



DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Ground Floor, SW
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Enquiries: 0330 041 6501

Email: dwi.enquiries@defra.gov.uk
DWI Website: www.dwi.gov.uk

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To: Huw Irranca-Davies
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Dear Minister

Drinking Water 2024 on the quality of public supplies in Wales

It was a pleasure to meet with you to discuss the priorities for drinking water quality during a pivotal period of industry review, before what might be the most extensive reform of the water industry since privatisation. I have shared a summary of the outcome of this discussion and look forward to continued engagement with your officials to ensure that these objectives are delivered through the reform process, for the benefit of both the consumers of public and private water supplies.

The provision of clean drinking water is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of society and economic prosperity, and access to clean water is a basic human right recognised by the United Nations. The advances in water safety planning and systems management underpinned by robust water quality regulation provide some of the best drinking water in the world.

Drinking water quality in Wales remains excellent, with public supplies consistently meeting the stringent regulatory standards for drinking water. Compliance with the standards in 2024 was 99.97%, although the challenge remains to achieve 100% compliance with the regulatory standards.

Drinking water supplies in Wales are protected by water safety planning which provides a robust multi-barrier approach. In this process, risks are identified from source to tap, and mitigation are put in place to address the risks before there is any deterioration or impact on consumers. The quality of supplies is

further verified through extensive random sampling. Occasionally things go wrong, and when this occurs, the Inspectorate investigates and assesses compliance breaches and events and takes enforcement action to prevent recurrence. Summary details of the regulatory activity carried out by the Inspectorate during 2024 are presented in this report, and further details of company improvement programmes are published on the Inspectorate's website.

The commencement of AMP8 this year marks the beginning of the industry's efforts to deliver the outcomes set out in the PR24 business plans. This coincides with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water initiating its transformation programme only months prior. The Inspectorate will maintain its engagement with the company to support enhanced performance, driving measurable improvements in resilience, operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, consumer experience, and performance metrics.

Our water supply system is under pressure from a range of different threats, and these are made more urgent by climate change and population growth. In January, I made recommendations to ministers for updates to our regulations including drinking water quality, sufficiency, and alternative sources such as recycling.

The recommendations for drinking water have formed the basis of guidance to water companies, with the ultimate objective to update the regulations to meet modern standards of quality. This will enable consumers to remain confident in the quality of their drinking water, and that they are protected from exposure to contaminants.

Resilience of supplies, security, sufficiency in times of drought, and safe water recycling schemes, and new treatment processes to secure continuous supplies which all users can have confidence in. This purposeful strategy sets the foundation of delivering guidance based upon expert evidence for which future regulation may be delivered.

Nevertheless, legacy issues such as lead pipes and nickel in domestic dwellings, PFAS and other environmental threats as well as our infrastructure, security and operational technology are all critical issues which need to be addressed. The Inspectorate has worked closely with Ofwat through the five yearly price review to ensure there is adequate investment in these areas, but much remains to be done to improve asset health and resilience.

The government has launched an independent commission into the water industry, to reset the relationship between consumers, water companies and the environment. This is an opportunity to think ahead and develop

sustainable solutions which will meet the challenges facing the sector. I welcome this review and look forward to working with renewed energy and purpose to protect and improve drinking water supplies today and for future generations.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marcus Rink', with a stylized, cursive script.

Marcus Rink
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water