

Bristol Water Customer Forum

Drought management

Bristol Water



NOVEMBER 2022

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Key findings

Key findings



- Customer forum members were generally **very positive** about Bristol Water's management of water during the summer 2022 heat wave. However, some commented that there was **very little communication** from Bristol Water, and it would have been reassuring to have more.
- Members were **knowledgeable about conserving water**, and most were already taking steps to reduce water use as part of their daily lives. Participants' actions to reduce water over the summer varied, from not changing habits at all, to feeling motivated to do more in light of the hot weather.
- Members were **largely supportive** of demand side measures, particularly restraint measures. More formal bans were also supported to an extent, although many felt that they were **unenforceable** and shouldn't be needed if people exercised restraint in the first place.
- More **education was seen as key** to avoiding bans and conserving water more generally, and that this should be prioritised in the context of **climate change**.
- Most participants felt that **leakage was important** and should be prioritised in times of 'business as usual'.
- A few participants questioned why domestic customers would need to change behaviour before businesses. They felt this went against an '**all in this together**' mentality.
- Most Forum members did not find a potential increase in discoloured water - should Bristol Water reduce pipe water flushing - particularly appealing. However they agreed that **saving water is important**. Most said that in order for households to accept discoloured water there would have to be severe drought conditions and **reassuring communication** from Bristol Water.

Introduction & methodology



Background and methodology



Background

- Recent heatwaves and temporary measures (like hosepipe bans) introduced over the Summer have seen drought management issues increase in U.K. media prominence over summer 2022.
- This presented a good opportunity to discuss how Customer Forum members think Bristol Water should manage drought.

Aims and objectives

- The aim of this work was to introduce the new Drought Management Plan (DMP) to the Customer Forum and gather insight to inform demand-side action.

Format

- 27 members on Zoom on 18 October 2022 for 90 minutes
- A mix of Bristol Water's customer segments
- A mix of presentations and breakout groups to discuss different aspects of drought management

Research Questions

- How do Customer Forum members think Bristol Water managed the effects of the heat wave in the Summer?
- What actions did customers take (if any) at this time to reduce their own water use?
- What do Customer Forum members think about specific demand-side measures that are taken at different stages of drought management and why? (Restraint, temporary use bans, non-essential use bans, further leakage reduction).
- Do members think Bristol Water should take further measures itself to reduce demand? Exploring trade-offs around reducing water flushing.

Findings

How do Customer Forum members think Bristol Water managed the effects of the heat wave in the Summer?



- Most members said that the **lack of restrictions** compared to other parts of the country was evidence that Bristol Water were **handling the dry weather well**.
- Many said that they didn't necessarily expect communication from Bristol Water as the area was not in drought. However they felt that **some communication would have helped** to reassure and nudge people to conserve water.
- Where members did see communications, they felt that it was **calm and informative** compared to media coverage.
- **Zoom poll results** show that the forum was evenly split between those that saw communications from Bristol Water in summer 2022 and those that didn't. Most members were aware that there were no restrictions and saw evidence of dry weather in their daily life (see appendix for results)

"I assumed the heat wave was handled well because I didn't hear about any disruptions. I didn't know about any issues from other people either. No news is good news."

"I thought they handled it very well, no hosepipe bans, no mass panic, they showed they had a lot of forward planning - it was quite calming."

"I think I would have preferred if they'd said 'this doesn't apply to Bristol' (drought measures) as opposed to not saying anything...I would have liked a statement to say you don't need to worry at the moment."

What actions did customers take (if any) at this time to reduce their own water use?



- As an informed audience, most Forum members were already **keeping their water usage low**. However many said they tried to do more in the heatwave such as having shorter showers and buying more water butts.
- Although most members felt they already took measures to conserve water, many said they felt **more aware** of the need to do so because of news stories about drought and how hot it was.
- A few said that the idea of **looking wasteful** in front of neighbours was also a driver of restraint.

“At one point that was what was quite dominant in the news. It kind of felt like you needed to be aware of it even if Bristol Water weren't necessarily saying there was a drought. It was something you thought about across the whole country for a month.”

“I think being a good neighbour, coming together in times of difficulty etc are important messages. Most people want to be seen as a good person by other people I think”

“Myself and my wife tried to use the water butt more than the hose pipes to keep the plants alive. We were conscious that the water was not being replenished”

What do Customer Forum members think about specific demand-side measures that are taken at different stages of drought management and why?

