



**Scottish
Water**

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Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Edward,

Thank you for your letter seeking information on behalf of the Committee about Scottish Water's preparations for the possibility of drought this year.

Scottish Water relies on the climate and the natural environment for the resources we need to provide our services. Changes to the climate mean that warmer, drier springs and summers - as well as more extreme rainfall events - are expected to become more frequent. We recognise therefore that we need to adapt and continue addressing the challenges that this brings, via a combination of sustained long-term investment in resilience; capacity to respond via effective operational action in any individual year; and engagement with customers and communities to ensure that Scotland's drinking water is valued and used as a precious resource. Adapting effectively to these changing weather patterns is a central part of our 25 year [Long Term Strategy](#), published last month.

I have set out our responses to the Committee's questions below.

1. *What actions were taken in response to SEPA's [Winter water situation report 2025](#) and how did Scottish Water, the Scottish Government and SEPA coordinate work to prepare for the increased risk of water scarcity?*

There is regular engagement between Scottish Water, SEPA and Scottish Government about the water resource position. However, it is important to explain that SEPA's water scarcity report does not relate directly to the stored water resource position for Scottish Water. In part, this reflects that, where practical, sources of water for public supply have been chosen and developed over time with resilience in mind.

While Scottish Water is responsible for managing public water supplies and maintaining service to our customers, we work actively with SEPA to ensure that this can be done in a way that complies with relevant regulatory standards and protects the environment. The Scottish Government has a continuous and wide-ranging role in overseeing and supporting the national response to water scarcity as a whole.

The roles and responsibilities are clear and the relationships between the main organisations work well. There is also a role for local government, communities and customers in responding to the particular risks and impacts of water scarcity in their areas.

Scottish Water monitors and actively manages the water resources that we use to provide drinking water to communities throughout the year. This ensures that we have up-to-date information on the storage level in our reservoirs, and the flows in river catchments that we rely upon. In each case, we also maintain a Drought Plan which identifies appropriate thresholds at which planned actions will be taken to ensure that water supplies to customers can be maintained.

From this monitoring, as well as routine liaison with SEPA, we were alert to the increased risk of water scarcity affecting some public water supplies as we emerged from the winter of 2024/25. Our preparatory work began in February, focused on areas of the East of Scotland where rainfall had been significantly below average.

Week to week monitoring of storage levels and trends enables us to respond promptly both to the nationwide position as it changes; and to the particular situation for each of Scotland's 229 public water supplies. By mid-May, we saw both a significant increase in water demand – reaching a peak of over 2000 million litres per day, compared with a year-round average of around 1840 million litres per day – and levels of storage falling significantly below the average for the time of year. This prompted us to issue a nationwide call for customers to use water efficiently, a call to which customers responded positively.

2. *What actions are you considering taking should drought conditions worsen over the summer?*

The operational actions which we will take to ensure water supplies can be maintained are set out in the Drought Plans that we maintain for each water supply system. These vary with the circumstances of each area, but typically include measures like reconfiguring water networks to reduce demand on sources which are under greatest pressure; transferring drinking water via strategic infrastructure where it is available to support less resilient systems; seeking licence to reduce reservoir compensation flows; making arrangements to supplement normal water sources from other suitable nearby water bodies; supplementing drinking water storage within the network via road tanker; and communicating with customers to reduce demand and protect the wider water environment.

Building on the success of our initial message to customers in mid-May, which contributed to a 60 million litre reduction in daily demand for water across the country, we have planned communications for customers to maintain awareness over June and July with the headline message that 'Water Is Always Worth Saving'. Our communications focus on practical, everyday actions people can take to save water, with targeted messaging for communities who may be more vulnerable to scarcity. We have worked closely with SEPA and other partners to ensure our messaging aligns with national drought preparedness efforts; and we continue to adapt our messages in response to changing conditions – including the potential need for targeted activity in particular regions or individual supply zones. Our presence at a programme of summer events over this period enables two-way engagement with customers, with scope to add more local events in any areas of higher priority.

