



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Rebecca Pow MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

[REDACTED]

Rt. Hon. Philip Dunne
Chair
Environmental Audit Committee

30th October 2020

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Dear Philip,

I recognise the need to balance increasing pressures on our finite water resources; and to adapt to climate change and population growth while protecting and restoring our natural environment. We need to put in place measures to ensure that we have a sustainable supply of water for the future.

To reduce demand for water, we must reduce the volume of water everyone uses in their day-to-day lives. The Public Accounts Committee has made several important recommendations on ways to achieve this, many of which were explored by a government consultation on measures to reduce personal water use in 2019. Similar points have been made by the Environmental Audit Committee. The PAC report into *Water Supply and Demand Management* recommended that we should write within four months, setting out a timetable for when Defra expects to implement product labelling and any other changes, including to building regulations, designed to improve water efficiency.

The policy direction on the areas raised by both Committees will be set out in a government response to the 2019 consultation. This will cover policy for: customer supply pipe leaks, smart metering, water efficiency communications, product labelling and building regulations.

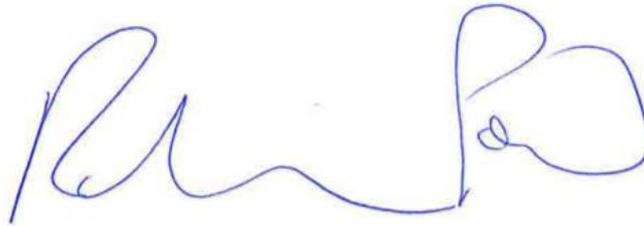
On 10 June, I told the House that we would publish our government response this year. On 10 September, Defra's Permanent Secretary, Tamara Finkelstein, responded to the PAC's 29 July letter and reiterated this message. On 21 September, a Treasury Minute was laid before Parliament committing to publish this response in autumn 2020. To achieve this, we have been working closely with key stakeholders – including Waterwise and Water UK – and have made good progress in our water efficiency policy development.

Unfortunately, to make sure that Defra is well prepared for the end of the transition period and staff our response to the Covid-19 resurgence, we have had to make very difficult decisions about how we prioritise our efforts over the next 3 months. This means that we

are pausing some of our policy work and legislative activity and will therefore need to delay publication of our response to the consultation.

I will review the prioritisation position in the New Year. I will write to you again once our response has been published, which will be as early in 2021 as possible.

Our 19 August Environment Bill policy targets paper proposed setting a statutory target on overall demand for public water supply, to maintain a focus on reducing leakage as well as household and non-household water use. We will continue development of this target, and other related targets, and strongly encourage water companies to further reduce leakage – something I highlighted at a recent roundtable I held with water company CEOs in September.



REBECCA POW MP