**MR0608 Rethinking water - Public attitude on the water environment** **- proposal for research**

**Background**

The Water Strategy is the Environment Agency’s approach to bring together all our work on water under the framework of a single emerging Water Strategy. It will include all elements of the water environment and address all issues. It will build on existing and proposed mechanisms, identifying and delivering long-term change and it will make sure that water is at the heart of all decisions on planning, development, and investment. It will promote effective catchment governance and true integrated planning.

The Water Strategy will seek to deliver a sustainable and resilient water environment for the future, underpinned by two governing principles:  climate science and nature (restoring natural processes and letting nature do the work).

The Water Strategy has three strategic objectives:

1. People – People connected to and valuing water
2. Places – Naturally functioning water, land and places
3. Future – A water environment ready for the future

The coverage and scope of the Water Strategy is wide ranging and includes all elements of the water environment - groundwater, coasts and estuaries, rivers and lakes. It will address most water issues including quality, quantity, biodiversity, fisheries, geomorphology and invasive non-native species.

We want to engage with our partners, customers and the wider public – influencing decision makers and all parts of society, driving behaviour change and harnessing the renewed public interest in the value of our water environments and the importance of access to blue and green spaces for health and wellbeing.

Nationally we have already started a public dialogue with communities using deliberative engagement through citizen juries and running several panels, the results of which are published on our [consultation website](https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/rethinking-water-citizens-juries-information-page/).

**Business objectives**

This market research will help create an evidence-based approach to strategy development and help to ensure public views and concerns are fed into our new plans. The work will also help to prioritise the work necessary to support our work to create better water quality and better places for people and wildlife.

In more detail our business objectives are to:

* Ensure public views and concerns inform our developing water strategy and help us prioritise the work necessary to achieve our goal of healthy air, land, and water.
* Understand and can argue for trade-offs that might be required.
* Understand to what extent the public would be prepared to change their actions to protect or enhance the environment, including drought, cleaner waters, preventing and adapting to climate change.
* Understand to what extent the public would be prepared to change their actions to mitigate, or adapt to, or prevent climate change worst case scenarios (in particular, drought and cleaner waters).
* Understand the acceptance of locally applied standards and place-based variability (part of the future of better water management may be common standards but applied in different ways, to take different actions in different places – i.e. be place specific).
* Understand the need to ensure local governance and access to local decision-making, and at what scale. Could this include contributing and understanding evidence.
* We understand the role the Environment Agency should play with respect to education.

**Research objectives**

The overall objective is to better understand the public’s attitude to water and the water environment. It would also be helpful to understand the public’s attitude to climate change as this would provide a benchmark for their attitudes to the water environment as a whole.

More specifically, the research objectives are to better understand:

* How the public interacts with the water environment for example rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, estuaries and coasts (including established recreational users such as those who fish or boat but not exclusively).
* Views, opinions, preferences, current concerns and wants of the public relating to all things water (e.g. including but not exclusively biodiversity, recreation, water supply, water demand and flooding) and the differences between different elements of society.
* The relationship between the two (interactions and views)
* The public’s perceptions of the link between climate change and the water environment and their concerns around this (e.g. for many, changes in water will be the primary place they encounter the effects of serious climate change).
* To what extent people’s thoughts are local or national – does a local picture matter to them?
* Which organisations people trust to understand and represent their local needs on the water environment. If decisions are to be made about local impacts (e.g. about local targets) then who do people think should be making those decisions?
* The extent to which people’s ability to input into local decisions matters to them (e.g. like people can do in flood risk through locally elected officials in the RFCC’s.)
* What people think about the trade-offs for a cleaner water environment, (e.g. paying bigger water bills to improve sewerage infrastructure, or paying more for food to reduce agricultural pollution, or changing behaviour to reduce demand for water).
* Do people understand their own and whether they think it's for them to change behaviour or whether they think it's the role of water companies – e.g.unflushables?
* By which route the public believe education would be most effective at influencing behaviour change with respect to individual and household actions.

**Sample**

Achieving a representative sample of the English adult population (18+) is key to this project in order to provide sufficient evidence to support the Water Strategy. We would like a representative stratified sample including (amongst other demographics):

* Gender
* Disability status
* Age group
* Ethnicity
* Social background
* Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

The sample also needs to be a mix of both decision makers and non-decision makers, geographically diverse and represent both urban and rural populations. All recreational users should be represented including kayakers, rowers, paddleboarders, swimmers etc. Note: We will not provide data for rod licence holders or boat licence holders - these two particular groups should not dominate this audience and we would prefer to find out their views via the main population.

