

Waterwise Conference
Keble College, Oxford
Tuesday 23 March 2010

Chair's Introduction

It hardly seems possible, but this is the fifth year of Waterwise's life... And I don't have to tell you because the quality of today's audience and speakers makes it obvious that we now have something of a success on our hands.

As a board member of Waterwise I'm proud that we've reached this milestone. But I'm also proud because it was the water industry that set up Waterwise and nurtured it in its first few years. It's now grown up and is going from strength to strength into its next phase as an independent and highly effective organisation with a national and increasingly international profile.

Perhaps it's Waterwise's most important achievement that it has focused stakeholders and increasingly the public on the essential part that water efficiency has to play in the future. If we want a sufficient supply of water for a healthy economy and healthy environment, we have to take the steps required to develop water efficiency and effective demand management as part of a genuine twin-track strategy.

Now everyone who knows anything about the complexity of water policy knows that we have to be as joined up as we can possibly be. But we also know that to actually join things together – to make things really happen – we need people who are knowledgeable and committed but also, crucially, skilled coordinators. This is just what the Waterwise team has done and indeed a lot really has happened in terms of regulation, products, water company action and public education.

There is cause for real satisfaction here.

The water companies have always been active on water efficiency, but are now more involved than ever before in large scale trials and water efficiency retrofits and promotions.

For the 2009 price review (PR09) all the companies in England and Wales produced 25-year Strategic Direction Statements. These Statements put long-term high-quality customer service at the heart of planning – and a big part of this was their commitment to water efficiency among customers and in their own businesses.

The government recognised the role of water efficiency particularly in its excellent strategy paper, Future Water, and I know that the Opposition parties are also strong supporters. Ofwat, the Environment Agency and the Consumer Council too are playing a full part.

I would also like to give a special mention to the water supply chain. I mean the companies who have risen to the challenges of water-efficient product development. Can I say to those of you here today – the policy context is now positive, but without your work we wouldn't be able to move it on as fast we need to, so please keep up the good work.

So, as I say, cause for real satisfaction.

But – there is always a But – no cause for complacency. We've made good progress and I'm confident we can keep up the momentum but there will be challenges ahead – from climate change, population growth and rising consumer expectations. That's why I'm very pleased to say that in this morning's session we will hear from the people best able to advise and guide us on the political, regulatory and business issues. We'll hear about scaling up water efficiency – the role of water efficiency in climate change mitigation and adaptation – and we'll hear about one company's activities in turning policy into action.

So without more ado, I'm delighted to introduce someone who in a comparatively short time has made a real contribution to water policy and the momentum I was talking about – not least in piloting the Flood and Water Management Bill through Parliamentary stages against a very tight timetable – the Minister for Marine and Natural Environment, Huw Irranca-Davies.
