

AGM & The Race to Net Zero – The Legacy of COP26

Non-Verbatim Minutes



All Party Parliamentary
Water Group

Date	Thursday 3 March 2022
Time	10:15 – 11:00
Venue	Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom.
Chair	Baroness Anne McIntosh Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Water Group.
Speakers	Sir James Bevan Chief Executive of the Environment Agency. James Jesic Managing Director, Customer Operations, Severn Trent Water. Samuel Larsen Director of Programmes and Planning, Water UK Dr Fatima Ajia Campaigns and Social Research Manager, Waterwise

MINUTES

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was attended by the following Parliamentarians:

- Baroness Anne McIntosh (Co-Chair)
- Liz Twist MP (Co-Chair)
- Baroness Gloria Hooper (Officer)
- Peter Bottomley MP
- Lord Taylor of Holbeach

Officers were nominated by **Peter Bottomley MP**, seconded by **Lord Taylor of Holbeach** and approved by vote.

The **Income and Expenditure statement** for the year was presented by the secretariat Connect. **Liz Twist MP** and **Baroness McIntosh** asked if the group had made any moves to widen its sponsors by including environmental groups. Connect noted this as a future action to explore on behalf of the Chairs.

The Group voted to approve the income and expenditure statement, which has been published on the Group's website.

The AGM concluded at 10:08.

The Race to Net Zero – The Legacy of COP26

Baroness McIntosh, the co-chair of the group, welcomed everyone to the session, thanking especially the speakers for their attendance. She noted that the theme of the meeting is to focus on climate change,

the goal for net zero and the role the water industry could play. Baroness McIntosh explained that given the extreme weather events we have seen this year, including many storms and floods, water companies had a special role in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change. She noted that the government had committed to building 300,000 houses a year, however there would be a need to focus on the water services for these developments, especially considering sewage and waste water. Baroness McIntosh explained how she was keen for the development of sustainable drainage systems (SuDs), but that it was important to establish who would maintain these once developed.

Baroness McIntosh then welcomed Sir James Bevan, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency to speak.

A transcript of Sir James Bevan's remarks is available on gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/water-is-the-most-important-thing-there-is>

Sir James Bevan started his talk explaining that water, with its quality and quantity, is the most important thing on our planet. He stated that it is important to look at the strategic picture around water, so focusing on the climate is key. Climate change is leading to floods, rising sea levels, increased water contamination in rivers, higher risks of drought, the killing of water wildlife and many other environmental factors. The Environment Agency are working to help communities adapt, build flood defences, and increase the use of SuDS, in order to try to combat climate change.

With regards to water quality, James noted that this is a mixed picture. Currently 40% of rivers are at good ecological status, however this has been the same for the past years and many are getting worse, for example due to things such as microplastics and what are called 'forever chemicals.' James explained that all in society must play their part in combatting these issues, including farmers and water companies, politicians building pressure on the government around these crucial issues, and environmental agencies need to continue to scrutinise and support the work around water.

Looking at quantity issues around water, James noted this is an even bigger issue. First, by focusing on issues caused by too much water, for example the catastrophic floods we have seen in recent years. However, following government spending on flood defences, many businesses were not destroyed by recent floods. That said, James noted that flood defences are not enough on their own. The Environment Agency has a new strategy that in addition to looking at flood defences, also focuses on other kinds of infrastructure, for example travel, in order to improve resilience.

On the topic of having too little water, James noted that if we continue to use water in the same way we do now, demand for water will exceed supply. There is increasing demand for water as the population grows. James stated that to solve this issue we need to use less water and increase the supply of water by investing in sustainable solutions – this is all set out in their National Framework for Water Resources.

Baroness McIntosh thanked James for his talk and went on to welcome James Jesic, the Managing Director of Customer Operations at Severn Trent Water.

James Jesic began by stating how we are now starting to see the impact of climate change. He noted that in response to this, he believes the answer is twofold: firstly, contributing to reducing carbon emissions and secondly, adapting to the changes we are seeing unfold. There is a crucial need to reduce our carbon footprint as so much carbon is emitted from the energy needed to move water around.

