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Public Attitudes to Water Efficiency in Wales



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Public Attitudes to Water Efficiency in Wales

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

| Acronym/Key word | Definition |
|-------------------------|--|
| CAPI | Computer Aided Personal Interviewing |
| LSOA | Lower Layer Super Output Area |
| Omnibus Survey | A face-to-face, qualitative survey covering a wide range of subjects |
| Water meter | A device for measuring and recording the quantity of water passing through an outlet |

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1. With a growing population and climate change related changes in weather, it is important for the Welsh Government to consider how water is viewed and used in Wales in order to provide guidance for future policymaking. It is for this reason that the Welsh Government is interested in gaining the public's views on water, particularly regarding whether water is viewed as a finite resource and what the public's motivations and barriers to saving water are.
- 1.2. The aim of this research was to collect data regarding how water is perceived by the general public in Wales. There was a particular focus on attitudes towards water metering and water recycling, perceived barriers and motivations to reducing water use and current behaviours to reduce water use.
- 1.3. The research may be used to inform further, more in-depth research. It may also be used to inform the development of policy relating to water efficiency in the future.
- 1.4. This research report contains an overview of the answers provided by respondents to the questions included in this questionnaire. All figures quoted in this report reach a point of statistical significance (please see note on statistical significance in section 2.8), except for those which are not statistically significant but are included for comparison purposes. These are clearly identified.

2. Methodology

- 2.1. The data collection was completed by the Beaufort Omnibus Survey team. The Omnibus sample is designed to be representative of the adult population resident in Wales aged 16 and over. The unit of sampling is Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA)¹ and 69 interviewing points throughout the Wales are selected with probability proportional to resident population, after stratification by Local Authority and Social Grade.
- 2.2. Within each sampling point, interlocking demographic quota controls of age and social grade within sex are employed for the selection of respondents. Quotas are set to reflect the individual demographic profile of each selected point.
- 2.3. A fresh sample of interviewing locations and individuals are selected for each survey and no more than one person per household is interviewed. Interviews are conducted face to face in the homes of respondents utilising CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interviewing) technology.
- 2.4. Fieldwork took place between 16 September and 15 October 2019. 1,000 interviews were completed and analysed.

Questionnaire

- 2.5. Where possible questions were taken from existing questionnaires. These sources include the Consumer Council for Water, DEFRA and the Energy Saving Trust.
- 2.6. For those which did not exist in previous surveys, the questions were designed by Welsh Government with the support of the Beaufort Omnibus survey team.
- 2.7. A full list of the research questions can be found in Annex A.

Statistical Significance

- 2.8. When survey data are tested for statistical significance, an assumption is made that the achieved sample represents a random sample of the relevant population. However, as the Wales Omnibus Survey uses proportional quota sampling (not random sampling), genuine statistical significance cannot, strictly speaking, be established². Therefore, when a difference between two sub-groups is described as

¹ These were North Wales, Mid/West Wales, West South Wales, The Valleys, Cardiff and South East Wales.

² Gschwend, T (2005). Analyzing Quota Sample Data and the Peer-review Process. *French Politics*, 2005, 3, (88–91).

being 'significant' in this report, this refers to a pseudo-statistically significant difference at the 95 per cent confidence level. This means that, if the survey did use a random sample, the probability of obtaining the finding by chance would be less than one in 20.

