

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

5th December 2023

Dear Mr Mountain

Consumer Scotland response to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee questions from the 7th November 2023

Following our attendance at the committee's meeting on 7th November, the committee asked if we could respond to some additional questions. I am pleased to reply with our response to the questions below.

1. Does Consumer Scotland have any evidence to indicate that campaigns such as Scottish Water's Nature Calls campaign is increasing awareness among consumers about these issues?

Over the last two years we have carried out a few key pieces of research that have sought to identify consumer views, understanding and needs in relation to climate change adaptation and net zero.

Our most recent research is still ongoing and has sought to bring consumers voices into the heart of the Scottish Government-led, ongoing legislative and policy review of the water sector. We commissioned Ipsos to carry out consumer research using a deliberative methodology, with fieldwork finishing in mid-November and a report of findings due from Ipsos in March 2024. Over 40 participants – broadly reflective of the Scottish population – were recruited to take part in a series of detailed workshops during October and November 2023. During these sessions, participants heard from specialists within the sector, who were able to share the challenges climate change is posing for the water sector and potential ways we can tackle it. Ultimately the participants were given the opportunity to deliberate over these challenges and develop their collective views on possible solutions.

During some of these sessions reference was made to various campaigns and some participants suggested they had not seen or heard of them. Whilst caution should be applied to these comments as they are pre-analysis and were not the specific focus of the research, this is consistent with findings from other research we have carried out.

In another piece of research carried out this year; [Consumers and the transition to net zero¹](#), which has already been shared with the committee, we sought to map consumer engagement with the net zero and adaptation agenda. Whilst this took a broader look at consumer markets, we did ask consumers a range of questions related to water use at home and whether they knew what they were expected to do and where they should go to find information.

The findings from this research found that climate change is very much on consumers' agendas, with over three quarters of respondents saying they are concerned. However, two thirds of consumers are either unsure or don't know, what they need to be doing to help Scotland achieve net zero emissions and adapt to climate change. A lack of reliable and trustworthy information and advice is linked to the reasons for this.

In the context of water-saving campaigns, we have a forthcoming research report (due to be published shortly) which has found that such campaigns tend to receive more sustained engagement from consumers when they combine messages around a particular environmental issue (the 'why') with information and practical tips around strategies for households to reduce their water consumption (the 'how').

As our 'Consumers and the transition to net zero' report suggests, consumers are not always aware of the ways in which their individual actions are linked to the wider climate adaptation agenda. Public campaigns offer the opportunity to make these links more explicit to consumers. Making this link clear should encourage greater engagement from consumers on the issue, while highlighting specific actions they can take, both of which are key to achieving sustained behavioural change.

The other key point which our forthcoming water efficiency report will highlight concerns the role of the messenger. Campaigns will be more persuasive for consumers if the

organisation delivering the campaign is seen as credible and trustworthy. Research on [Scottish Water's future strategy](#), undertaken for the previous Customer Forum during the Strategic Review of Charges (2021-2027) regulatory period, indicated that consumers overwhelmingly felt it was important for Scottish Water to lead the way by having high ethical standards of business.¹ Behaving truthfully and with integrity was seen as signalling that an organisation was worthy of public trust. For this reason, Scottish Water maintaining a positive relationship with its customer base has an impact on its ability to advocate positively for the wider water environment.

Despite consumers' widespread concern for the environment and climate change, our research consistently highlights that consumers want and need more support and information to help them make the collective changes to their behaviour that will support adaptation and the transition to net zero. In our net zero research we found that consumers believe the government needs to be a key messenger of information relating to climate change adaptation, alongside other bodies such as Scottish Water and local authorities.

Adapting to climate change will require some significant changes to how we value water and how we incorporate water, wastewater and rain water infrastructure within our communities. This will require a step change in perceptions and consumers' attitudes and this will require the government to lead on providing information and clear messages, with other key bodies engaging in further detail with consumers.

2. What are some of the barriers Consumer Scotland have identified in the adoption of blue-green infrastructure projects?

And,

3. What do the Scottish Government, Scottish Water and other stakeholders need to do to resolve these issues?

Consumer Scotland is working with the Scottish Government and other key organisations, with a view to proposing new water industry legislation to ensure the Scottish water industry is able to effectively respond and adapt to climate change impacts.