Restraint

- Most members said that demand side restraint such as shorter showers and not watering the lawn were **not prohibitive** and most take these measures anyway. They said that this should be normal behaviour not just in times of dry weather.
- Many said there should be an **emphasis on education** about water conservation so that restraint becomes the norm and not just for times of dry weather.
- A few said that as water is a utility, conserving has become second nature due to **spiralling costs**, and that mandatory water meters would further support moderation.
- A few said that Bristol Water could **encourage more consumer restraint** by suggesting actions such as recycling grey water, capturing cold water whilst waiting for hot, and reducing toilet flushing.

Reducing leakage

- Most members felt that controlling leaks is **very important**. They felt that the 'Leakline' should be advertised all the time and not just in times of dry weather or drought.
- A few said that **collaborating with insurers** to detect leaks could help find and repair them quicker.

"...if we're not teaching the future generation (about conserving water), then what can we expect to happen?"

"...It seems to me that we're not aggressive enough in implementing these things (repairing leaks). There are measures in place but they're not aggressively pushed."

What do Customer Forum members think about specific demand-side measures that are taken at different stages of drought management and why?

Temporary use bans (TUBs) and non essential use bans (NEUBs)

- Most members thought that both TUBs and NEUBs were a **fair and essential measure** in droughts. However a few questioned how compliance could be policed in practice.
- Some members said that use bans seem ‘draconian’ and felt that **more education** about conserving water would mean that water could be saved without using bans.
- A few members questioned the **fairness of targeting domestic users** first in the event of a drought. They said it would feel like we were not ‘all in this together’. Others could see the economic advantages of businesses being able to operate as usual for as long as possible.

- A few members said that Bristol Water should **set a good example** to encourage people to adhere to use bans.
- A few members questioned NEUBs that could require an inquiry as this could **delay urgent action**.

“As we know though, every little helps. If we’re all in it together, why would we not all do it? ”

“...it’s not free (water), it’s not unlimited. So education is a start, this is a valuable resource, not something you can afford to chuck away. You could potentially avoid the TUBs.”

“It makes sense. Water is a resource that is not unlimited, so we have to stop people from using it on things that are not essential, if it means we are going to run out of water. ”

Do members think Bristol Water should take further measures itself to reduce demand? (Water flushing)



- Most members were **uncomfortable** with the thought of discoloured water. Many described this by talking about their senses and water's **visual appeal**, concluding that discolouration would be off putting.
- Most thought that in order to accept discoloured water, there would need to be a substantial communication **campaign to reassure** them that the water was safe, and convince customers of the need to save water in this way.
- Many members conceded that - as a **last resort** in times of severe drought - saving water would be more important. However, many speculated that people would probably just run the tap in their homes until the water ran clear, negating any water saving. Others said people would buy bottled water instead, exacerbating other problems such as single use plastic use.

As well as discussions, members were asked to complete a task. See appendix one for details and results

"I wouldn't be overjoyed (by discoloured water) but as has been said, if you were told that it was harmless and you really felt it wasn't harmful then if you're in a drought situation then yes. If not in drought then it's better to have it flushed."

"I'm sitting to the left of the scale (no discolouration but water is wasted flushing), not all the way to the left but only because I'd much rather attempt to save water in other ways but feel visually reassured about the quality of water."