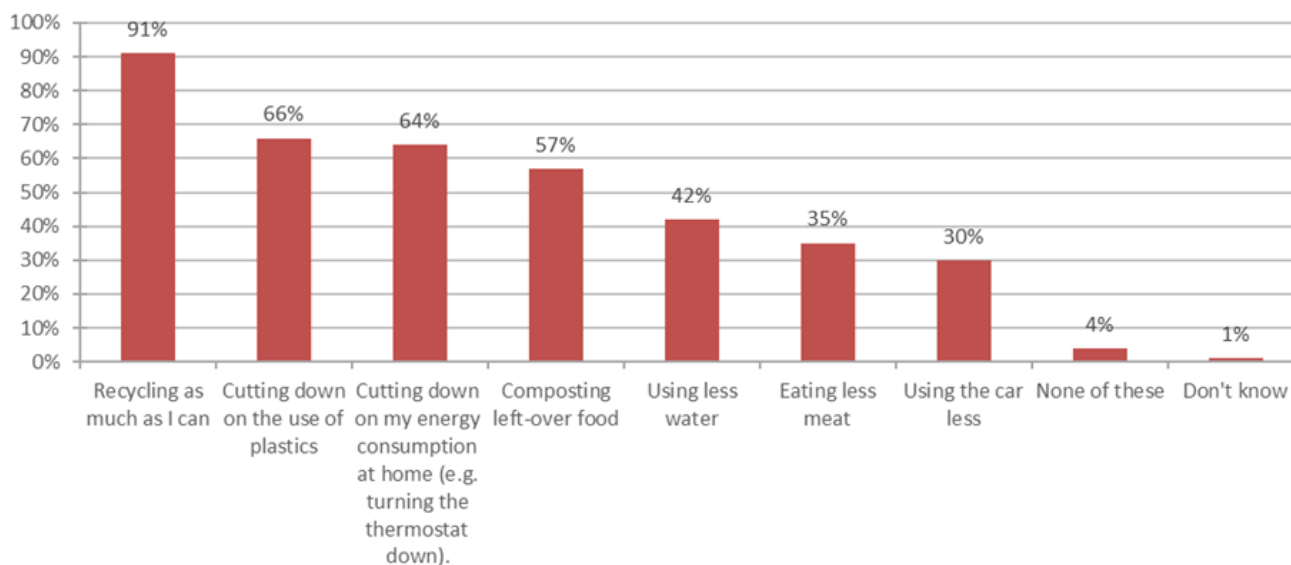
3. Findings

- 3.1. The findings from this research are presented below. The findings are clustered into categories based on the topic of the questions that the respondents were asked.

Environmental Behaviours

- 3.2. When asked about whether they were engaging in a number of environmentally beneficial behaviours, 42% of respondents stated that they are currently taking action to reduce their water use (Figure 3.1). Sixty percent of those who reported taking action to use less water had a water meter, compared with 35% of those who did not.

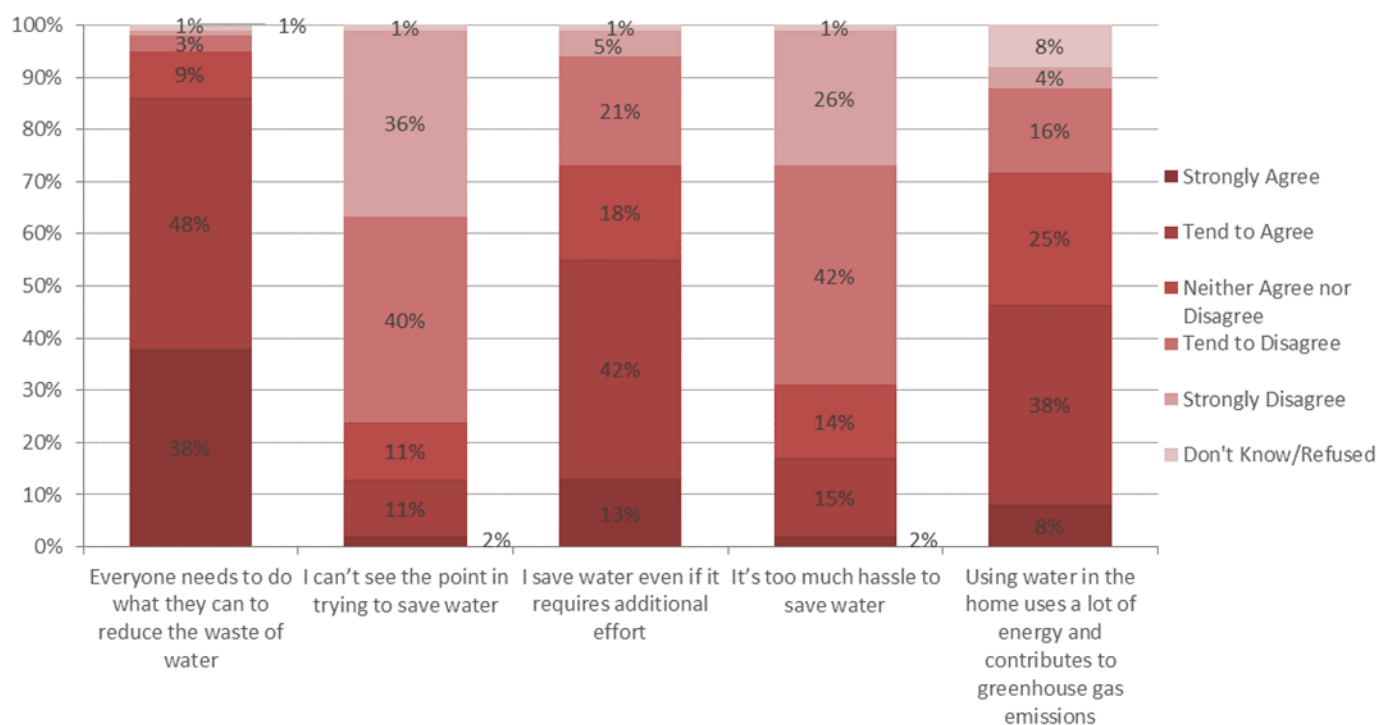
Figure 3.1: what of these actions, if any, are you personally taking nowadays? Any others?



