



A JOINT LETTER FROM **WATERWISE** AND THE  
**UK WATER EFFICIENCY STRATEGY STEERING GROUP**

The Rt Hon. Alok Sharma  
Secretary of State  
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
1 Victoria Street  
LONDON SW1H 0ET

4 August 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**Including water efficiency in building retrofit schemes: saving water, saving energy, saving money**

We are writing on behalf of the steering group for the UK Water Efficiency Strategy, representing water companies, regulators, government, NGOs and academia from across the UK; and the independent water efficiency campaigning organisation, Waterwise, which supports the steering group.

**We welcome the announcement by the Chancellor in his Summer Economic Update to introduce both a Green Homes Grant and a Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.** The climate emergency demands decisive action by the government. Retrofit schemes, such as these, have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions very cost-effectively whilst creating thousands of new green jobs to support the economic recovery from Covid-19.

**However, we note that details of the Green Homes Grant announced today exclude water efficiency measures that would reduce the energy and carbon associated with heating water in the home.**

Heating water, for example for showers and hot taps, is the second largest source of household greenhouse gas emissions after space heating, accounting for 17% of home energy use.<sup>1</sup> Water efficient taps and showers are now available on the market that deliver the same customer experience whilst using much less water. Water efficient showerheads can have flow rates that are less than a fifth of equivalent products, offering energy savings of 80% or more on the amount of water needing to be heated. However, due to a lack of product labelling and minimum standards in this area, much more water and energy wasteful products are unknowingly bought and installed by customers.

Using less water is also critical to safeguarding the environment and supporting sustainable housing growth. **As COP26 President you will know that water is the medium through which many of the impacts of climate change will materialise.** The National Infrastructure Commission says concerted action is needed to reduce demand as part of a 'twin-track' approach to safeguarding water resources.<sup>2</sup> Sir James Bevan, the Environment Agency's chief executive, warned last year that we face the 'jaws of death' where demand for water exceeds supplies within 25 years.<sup>3</sup> Last week the Committee on Climate

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on Climate Change (2019), [UK Housing: Fit for the Future?](#)

<sup>2</sup> National Infrastructure Commission (2018), [Preparing for a drier future.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Sir James Bevan, 19 March 2019, [Escaping the jaws of death.](#)

Change published new research based on the latest UK Climate Projections that suggests the UK faces a shortfall of up to 2.7 billion litres of water per day by 2050 – equal to the daily water demand of 19 million people - unless action is taken.<sup>4</sup>

**We therefore urge you to include water efficiency measures that save energy to be included within the scope of the Green Homes Grants and other retrofit schemes being developed.** Part G of Building Regulations specifies a maximum flow rate for taps and showers to meet the optional 110 litres per person per day water efficiency standard in new homes.<sup>5</sup> We propose these flow rates be used to define products eligible for inclusion within your department's energy efficiency retrofit schemes, including existing schemes delivered by energy companies. When included alongside larger interventions which improve the overall energy efficiency of homes, such as reducing heat loss through improved insulation, low cost measures that save both water and energy would maximise the benefits for low-income householders, saving money in both energy and metered water bills.

This proposal would also help take forward government policy on water efficiency more generally. **Evidence shows that the single most cost-effective intervention to save water would be to introduce a mandatory, independent water efficiency label displayed on all water-using products at the point of sale, linked to tighter Building Regulations and water supply fitting regulations.**<sup>6</sup> We fully support the proposals Defra consulted on last year to establish a government-backed mandatory water label and introduce minimum product standards, including for dishwashers and washing machines. The recent report from the Public Accounts Committee<sup>7</sup> requires Defra to set out a timetable to implement product labelling and other policies to improve water efficiency. The Committee on Climate Change and the National Infrastructure Commission fully endorse these proposals, and we hope there will be positive announcements soon. When such a label is in place, A-rated products should fall within the scope of these retrofit programmes due to the energy and water savings that they would deliver.

We would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss these proposals with you at your earliest convenience.

Copies of this letter have been sent to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Floods and Water at Defra, the Minister of State for Housing at MHCLG, Rachel Fletcher at Ofwat, Sir James Bevan at the Environment Agency, and Emma Clancy at the Consumer Council for Water.

With every best wish,



**Daniel Johns**  
Chair, UK Water Efficiency Strategy Steering Group



**Nicci Russell**  
Managing Director, Waterwise

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<sup>4</sup> HR Wallingford for the CCC (2020), [Projections of Future Water Availability](#).

<sup>5</sup> Building Regulations, Approved document Part G (2016), [see Table 2.2, page 17](#).

<sup>6</sup> Artesia, Eftec (2019) for Water UK, [Pathways to long-term PCC reduction](#).

<sup>7</sup> Public Accounts Committee (2020), [Water supply and demand management](#).