James noted that there are four main approaches we should be focusing on in regard to climate change. Firstly, reducing carbon. Secondly, looking to replace energy sources, suggesting a focus on anaerobic digestion. Thirdly, James stated that we need to remove carbon, by looking into locking carbon back into the land. Finally, he suggested we look at offsetting by enhancing fertiliser creation and usage.

James noted many of the ways in which we must all look to solve issues resulting from too much or little water. He explained that we need water networks that are better connected, and companies need to invest in long term infrastructure to meet water demands. There is also a need to embrace nature-based

solutions that can be far more economic and environmentally friendly but are not always as reliable as previous solutions. He noted that there needs to be joined up regulations around water to ensure water users adapt to lowering consumption levels. James finally explained that all these focuses to solve issues surrounding water need to be looked at with a focus on affordability, so that all people can be part of these crucial solutions.

The Baroness thanked James for his insightful words, and then went onto welcome Samuel Larsen, Director of Programmes and Planning at Water UK.

Samuel Larsen explained that Water UK oversees water companies and regulators throughout the UK to ensure customers receive high quality water in an environmentally friendly way. Samuel noted that from the COP26 summit the government is focusing on four key themes to tackle climate change. Firstly, cutting emissions. Samuel explained that emissions have been reduced in the last decade and that we are seeing progression on transparency around this. He noted that a lot of these emissions come from processing wastewater and moving water around, therefore there is a need to find innovative solutions to cut these emissions.

Secondly, there is the need to adapt to climate change by looking at water use efficiency, SuDS, reducing demand and cutting down on the amount of water that is moved around. Thirdly, the government are looking for new ways of unlocking investment that can be put into mentioned water-based solutions. The Net Zero Strategy by the government sets out well the idea of finding the lowest cost for society to achieve climate change ambitions.

Samuel noted that what is needed now is the detail down from this strategy to know how these ideas can be set into practice. This detail will inform investment planning in several sectors. Finally, he explained the need for collaborations between different sectors and the government, the government's work with NGOs and the government's relationship with the consumers, to ensure solutions to climate change are enacted on a holistic level.

Baroness McIntosh thanked Samuel for joining the discussion and finally welcomed Dr Fatima Ajia, Campaigns and Social Research Manager at Waterwise.

Dr Fatima Ajia began by explaining that Waterwise is a Non-Governmental Organisation, with a vision that water should be used wisely everywhere and every day. She explained that the problem of water demand is deeply worrying considering the fact that we are conversant with how economic growth and reliance on fossil fuel energy increase our carbon footprint but what is often not prominent in the climate conversation is how these phenomena put pressures on our water resources, particularly in the face of changing weather patterns and population growth. Fatima noted that the impact of climate change is being felt more and more as time goes on, especially through drought and flood disasters. She explained that COP26 was monumental in that the Water Pavilion was the first of its kind and it solidified the place of water in the climate conversation, and this allowed the issue of water demand to be brought to the forefront.

With regards to securing the legacy of COP26, Fatima reiterated the [water climate call to action](#) developed to facilitate the race to net zero. She highlighted four actions and directions we can all take within our various capacities as stakeholders to advance this agenda. Firstly, adapting by taking collective action to move from seeking water sufficiency to water efficiency. This can be done through education that can bring about behavioural and sociotechnical change, including enhancing the value of water, promoting sustainable consumer habits that reduce the use of embedded water, and increasing water reuse and rainwater harvesting. This also needs to come hand in hand with more ambitious regulations around water consumption, for example, through tighter building regulations, smart metering programmes, and water efficiency labelling on white goods. Secondly, alongside adaptation, mitigating the effects of climate change by looking into reducing carbon emissions attributed to the water sector will be beneficial. Assessing business-as-usual in the water sector by taking a transformational lifecycle approach to reduce

operational gas emissions will also be beneficial. Thirdly, finance surrounding these water climate issues must be considered. There needs to be increased investment in and support for individuals, homes, communities, and organisations to take ownership of climate adaptation measures that maximise existing infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Finally, Fatima highlighted the need for collaboration between communities, government, and the food, energy and water sectors to enable emissions to be reduced in a holistic and sustainable manner.

Baroness McIntosh thanked Fatima for her thought-provoking ideas and for joining the discussion.