- 3.3. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Everyone needs to do what they can to reduce the waste of water' 85% of respondents agreed with the statement and 4% disagreed (figure 3.2).
- 3.4. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'I can't see the point of trying to save water', 13% of respondents agreed with the statement and 76% disagreed. Respondents were more likely to agree with this statement if they did not have a water meter at home (15% vs. 8%).
- 3.5. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'I save water even if it requires additional effort', 55% of respondents agreed with the statement and

26% disagreed. Respondents who had a water meter were more likely to agree with this question (66%) than those who did not (51%).

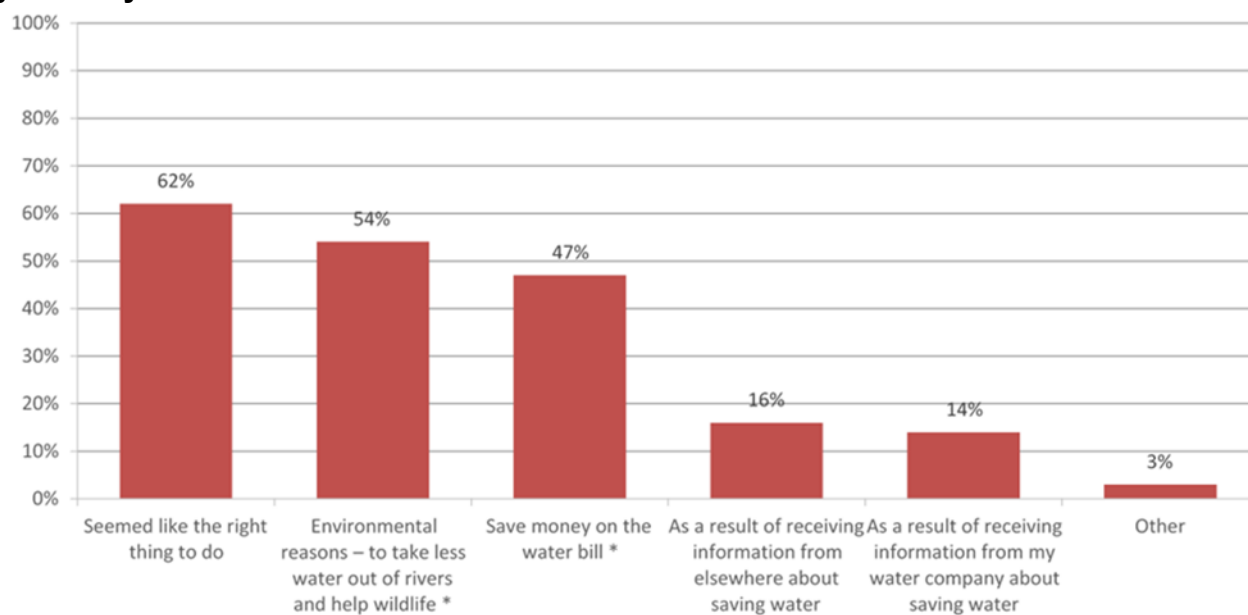
Figure 3.2: Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about water use:



Reasons for and barriers to using less water

- 3.6. When directly asked whether they had made a conscious decision to use less water over the past few years 56% of respondents stated they had and 42% said they had not.
- 3.7. Respondents who stated that they had made a conscious decision to use less water were asked why they had made the decision to do so. These results are displayed in figure 3.3.
- 3.8. The most common response was that it 'seemed like the right thing to do', with 62% of respondents selecting this statement. Receiving information from water companies (14%) or elsewhere (16%) appeared to motivate a smaller percentage of respondents to use less water.

Figure 3.3: Which of the following reasons for deciding to use less water apply to you? Any others?

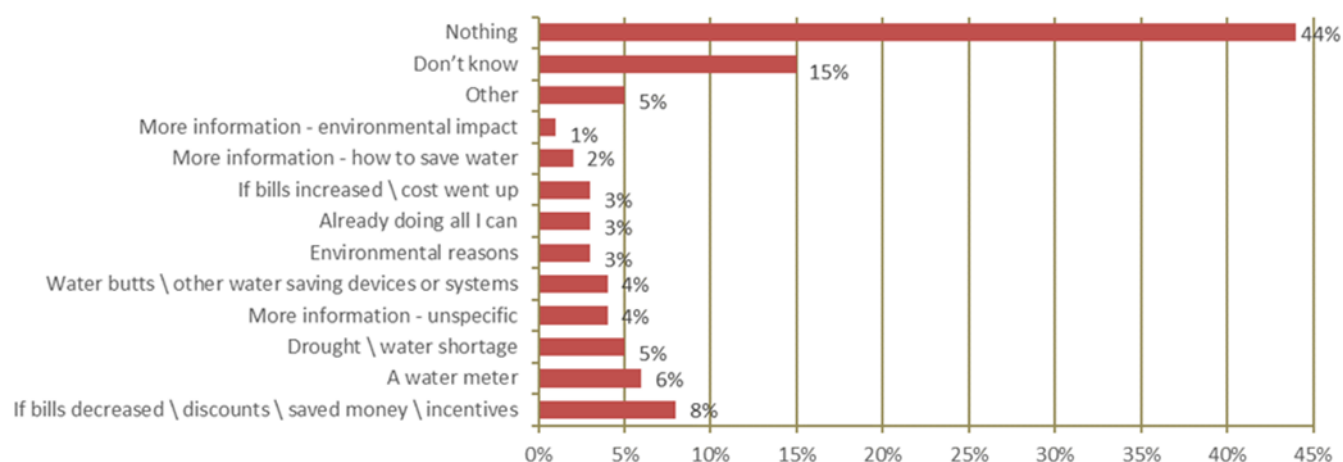


* Not a statistically significant finding, included for the purposes of comparison

- 3.9. All research participants were asked what would encourage them to use less water. The full list of responses is in figure 3.4. Overall, 44% of respondents stated that nothing would encourage them to use less water. There was some regional variation in this response, with 26% of these respondents living in Cardiff and South East Wales, compared to 63% who lived in West South Wales.
- 3.10. Of those multiple choice responses which related to money, 3% responded that they would be encouraged to use less water 'If bills increased / cost went up', and 8% stated that they would use less water 'if bills went down or they were provided with incentives or discounts'.
- 3.11. Six percent responded that having a water meter would encourage them to use less water. It should be noted here that 30% of respondents already had a water meter.
- 3.12. When asked an open-ended question about what would encourage them to use less water, a number of respondents referenced water meters. Respondents mentioned that they either had a water meter or anticipated they would eventually have one, and this encouraged them to reduce their water use.