Appendix one – task results

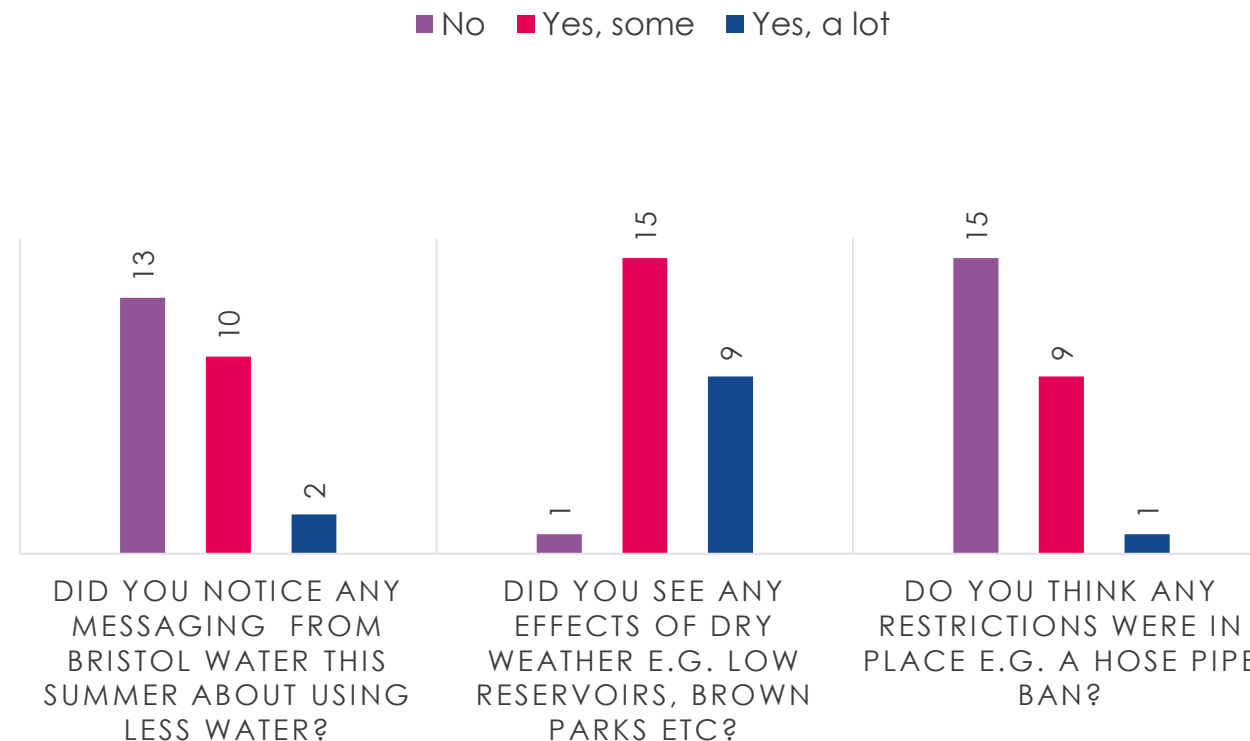


Zoom poll results



Forum members were asked to complete a poll at the beginning of the session before any information was given.

Figure 1 shows the results of the poll.



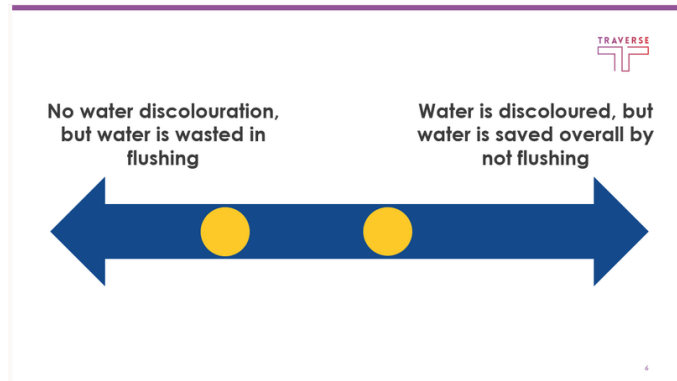
Please note: this is a small sample size and therefore is not statistically significant.

Water flushing slider exercise

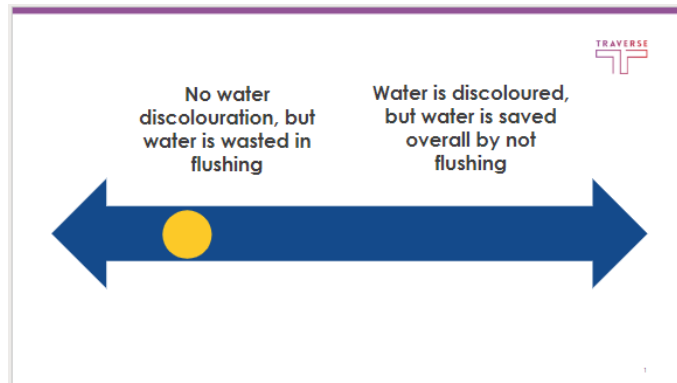
Each group was asked to come to a consensus on how comfortable they were with discoloured water if it meant saving water.

