invited to participate. Northumbrian Water (Essex and Suffolk), Anglian Water and Severn Trent Water have already contributed.

### The aims of the project

The principal aims of WRSE are to:

- Engage key stakeholders in the development of the WRSE Strategy while informing regional stakeholders and the wider general public of the results of the WRSE Regional Modelling Project.
- Ensure potential new entrants to the water supply market are aware of the work being undertaken and enable access and participation in all aspects of the project as appropriate.
- Present an overview of the modelling to customers, highlighting the work being done to ensure security of supply while minimising both costs and environmental impacts. Project outputs will be explained; these being the model results and the options for a regional water

resources strategy, which have been agreed by the WRSE Group.

- Demonstrate that the industry and regulators are working cooperatively and that an open and transparent approach is being taken which will identify the benefits the modelling work could deliver for water customers and the natural environment.

The group's focus is on identifying the means to maintaining the security of supplies to customers in the most sustainable way possible. Through communication with stakeholders and wider groups it hopes to ensure all relevant issues are taken into account.

### Principal elements

There are three principal elements which are expected to influence the outputs of the modelling project:

**Potential options available and their costs.** The water companies are providing cost estimates for both managing customer demand and proposals for new resources. Consultants are reviewing them to ensure consistency across the region.

**Potential sustainability reductions.** In order to satisfy the requirements of the European Water Framework Directive, it is expected reductions will have to be made to abstraction licences to meet new environmental flow indicators. The Environment Agency has provided the project with indicative licence reductions. Costs associated with delivering these reductions will need to be identified and the potential impact on customer bills assessed.

**Potential barriers to the adoption of regional solutions.** As well as highlighting the likely changes required for inter-company transfers of water, a sub-group is seeking to identify other potential obstacles to the development of strategic options.

Consultants have been employed by the Environment Agency to conduct the detailed modelling work, but the base data is being provided by the water companies.

A number of sub-groups consisting of company and regulator representatives have been established to manage key activities. A Project Management Board oversees the management of the work and is responsible for its delivery. It reports to a Senior Manager's Group which is accountable for the overall WRSE project.

### Key outputs

The Project anticipates a staged approach to publication and dissemination of its work.

**Stage 1:** This took place in January this year (2012). A briefing for key stakeholders was held to explain the background for, and extent of, the work currently being undertaken. This article is also a part of that public information process.

**Stage 2:** Expected to take place in August this year (2012) with the publication of Phase 1 of the detailed modelling. The outputs are expected to validate the regional mathematical model while at the same time providing initial guidance for further development of options for inclusion in Phase 2 modelling. A new WRSE website containing much more information and details about its work is online at <http://wrse.org.uk/>

**Stage 3:** due in November this year (2012). It will outline the results of the Phase 2 modelling. It is expected to provide companies with a central set of results they can consider when developing water resources management plans which they will need to publish for consultation in the spring of 2013.

*The Editor & Publishers thank the WRSE Group for preparing the above article for publication.*



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