¹ <https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/ScottishWater/Document-Hub/Key-Publications/Strategic-Plan/Research-Projects/280120ResearchProject27FutureStrategy.pdf>

As part of this wider work, Consumer Scotland has gathered evidence to understand the barriers preventing a greater uptake and successful implementation of blue-green infrastructure (BGI). We have subsequently worked with stakeholders to develop solutions.

Our report [Overcoming Barriers to the Adoption of Blue-Green Infrastructure](#), that has been shared with the committee, highlights the various challenges for BGI, including:

- Physical space – there is finite land available to develop BGI in urban spaces, and the presence of physical limitations associated with a site, take time and resources to resolve.
- Stakeholder cross-working – BGI development and implementation is still fragmented. Organisations involved in BGI projects are segmented into sectors, with different vested interests and priorities, at different levels.
- Funding – limited financing mechanisms available for BGI can hinder the ability of projects to maximize outcomes for consumers and the wider environment.
- Legislation, policy and planning frameworks – existing frameworks do not sufficiently protect against the risk that BGI is viewed as optional, and removed from a project, in order to bring down costs or due to rising complexities.
- Community engagement – meaningful engagement with communities that are impacted by BGI can be inconsistent at times and can result in projects that do not align with community needs and expectations.

If BGI projects are to be effective and resilient over the long-term, bringing benefits to consumers and communities, these challenges need to be addressed. Through our research and engagement with key water sector stakeholders, we have recommended:

1. A central part of the solution is the development of an overarching strategy and shared vision for BGI in Scotland, set out in legislation. This shared strategy is essential for developing a unified approach and vision for BGI, countering siloed working and helping to align resources.
2. An improved approach is developed to engage with consumers and communities across Scotland as partners in BGI projects. Consumer engagement in BGI projects

should go beyond superficial measures, such as the provision of information, and give consumers a genuine opportunity to shape project outcomes. This will ensure that BGI projects match with the needs and aspirations of each community. The evidence we have gathered indicates that BGI projects which are co-designed with consumers are far more likely to reflect how consumers use or want to use the space in reality, and are thus more likely to be maintained in the long-run.

3. A considered approach should be taken to identify ways in which consumers can be encouraged to champion their own local rainwater management solutions, including a review of current incentives and disincentives in planning legislation.

While many of the existing BGI schemes in Scotland are designed and delivered by local authorities and Scottish Water, individual consumers can also play their part by adopting smaller-scale solutions in their own homes, gardens or community areas, such as installing a water butt as part of a house renovation or opting for a permeable driveway.

Consumers can be the first line of defence against the impacts of urban creep through the installation of local rainwater management solutions. However, according to a previous consumer survey, 95% of consumers in Scotland have not heard of the term 'blue-green infrastructure'ⁱⁱ. Consumers need clear information that they can trust and understand. There are opportunities for further consumer-led research to inform approaches to communication by those in the Scottish water sector engaging in BGI.

4. What can the Scottish Government and Scottish Water do to address barriers for people who rely on private water supplies to ensure a safe and secure supply in the face of increased periods of drought?

Earlier this year we commissioned qualitative research with users of private water supplies (PWS), to ascertain their views and needs around advice, support and funding provisions. This research built on previous consumer research that explored the challenges and experiences of PWS users in Scotland. We have published our policy findings in the report [Advice, support and funding needs of private water supply users](#)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Our research has highlighted that climate change is increasingly having a negative impact on PWS and a growing number of properties reliant on a PWS are more regularly running out of

water during prolonged dry periods, often leaving users with no alternative water supply. Various types of land use in rural areas can also impact the quality of the water and the amount of water available for private water supplies, with forestry, wind turbines, agriculture and developments capable of impacting drinking water sources.

It is estimated there are 22,500 private water supplies in Scotland serving over 180,000 people: 3% of the population^{iv}. These drinking water supplies are not connected to the mains water network and can serve single households, tenanted properties, holiday lets, businesses or even small communities. PWS are more common in rural areas and some regions will have 20-30% of their populations on a PWS. PWS are often small scale and regularly rely on surface water sources rather than ground water supplies. As such, they can be more vulnerable to changing weather patterns (longer dry periods or more intense rainfall) which can quickly see water supplies run dry or struggle to tackle pollutants being washed in.