The detailed sample will be agreed with the successful supplier at the set-up meeting. The Environment Agency does not hold any mailing lists for the intended sample and so suppliers will be asked to take the costing of this into consideration in their research proposals.

The survey will only take place in England.

**Research approach**

We propose that we seek the advice of a specialist and experienced professional market research supplier in order to develop a creative approach to achieving our research objectives.

We envisage the survey being predominately quantitative in nature but would welcome proposals to introduce a qualitative element in order to introduce some ‘colour and depth’ to the findings. We welcome creative approaches to achieving our objectives if this is appropriate within the constraints of the budget. Suppliers will be asked to fully cost their proposals.

Any research approach will need to:

* Include a representative stratified sample of the English adult population (see sample section above).
* Consider different research approaches to ensure that representation is achieved across all elements of society.
* Consider that we may want some / all the quantitative questions to form the basis of a ‘tracker’ survey going forward.

The EA does not approve the use of incentives for market research and so this cannot be considered as an option.

We anticipate fieldwork taking place during late January / early February 2023, although suppliers will need to be prepared to be flexible if there is any significant flooding prior to or during fieldwork.

The Environment Agency is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, and to reducing our environmental impact as we move towards our goal of Net Zero by 2030. We would like to work with suppliers who share our aspirations.

**Questionnaire design**

We anticipate the questionnaire design will involve up to 2 planning meetings with the successful supplier (including the set-up meeting). This will include agreeing the criteria for recruiting a balanced sample of the public. The meetings can be held digitally.

We strongly recommend that the survey questions are piloted prior to going live and will ask for supplier costings to include this.

In addition to the planning, we anticipate up to 3 rounds of amends to the survey questions (including changes resulting from the pilot) and this will need to be costed for in the supplier brief. We will need to ensure that sufficient time is accommodated within the schedule for the above and that key deadlines are agreed at the set-up meeting.

**Analysis & reporting**

The research will need to report against demographics, as described above. In the final report we will be expecting:

* Summary slides of top-line results;
* A Microsoft Excel file to enable potential further analysis;
* A full PowerPoint report;
* A feedback session / debrief with the supplier (this can be held digitally)

**Budget**

The Water Strategy team have a budget of up to a maximum of £49,999 to procure a market research supplier to conduct this research.  This will need to be spent in full by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

**Timeframes**

This research needs to be completed before the end of the 2022/23 financial year. Our preference is for fieldwork to take place late Jan/early February 2022. Please see the draft outline timetable below.  It should be noted that once the timetable has been agreed with the successful supplier, then deadlines should be stuck to (for example when providing feedback on draft questions, or data samples etc). Any missing of project deadlines may mean that the final deadline may be missed.

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| **Date** | **Activity** | **Responsibility** |
| **October - November 22** | Review and sign off on MR project brief | MR / Water Strategy Team |
| **November 22** | Check need for marketing exemption. | Water Strategy Team |
| **October – November 22** | Draft MR tender brief & go out to tender | MR Team |
| **November 22** | Agree detailed project information objectives | Water Strategy team |
| **November - December 22** | Review applications and appoint supplier | MR / Water Strategy Team |
| **December 22** | Obtain Purchase Order number\* | Water Strategy Team |
| **December 22** | Set up meeting with successful supplier | MR Team |
| **December – January 23** | Survey design & sign off | Supplier |
| **January 23** | Survey pilot / test | Supplier |
| **January – February 23** | Fieldwork | Supplier |
| **February – March 2023** | Analysis, reporting & presentation of results | Supplier |

The successful supplier will be required to provide a more detailed timetable including sign-off dates for drafts and final versions.

\* Please note that the supplier is not authorised to start on any work until they receive a valid Purchase Order number.

**Risks**

There are a number of potential risks which could affect the delivery of this project:

* There is a difficulty in obtaining the full breadth of representation wanted, resulting in a lower response rate and / or patchy results in terms of geographical and demographic coverage.
* A large incident occurs (for example major flooding / Coronavirus lockdown), resulting in the project being ‘stopped or slowed’ for a period of time and not being completed this financial year.