While the majority of our plans involve operational action to ensure that water supplies can be maintained, in combination with communication and engagement with customers to help reduce demand, there is also a legal mechanism called a Water Shortage Order which is provided for by Part 7 of the Water Resources (Scotland) Act 2013. Scottish Water can ask the Scottish Government to consider putting a Water Shortage Order in place if we consider that there is a serious risk to the public water supply in any area. If granted, Water Shortage Orders could permit us to take further action to maintain supplies; or to apply mandatory water saving measures.

3. What formal and informal structures are in place to ensure effective communication with SEPA, and are these sufficient?

Building upon regionally and locally-focused action in the areas at highest risk from February, Scottish Water formed a nationwide Incident Team from Tuesday 6th May to coordinate our operational response.

A national water scarcity call is convened and chaired by SEPA, starting when an area of the country moves to alert status and continuing until all areas return to normal. The forum, which includes representatives of Scottish Water and the Scottish Government, has been meeting weekly since Thursday 24th April and has an over-arching coordinating role.

There is a well-established framework for further escalation at national level, should it be required, via the Scottish Government Resilience Room. Regional and Local Resilience Partnerships are also kept informed and would be used to coordinate multi-agency resilience efforts if required in their areas.

4. What communication has Scottish Water had with the agricultural sector and any other groups (demographic, sectoral or geographic) that appear to you to be vulnerable to the impacts of water scarcity on their preparedness for drought over the summer?

Non-domestic customers in Scotland, including the agricultural sector, are supplied with water via a number of Licensed Providers. These companies operate in a competitive market that was established by the Water Services etc (Scotland) Act 2005.

In addition to our communications and engagement activity for the general public, we provide information as a wholesaler to Licensed Providers, who have primary responsibility for communicating with and assisting their customers. Non-domestic customers concerned about water scarcity should engage with their Licensed Provider in the first instance.

As the Committee will appreciate, many farms and businesses meet all or part of their need for non-potable water from independent sources. SEPA regulates the use of these private water sources and engages with their owners as part of their water scarcity planning activities.

As in previous years, Scottish Water will work with local authorities, where required, to supply bottled water via the Scottish Government's emergency support scheme for Private Water Supplies that are affected by water scarcity.

5. How are you feeding lessons learned from this year's water scarcity and considering the increased risk of extreme weather conditions from climate change into the Scottish Government's review of water industry policy, which was committed to in the 2023-24 Programme for Government?

We are fully engaged with the Scottish Government's continuing policy development work to ensure that Scotland's water sector can respond successfully to the challenges of climate change, including increased risk of water scarcity and other extreme weather impacts. We will continue to contribute to the process wherever we can – including by supporting a wide conversation with customers and water sector stakeholders over the months ahead; and by feeding back on lessons learned from the current situation.

Improving Scotland's resilience to drought is a significant element in [Scottish Water's Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#), which was published last year. This reflects that we have already made progress in a number of areas, including reducing leakage by around 58% since 2007 across our 30,000 miles of drinking water network; investing in improved connectivity between

some water supply zones; improving our operational capacity to respond; and trialling smart water meters for non-domestic customers.

Working with customers to reduce long-term demand from its current level of around 178 litres per person per day, as well as gaining better understanding of localised and smaller sources of leakage, will be increasingly important in the future. This is the basis for a current pilot project in the north-west of Dundee to install smart monitors for around 2,000 homes: the pilot will focus on working with customers to understand the benefit that improved awareness of domestic water usage can provide; and how information about usage can help to reduce leaks on the customer side of the pipe, and in Scottish Water's networks.

These initiatives, alongside the continuing need to invest for the long-term in improved connectivity and drought resilience, are at the heart of our recently published Long Term Strategy, developed as part of our preparations for the 2027-33 Strategic Review of Charges. Our Strategy identifies objectives to reduce leakage by a further 20%; to reduce the amount of water abstracted and treated across Scotland by 240 million litres per day; and to increase flexibility to move water between supply zones, particularly in Edinburgh, Fife and Dundee. More broadly, the strategy reflects our aim to increase collaboration with other relevant organisations, customers and communities; transform and drive efficiency through research, innovation and technology; and continue to invest on a sustained and prudent basis.

We are working constructively with the Scottish Government, SEPA and others to ensure the policy framework can enable us to be resilient in the face of a changing climate and continue to support a flourishing Scotland.

Yours sincerely, *and all good wishes!*


Alex Plant
Chief Executive
Scottish Water