

# Water for Life

## Water and you

How household customers will be affected.

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### The Water White Paper – *Water for Life*

[Water for Life](#) describes a vision for future water management in which the water sector is resilient, in which water companies are more efficient and customer focused, and in which water is valued as the precious and limited resource it is. And it explains that we all have a part to play in making this happen.

### **What will this mean for household customers?**

Water is a necessity and must remain affordable to us all. At the same time everyone has a role to play in using water more efficiently. [Water for Life](#) puts customers at the heart of decision-making in the water sector. It also explains how we can all use help conserve water and protect ourselves from higher water bills.

### Keeping bills affordable

For many household customers, the most critical issue is the affordability of their bills.

[Water for Life](#) sets out how we are tackling water affordability by explaining how in the short term we will enable water companies to help households who are having problems paying their bills and, over the longer term, we will reform the market in water and sewerage services to increase competition and innovation to help limit future rises in customers' bills.

Early in 2012 we will publish guidance to water companies on creating social tariffs which would enable water companies to offer more support to vulnerable customers. This will give companies time to design schemes and consult with their customers before

introducing tariffs from April 2013 where they choose to do so.

Low income metered customers who need to use lots of water already receive support through the WaterSure tariff. We will also ensure that water companies can offer enhanced terms to WaterSure customers through their social tariffs.

Bad debt is a big problem for water companies because households cannot be disconnected if they do not pay their bills. Bad debt forces companies to raise everyone's bills - by an average of £15 currently.

Reducing levels of bad debt would lower bills and help households who are struggling to afford their charges. We will consult on measures to help companies recover debts.

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### Reducing high household bills in the south west

Households in the south west of England face the highest water bills in the country because at privatisation the network of water and sewerage pipes and other capital assets was less well developed in the south west than in other regions. Since then South West Water has had to invest around £2 billion to raise sewerage standards to the same standards as the rest of country. This has led to high bills.

The Government believes that in order to deal with this historic anomaly it should contribute to the cost of reducing bills. We have therefore decided to fund South West Water to enable it to cut bills by £50 per year for all household customers until at least the end of the next spending review period.

### Changing the way we value and use water

Keeping water affordable is vital. But it is also vital that we use water more efficiently. [Water for Life](#) advocates steps such as installing water butts in gardens to collect rainwater, converting toilets to dual flush, and addressing domestic leaks. We can also avoid water pollution by being careful about what we put down our drains; and by installing modern drainage systems that reduce the risk of surface flooding.

[Water for Life](#) also explains how Government will encourage and incentivise water efficiency measures, some of which are being supported under the Green Deal. It sets out how we will encourage voluntary water efficiency labelling to enable customers to choose more efficient products.

We will use previous successful initiatives to improve our understanding of what motivates

people to make best use of water; and of what gets in the way. We will apply the lessons we learn to encourage water efficiency.

We will also collaborate on a campaign to save water and protect the environment, working with water companies, regulators and customers to raise awareness of the connection between how we use water and the impact on our local rivers.

### **Water for Life – the other key reforms**

[Water for Life](#) also looks at reforming the current water abstraction regime, protecting our rivers and other water bodies from over-abstraction and pollution, reforms to the water market and ensuring our supply and drainage systems are resilient and flexible for the long term.

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