

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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Proposal for the recovery of costs by the Drinking Water Inspectorate

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The proposal

To update details on the implementation of a cost recovery scheme by DWI that will enable it to recover the cost of its regulatory functions from water companies.

The scheme will provide the Secretary of State and Welsh Ministers (and therefore the Chief Inspector appointed to act on their behalf) with the power to recover costs of DWI regulatory activities by way of a charging scheme. It is proposed that the Welsh Order will enable Welsh Ministers to make Regulations to allow charging in relation to water companies whose supply area is wholly or mainly in Wales and the English Order provides the same power for the Secretary of State in respect of water companies whose supply area is wholly or mainly in England. Following an informal consultation in the Autumn,

It is proposed that the Orders will come into force on 1st January 2013.

Publication of this consultation paper initiates a 6 week period during which the DWI will be seeking the views of the water industry and any organisation or individual who may have a personal or professional interest in the charging scheme. The consultation will run from 24th October 2011 to 5th December 2011.

Please send your responses to this consultation to dwi.consultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk by **5th December 2011**.

Background

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) was established in 1990 as the drinking water quality regulator for the privatised water industry. All inspectors, including the Chief Inspector, are appointed under section 86 of the Water Industry Act 1991.

The Chief Inspector of Drinking Water exercises the powers of the Secretary of State and Welsh ministers as set out in the Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended by the Water Act 2003) in relation to the safety and quality of drinking water. DWI does this by means of technical audit of

water company assets and operational procedures, taking enforcement action where appropriate including prosecution for offences as set out in the Act and Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations.

The Chief Inspector also acts for Ministers in relation to enforcing that local authorities take action as set out in the Private Water Supply Regulations in relation to private water supplies. The Chief Inspector is responsible for publishing drinking water reports and providing the European Commission with data demonstrating compliance by the UK with the EC Drinking Water Directive. Similar arrangements exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the Chief Inspector discharges these duties for the member state through a Memorandum of Understanding with her equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Chief Inspector (and inspectors) exercises these powers independently of Ministers.

DWI operates a risk based approach to technical audits of water companies and their drinking water supply arrangements. The regulatory activity applicable to each water company and each licensed water supplier is governed by the potential risk of its activities to public health. Regulatory monitoring for compliance with EU law is already risk based with the number of tests required varying according to the volume of water supplied/population served. The activity levels applicable to each company/licensed supplier will therefore vary, and will also change over time relative to the risks, and by the outcome of regulatory monitoring. The number and type of licensed water suppliers may also change according to competitive market forces and Government policy.

Reasons for the proposal

The Hampton Review of 2005 on good regulatory practice included a specific recommendation that regulators should be more accountable for the way in which they undertake their delivery functions. Defra and the Welsh Government consider that providing a mechanism for DWI to recover the costs of its delivery functions from the water industry will assist in achieving this recommendation.

A significant proportion of DWI activity relates to monitoring the way water companies meet their regulatory requirements through technical audit and associated activities. As it is the water industry who benefits from these regulatory services, they should bear the cost of providing that service.

The proposed charging scheme would also apply the following strategic principals:

- **The polluter, risk owner or beneficiary pays** - The polluter or risk owner should bear the costs of any measures to prevent harm that they might otherwise cause by their actions or non-actions, including the cost of monitoring regimes. This provides incentives for the development and adoption of less damaging methods and practices.

- **Charges paid by the individual or firm should broadly reflect the cost incurred by the regulator in regulating that firm or individual** - The charging system will be broadly cost reflective at the level of the individual, site or firm. A business that requires only light regulation hence gives rise to few costs for the regulator should generally pay lower charges than a business that needs frequent or more detailed interventions by the regulator.

By introducing a charging scheme, DWI will come into line with other related water regulators such as Ofwat and the Environment Agency and also the Consumer Council for Water (a consumer body), all of which charge for their regulatory activities. This proposal also brings the arrangements for DWI in line with general policy on charging, which is that businesses which benefit from regulation, not the taxpayer, should bear the cost of regulation.

The charging scheme will result in proportionate charges on water companies based on the level of technical audits and inspections involved. This will create a financial incentive for water companies to improve their water safety management.

The Costs involved (including administrative burden)

The estimated annual cost of the regulatory functions undertaken by DWI on behalf of the water industry is estimated at around £1.9m per annum.

Water companies may pass the charges onto their water customers, who are the main beneficiaries of the regulatory work (wholesome drinking water). It is estimated that if water companies did pass this cost on to customers, the average annual water bill could increase by around 15 pence.

The administrative burden on industry arising from this proposal are negligible.

The benefits of the proposal

The benefits of this option are that it:

- will assist DWI in achieving one of the Hampton Review's recommendation that regulators should be more accountable for the way in which they undertake their delivery functions.
- will create a financial incentive for water companies to improve their water safety management.
- brings the arrangements for DWI in line with general policy on charging.

Implementation matters

A significant proportion of DWI activity relates to scrutinising the way water companies (including licensed water suppliers and inset appointees) meet their regulatory requirements through technical audits and inspections. As it is the water industry which benefits from these regulatory services, the proposal to introduce a charging scheme would bring the arrangements for DWI in line with general policy on charging, which is that businesses which benefit from regulation, not the taxpayer, should bear the cost of regulation.

The charging scheme would provide a financial incentive for water companies to improve their procedures for water safety management. As companies will be paying for the technical audit services and inspections they receive, they will balance these costs against management measures which would lead to fewer technical audits and inspections and so potentially reduce the overall cost.

By introducing a charging scheme, DWI will come into line with other related water regulators such as Ofwat and the Environment Agency (EA) and also the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) which is a consumer body, who all charge for their regulatory activities. All three regulators recover their costs through the licensing regime (which is statutory). It is proposed that DWI will develop a system to identify the costs of their regulatory services in relation to each of the individual water companies and licensed suppliers which will allow cost recovery to be apportioned fairly to individual water companies and licensed suppliers.

Proposals to enable DWI to recover the cost of its regulatory functions from water companies were raised previously in the consultation on the Flood and Water Management Bill in 2009. However, the provisions were removed from the final session of the Bill to reduce its size. This consultation advises that the proposals have now been included in the Public Bodies Bill, and addresses the implementation of those proposals.

The implementation of the proposal is dependent on the outcome of parliamentary scrutiny of the Public Bodies Bill, and it receiving Royal Assent. If enacted, the Public Bodies Bill will provide the required primary legislation that provide powers for DWI to introduce a charging scheme. The scheme itself would be introduced by way of an Order made under this general charging power.

The proposed charging scheme will apply to all water companies and licensed suppliers. Each company/supplier will pay for the technical audit services and inspections they receive, therefore it is not considered to impose a discriminatory burden on small firms.

As explained in the previous consultation, those regulatory functions for which it is proposed to recover costs include:

- Technical audits involving the inspection and assessment of water companies' water supply arrangements.
- Investigation of water quality events and incidents.
- Checking compliance with statutory requirements, and legal instruments.
- Technical evaluation of water companies' water quality data.
- Investigations of consumer complaints relating to drinking water quality as notified by members of the public, local authorities or businesses.
- Statutory public reporting on drinking water quality.

Questions

- 1. Do you have any comments on the proposals for implementation of a cost recovery scheme by DWI that will enable it to recover the cost of its regulatory functions from water companies?**

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