



DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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To: Emma Hardy

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment

Dear Minister

DRINKING WATER 2025 ON THE QUALITY OF PRIVATE SUPPLIES IN ENGLAND

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) has published its annual report 'Drinking Water 2025 private supplies in England' which summarises the quality of private water supplies.

At least 1.5% of the population in England, over 860,000 consumers, source their water from a private water supply. This number is likely to be an underestimate due to the lack of mandatory registration and incomplete reporting by local authorities, who are the regulator for private supplies. Private water supplies provide water to transient populations, such as during festivals, to holiday sites and airports, and to commercial settings, including for food production, as well as large enterprises such as the Sizewell C development. Therefore the population exposed to these supplies is hard to quantify but is anticipated to be significantly higher.

The quality of private water supplies in 2025 remains a concern, with at least 4.08% of samples found to contain faecal contamination. This is significant when compared with public supplies where 99.98% of microbiological compliance samples tested complied with the standards. Lead was detected above the statutory standard in 2.35% of samples, nickel exceeded the standard in 2.24% of samples, and the enclosed report demonstrates that the scale of the risk from PFAS in these supplies is difficult to quantify. The local authority data return suggests that just 23 of over 36,000 supplies have an in-date risk assessment for PFAS. All these risks can negatively impact health, children often being the most vulnerable. There continues to be significant shortfalls in the number of samples collected by local authorities so understanding the true picture of risk is difficult.

Last year, I expressed concern that the data system used for statutory reporting on the quality of these supplies is no longer able to manage the increasingly complex data requirements asked of it. My team have been working with your officials to address this risk. Nevertheless, without any firm commitment to update or replace

the data system or where private supply compliance oversight will be placed during the regulatory reform, reporting will not be possible for 2026.

The role of the Inspectorate is to provide technical advice and support to local authorities, who are the regulator for private water supplies, and to inform Ministers on the quality of private water supplies. Each year, we respond to around 250 enquiries on private supplies annually. However, these activities are unfunded, largely non-statutory work which the Inspectorate carries out in the best interest of consumers and other stakeholders. This year the Inspectorate has had to reduce the resource dedicated to private water supplies. A risk therefore remains in the support provided to local authorities to exercise their duties in safeguarding these supplies.

The Inspectorate published research in 2023 to improve the regulatory model of the private water supplies. Private water supplies were out of scope of the work of the Independent Water Commission, despite water harvesting and re-use systems, which are private supplies, being promoted by wider government. I am concerned that the regulatory model of private supplies is being overlooked as part of wider reform. This omission puts consumers at risk and could further increase the gap between the quality of public and private supplies.

I would be pleased to discuss any element of the report or this letter to clarify the challenges and solutions.

Yours sincerely



Dr Marcus Rink OBE
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water