Baroness McIntosh then moved to the **Q and A** section of the meeting.

Liz Twist MP noted that many of the speakers had highlighted the need to raise awareness of water reduction but wondered the best ways in which to go about this.

Baroness Hooper asked around beavers and the support for this animal. Baroness Hooper also asked how the speakers suggest is the best way to educate people around water value and the need for a reduction in water consumption.

Dr Fatima Ajia began answering the questions, noting that water efficiency is a collective responsibility, from the individual level to the policy level. She suggested there is a need for ambitious policies to regulate people towards water efficiency, for example, via smart water metering, water efficiency labelling, and building standards. There also needs to be increased investment in water efficiency campaigns to increase people's awareness of the intrinsic value of water and enhance their connection to and responsibility for water, whilst also supporting them to understand their water habits and achieve behaviour change.

Samuel Larsen explained that we can attempt to educate people around climate and water, especially through a variety of means, for example careful labelling products and specific housing developments that look into water consumption in their planning. He noted that behaviour change is key in solving our water issues that can come from things such as training curriculums.

James Jesic explained that there is a need for people to understand that their actions have an impact on the environment and more importantly people need to understand the relationship between their actions and impact. Ideas such as smart metering can be part of the solutions.

James Bevan noted on Baroness Hooper's question around beavers, that they are remarkable creatures which habitually act in environmentally friendly ways. He suggests a need to support beavers into the future. He also agreed with the other speakers on the conversation around education that this needs to be the driver for behaviour change, to help people understand the value of water and the need to conserve it.

Baroness McIntosh drew the Q&A session to an end. She thanked the panel for their time and unique insights into these crucial conversations. Baroness McIntosh finished the session by noting that she hopes the government will rise to the challenge of meeting net zero with water usage efficiency at the forefront to enable everyone to have sustainable access to water.

The meeting concluded at 11:00.

APPENDIX

The following questions and discussion points were raised using the chat function throughout the session in response to the panellists' talks:

- 'Nice to see people adopting the 'too much, too little' phase that some of us started using in the 2000's! Net Zero presents massive challenges across all sectors. For example, electricity is estimating 6-12GW of new generation per year (the highest amount ever delivered in a year in the last 60 years was 9GW). EVs, Heat Pumps, Hydrogen and Insulation will mean massive

increases in the skilled resource needed. However, skilled resource in the sector is falling. How can the water sector ensure that there is sufficient skilled resource to deliver the changes we need to see?' From [Mike Jones, Principal Consultant, Infosys](#)

- 'We've launched www.makewaterfamous.com to help raise public awareness of water and the water crisis on a public-facing positive news platform. This is also a way of alerting people to the fascinating careers available in the sector - very happy to talk to anyone interested in helping us grow this platform - on and off line.' From Natasha Wiseman, WiseonWater
- 'A sustainable solution to generating energy to clean waste water is the Carruthers Wheel which can generate up to 1 MW at very low head from 1 to 6 metre. There are thousands of untapped former water mill sites and waste/water treatment sites. Helen@carruthersrenewables.co.uk' From Helen
- 'Since industry is still the major water user, how can industry be persuaded to develop more water efficient usage? This is 'low hanging fruit'.' From Claire Hunt, Option Convenor for Integrated Water Management, Imperial College London
- 'Liz Truss raised a key issue - value of water vs cost. Water company customers often do not recognise the true value of water. As James Jesic stated - about £1 per day for the service. I am not advocating increasing cost, I am in favour of the marketing of the value of water and if the demand can be reduced, the costs, carbon and £, of waste water treatment service provision is also reduced.' From Ken Shapland, Honorary Vice President, Chartered Institution of Water & Environmental Management (CIWEM)
- 'Society is going to have to get used to using recycled water - it is vital to future security of supply.' From Brian Smith
- 'Interested to hear if industry or regulators /NGOs have educational programmes in place to raise awareness?' From Liz Twist MP
- 'Any questions on the latest innovation of hydropower for wastewater sites and weirs is the award winning Carruthers Wheel helen@carruthersrenewables.co.uk' From Helen Kemp, Project Director, Carruthers Renewables Ltd.