Our recently published report identified the key issues and recommendations that we see are necessary:

1. There is no single, comprehensive source of information and support for PWS users and owners.

We have recommended the Scottish Government should examine how to bring together all aspects of support and advice to provide a so-called 'jumping off point'. A single website could provide PWS users with information and links to other methods of support. These would include tailored advice, links to regulatory registration, online training tools, water management tools such as risk assessments and water sampling options, routes for connection to the public water network and access to funding support.

2. Water supply management tools are not being fully utilised by PWS users, in part because the benefits are not evident to users.

We have recommended Local authorities (and any future single-service offering) need to promote water management tools, such as Risk Assessments and water sampling as beneficial for PWS management. This can be done through ensuring they are accessible, affordable and enable PWS users to engage with the results. Additionally,

Scottish Government and local authorities need to ensure PWS users have access to follow-on tailored advice where required.

3. PWS can be negatively impacted by issues out with their control, such as climate change and land use change. These can lead to PWS running out of water or having to tackle water quality problems.

We have recommended that local authorities should ensure PWS users can access affordable and timely remedies where land use change disrupts a PWS. Furthermore, if the Scottish Government establish a national advisory service, it should include access to advice, support and suitable technical solutions that enable PWS to better adapt to land use change and climate change impacts.

4. The current grant does not adequately reflect either the costs of ensuring a PWS can provide safe and sufficient drinking water, or the ability of users to meet the costs.

We have recommended that the Scottish Government should consider reviewing the funding options for PWS, with the view to delivering a more flexible approach. This should take into account PWS users' ability to pay, as well as the impacts of climate change affecting the sustainability of many PWS.

5. The current registration of PWS can be inconsistent and lacking in accurate location and water-source data, which can put them at increased risk from land use change and climate change impacts.

We have recommended the Scottish Government should ensure there is a single national register of PWS to improve understanding of those at risk and to better target support where necessary. This should be accompanied with a programme that incentivises PWS users to update the register with necessary information.

6. There hasn't been a long-term strategy to connect PWS to the public water network for many years and the costs for PWS users can often make connection unfeasible. Climate change impacts are now exacerbating issues of water quality and water availability for many PWS.

We have recommended the Scottish Government should consider how it can deliver a longer-term programme of extending the public water network in rural Scotland. This

would enable many homes and businesses with a PWS, to secure access to safe and reliable drinking water.

Update on Consumer Duty

We would also like to take this opportunity to update the committee about our work in relation to the consumer duty on public bodies introduced by the [Consumer Scotland Act 2020](#) (“the 2020 Act”). It is intended to improve the extent to which consumers are considered in strategic policy and decision-making. A key principle of the Duty will be to ensure all public bodies are working towards improving outcomes for consumers as part of their strategic decision-making process.

Consumer Scotland has a statutory power under section 22 of the 2020 Act to issue guidance on the consumer duty to ‘relevant public authorities’. The duty will apply to ‘relevant public authorities’ which will be set out in regulations, which will be laid by the Scottish Government. We anticipate Scottish Water and relevant water sector regulators will be covered by the duty.

The duty will come into force on 1 April 2024. This will be followed by a one-year implementation period, which is intended to allow time for public bodies to:

1. work with Consumer Scotland to inform the final draft of the guidance by sharing their experience of using it when applying the duty, and
2. experience implementing the duty, as not all public bodies will make strategic decisions on a regular basis.

Consumer Scotland is currently developing draft guidance on the duty. It has established an advisory group to provide expert input and advice on the content, structure, and tone of the guidance. Development of the final guidance will involve consultation with relevant public authorities before the guidance is approved by Scottish Ministers.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond fully to your additional questions. If you require any further details please let us know.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ash

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- i <https://consumer.scot/publications/consumers-and-the-transition-to-net-zero/>
- ii https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/building_back_blue_report_31.01.22_1.pdf
- iii <https://consumer.scot/media/v43cues4/advice-support-and-funding-needs-of-private-water-supply-users.pdf>
- iv <https://www.dwqr.scot/media/tvafu2kt/pws-annual-report-2021.pdf>