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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Chief Executives  
Local Authorities in England

01 September 2022

Dear Chief Executive,

## Water efficiency in new homes

Climate change and population growth are increasing pressure on our water resources. The latest regional water resources plans suggest we will need an additional 4,000 million litres of water a day by 2050. Half of this will need to come from reducing demand for water.<sup>1</sup> The growing population of England requires new housing that enables people to use water in a sustainable way.

Our 2021 Written Ministerial Statement on reducing demand for water included an action to write “to local authorities to encourage them to adopt the optional minimum building standard of 110 litres per person per day in all new builds where there is a clear local need, such as in water stressed areas”.<sup>2</sup> This is an interim measure to support increased water efficiency in advance of publishing a roadmap on water efficiency in new developments and retrofits in 2022 and exploration of revised building regulations. Local Authorities in England adopting this standard will help us meet our proposed Water Demand Target under the Environment Act 2021.<sup>3</sup>

Recognising the clear need for immediate reduction in water use, ***we encourage Local Authorities to apply the tighter standard of 110 litres per person per day (l/p/d) set out in the ‘Housing: optional technical standards’ guidance and prescribed by regulation 36(2)(b) of the Building Regulations 2010***.<sup>4</sup> Using the latest evidence, the Environment Agency has published its recommendation that additional areas in the South, East and the Midlands should be designated as in serious water stress (see map attached). In these areas this evidence can be used by Local Planning Authorities to establish a clear local need to set out Local Plan policies requiring new homes to meet this optional tighter standard of 110 l/p/d.

Water companies may provide a developer incentive for meeting this standard or lower (e.g. United Utilities, Severn Trent and Northumbrian Water provide a discount or zero

<sup>1</sup> [Environment Agency Review of England’s emerging regional water resources plans.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2021 Written Ministerial Statement on reducing demand for water.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Environment Act 2021: environmental targets consultation.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Housing: optional technical standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\).](#)

charge for homes built to 100 l/p/d or 105 l/p/d).<sup>5</sup> The United Utilities discount has saved developers more than £25m and created a potential saving of 3.8 million litres of water per day. This approach is supported by the Home Builders Federation and we encourage more water companies to utilise these incentives.<sup>6</sup>

***We encourage the use of the Fittings Based Approach (Tables 2.1-2.2 in the Approved Document which supports Regulation 36 and Part G of Schedule 1 of the Building Regulations 2010).***<sup>7</sup> Research by water companies using smart metering data has observed higher water consumption in new build homes compared with their design standard, most often developed with the water efficiency calculator approach in accordance with Appendix A of the Approved Document. Using a fittings-based approach ensures that water efficient products are installed and reduces the uncertainty around occupancy impacting demand for water. Some companies may provide a developer incentive for using a fittings-based approach (e.g. £200 per home from Thames Water).<sup>8</sup> This will also save developers and local authorities costs in using the calculator in planning.

We are working with water companies to reduce leakage and to develop new water resources as part of a twin-track approach to managing supply and demand. We will also introduce mandatory Water Efficiency Labelling for certain water using products, which will inform consumers and encourage the purchase of more water efficient products for both domestic and business use.

Through encouraging greater water efficiency Local Authorities can support protecting the environment and resilience to climate change. Reducing hot water use can also significantly reduce energy use and carbon emissions.<sup>9</sup> This letter is supported by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and we will work with Local Authorities, developers and other stakeholders as we develop our roadmap on water efficiency in new developments and retrofits.

Yours sincerely,



**STEVE DOUBLE MP**

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<sup>5</sup> [Infrastructure charges – Severn Trent Water](#); [Infrastructure charges – Northumbrian Water 2022-23](#).

