

# Drop the apocalyptic rhetoric – we need a sensible plan for our water industry



To listen to Environment Agency boss Sir James Bevan's speech this week, you'd be forgiven for feeling our water industry is facing the apocalypse. His warning that it must escape the 'jaws of death' makes a good headline but that does not necessarily make sensible policy.

[Environment Agency boss Sir James Bevan's speech this week](#)



From our perspective, as the union representing water industry workers, we need planners and policy makers to stop pursuing such a hysterical approach when discussing the future of the UK water sector.

There is a no scarcity of water in the UK, contrary to what the Environment Agency says, and what the public knows from the daily experience of watching rain fall from the sky. We use less than 2% of the water that comes from annual rain fall for domestic and industrial needs – and this is unlikely to change if we persist under the current model.

The Victorians recognised that water needed to be moved from areas of the UK where water was more plentiful to areas where water was more scarce. They acted – and in our time so we need to do the same.

What therefore is lacking is a plan from the privatised water companies to get the water from areas of the UK where water is plentiful to areas where water is short. What the UK needs is a calm and sensible debate about how we invest in our infrastructure to move our plentiful water resource not scare stories about reducing consumption in the face of climate change and an expanding population.

GMB has experience in contributing to this debate. We pressed Thames Water to go ahead with a back-up plan to use an existing reservoir in Snowdonia owned by United Utilities in the event of periodic droughts to supply water to the South East of England. The water would flow via the River Severn through restored Cotswold canals and the Shapperton tunnel into the River Thames and London Reservoirs. However Thames Water didn't agree. They considered recycling water and a possible new reservoir in Oxfordshire would suffice.

James Bevan's assessment that investment in our water infrastructure is essentially better now than leaving us unprepared for population growth and climate change is surely right.

It is clear to almost everyone it seems except UK Government that water infrastructure in the UK needs serious investment significantly above current levels.

Sir James Bevan's warning only highlights the failure that the privatised water sector in England has been over the last 30 years in managing our precious resource. We need to return water to public ownership if we are going to meet public demand and address new challenges in future.

Whatever the weather, we need to Take Back The Tap and ensure our water services are run in the interest of the public once more – and not just those of mainly overseas shareholders.

It's time to put water back in public hands – and make it work for our people.

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