Figure 2 shows each groups results

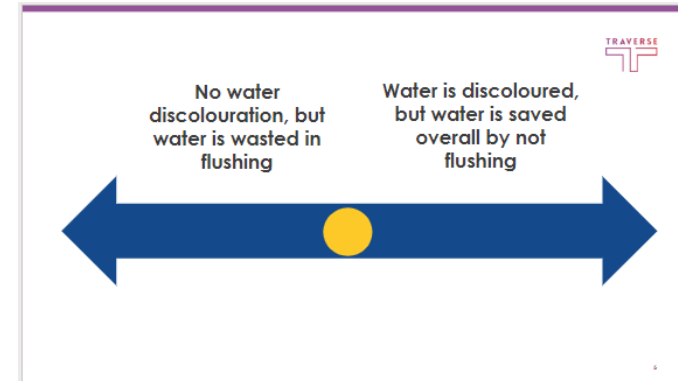
Group 1 (this group could not reach a consensus. The two sliders represent the two apposing view points)



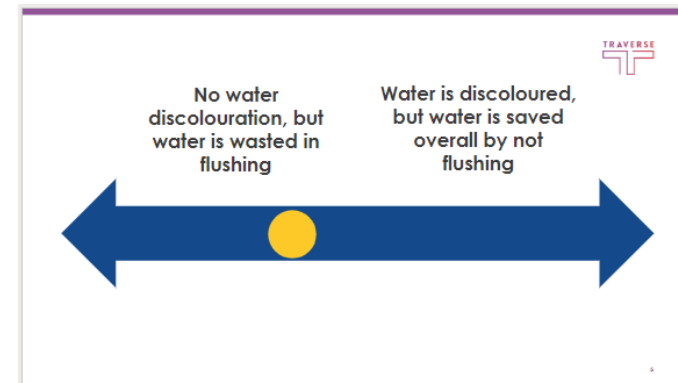
Group 3



Group 2



Group 4



Appendix two – breakout materials



Restraint



As a drought develops, Bristol Water make customers aware of the potential situation and encourage them to use water wisely. They may suggest actions such as;



turning off the tap whilst brushing teeth;



inserting a cistern displacement device on older toilets;



cut shower time by 2 minutes;



wait until you have a full load when using the dishwasher and washing machine;



mow the lawn on a higher setting to keep moisture and don't water a brown lawn in summer;



use a sponge and bucket rather than hosepipe when washing the car; and



use a water butt to store rainwater for use in the garden.

Temporary use bans (TUBs)



As a drought worsens, Bristol Water may need to introduce water restrictions to ensure that they can continue to maintain vital water supplies for drinking and washing. Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) are used to introduce restrictions that temporarily ban certain types of water use such as hosepipes for washing cars and watering lawns. Some key characteristics of TUBs are:



Some customers may be exempt from restrictions (for instance, for medical need)



They can be introduced without the need for a drought order, but notice is given



They are mainly focused on water use by domestic customers because this provides one of the largest water savings available. It helps to protect public services and the economy by allowing businesses which rely on water to continue to operate

Non essential use bans



If the drought continues to deteriorate, Bristol Water will need to implement a non essential use ban (NEUB). Key characteristics of a NEUB are:



Bristol Water would need to apply to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for a Drought Order to further restrict water use under the Drought Direction 2011



Restrictions could include (for example) filling or maintaining a pond, cleaning industrial plants or cleaning vehicles



In some cases, the Government could decide to hold a public inquiry before a Drought Order is granted

Reducing leakage



As a drought develops, It is important that any leaks in the system are repaired where possible. To help with this Bristol Water;



enhance the promotion of their 'Leakline' service to encourage customers to report leaks. This helps Bristol Water to keep leakage as low as possible as well as increasing their leakage management; and



support customers with advice and assistance where a leak is found

Water flushing



What is it?

Flushing is an effective method of cleaning the pipework before or after essential work where there is a risk that discoloured water may result. Flushing involves stirring up sediment and then flushing it out of the pipes.

Why do Bristol Water do it?

Overtime, a natural sediment similar to rust builds up and normally sits harmlessly in the bottom of pipes. However, if disturbed this sediment can cause the water to discolour. Although not harmful to health, the appearance of the water is different to normal, and may not be as appealing.

The amount of water flushed is strictly controlled to minimise the volume of water discharged.