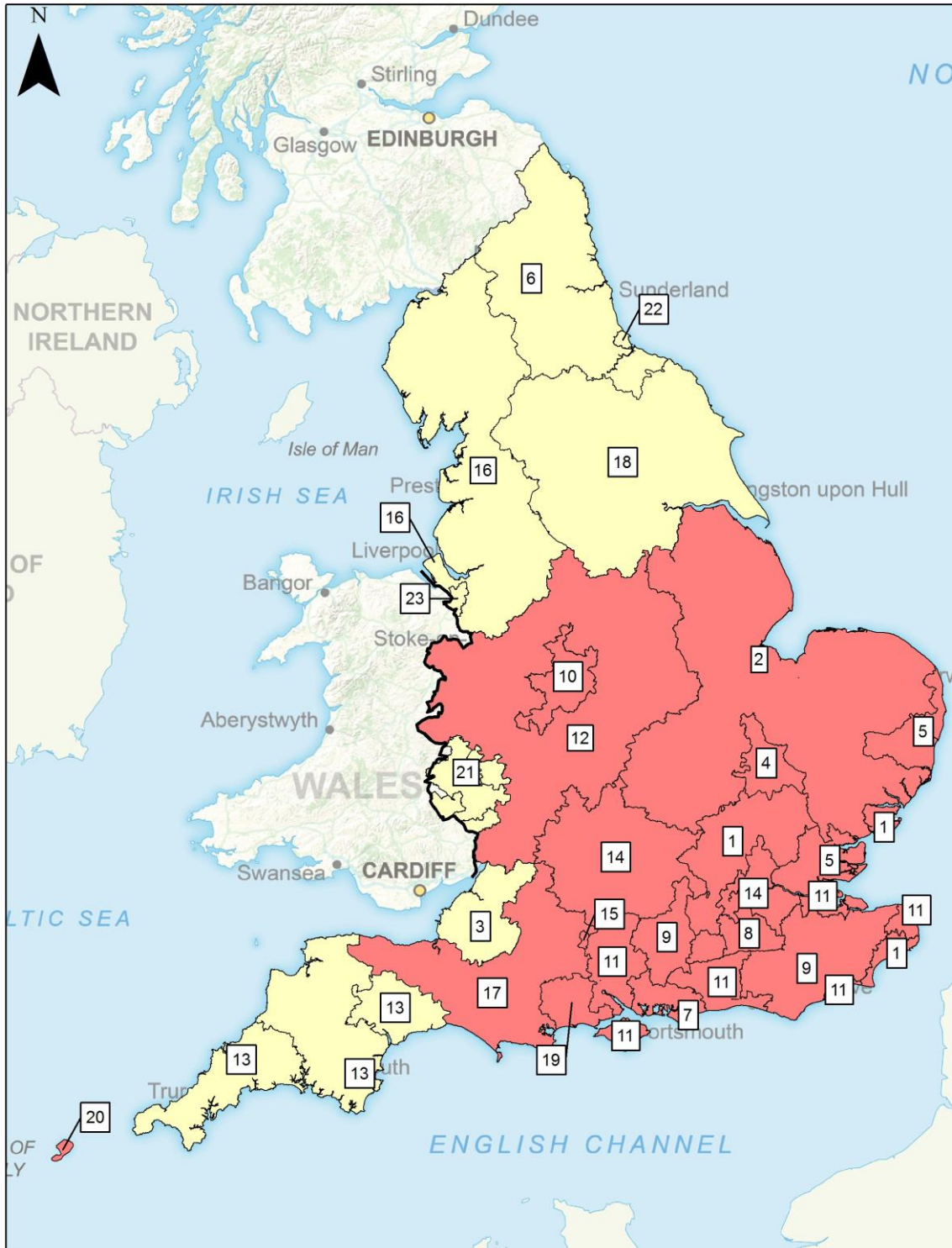
<sup>6</sup> [United Utilities – New Water Efficient Homes](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Approved Document G – Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency; Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency: Approved Document G - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Thames Water press release on developer incentive](#).

<sup>9</sup> [Waterwise – Net Zero and the role of water efficiency](#).

Attachment – Environment Agency Water Stress Assessment 2021<sup>10</sup>



Water Stress Map		Notes			
—	England Wales Boundary	1. Affinity Water	7. Portsmouth Water	14. Thames Water	20. Isles of Scilly WRZ (South West Water)
—	Boundary	2. Anglian Water	8. Sutton and East Surrey	15. Veolia Water	21. DCWW
■	Not Serious	3. Bristol Water	9. South East Water	16. United Utilities	22. Hartlepool WRZ (Anglian Water)
■	Serious	4. Cambridge Water	10. South Staffordshire	17. Wessex Water	23. Chester WRZ (Severn Trent Water)
		5. Essex and Suffolk	11. Southern Water	18. Yorkshire Water	
		6. Nothumbrian Water	12. Severn Trent Water	19. Bournemouth WRZ (South West Water)	
			13. South West Water		



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-stressed-areas-2021-classification>.