- 3.13. The importance of water was also cited in responses to the open-ended question as a motivation for using less water. Some respondents noted that their children had been taught about water efficiency in school and this encouraged them to be more cautious with their water use.
- 3.14. Those who worked in the industry or had a professional connection to a water company also mentioned this as a reason for reducing their water use.

Figure 3.4: What if anything would encourage you to use less water?

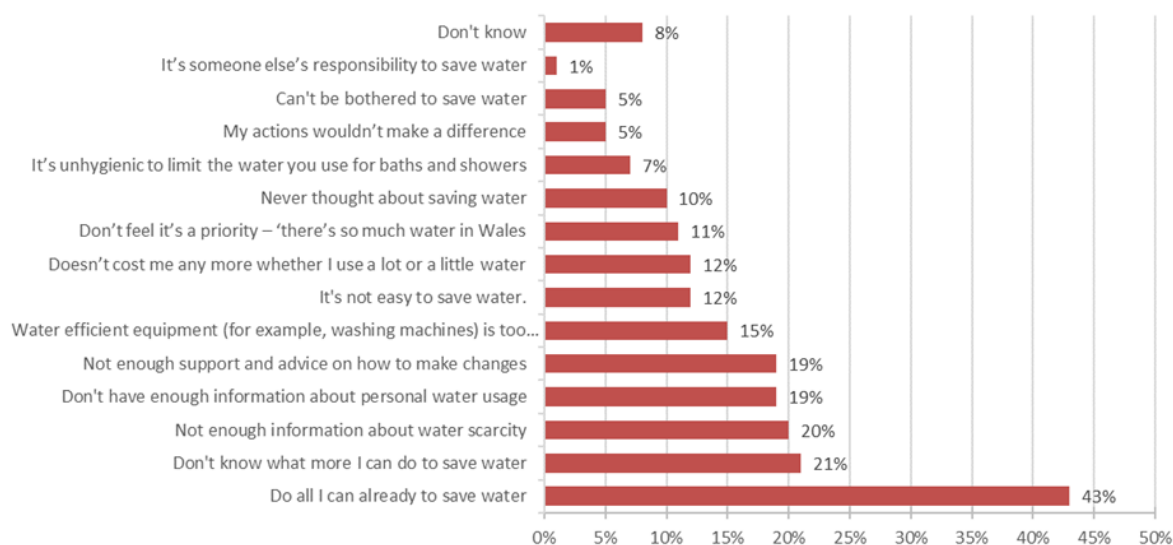


- 3.15. When asked what might prevent them from saving water or saving more water at home 43% responded that they do all they can already to save water. Fifty-six percent of those who had a water meter gave this response stated they were already doing what they can to save water, in comparison to 38% who did not have a water meter.
- 3.16. Nineteen percent responded that they do not have enough information about their personal water usage. Respondents who did not have a water meter were more likely to agree to this statement than those that did (23% vs. 11%).
- 3.17. Nineteen percent responded that there's 'not enough support and advice on how to make changes.' Respondents who live in Cardiff and South East Wales (28%) were more likely to agree with this statement than those who lived in North Wales (15%) or West South Wales (12%).
- 3.18. Overall, 11% of survey participants responded that they don't feel it's a priority – 'there's so much water in Wales.' Respondents who lived in the Valleys were more

likely to agree with this statement (21%) than those in North Wales, (5%) or West South Wales (7%). The full range of responses can be seen in figure 3.5 below.

- 3.19. When asked an open-ended question on what would encourage them to use less water, respondents suggested that if it saved them money they would reduce their water use. Understanding how water usage correlates with an increase in cost or a reduction in water rates was cited as a factor people would consider when using water in their homes.
- 3.20. Family members were mentioned as both a source of encouragement and discouragement for using less water. If other family members tried to use less water this would help encourage others not to. However, having children as part of the household was also mentioned as something which made it more difficult to reduce water usage, and it would be more likely to be something these households could do when their children were older.
- 3.21. Legislative changes or policy changes of Welsh Government was noted as a something which would inspire people to make changes to their water usage.
- 3.22. Some respondents stated that nothing would encourage them to use less water. Others reported there was nothing they could do or that there was no clear fix for the problems associated with water usage.

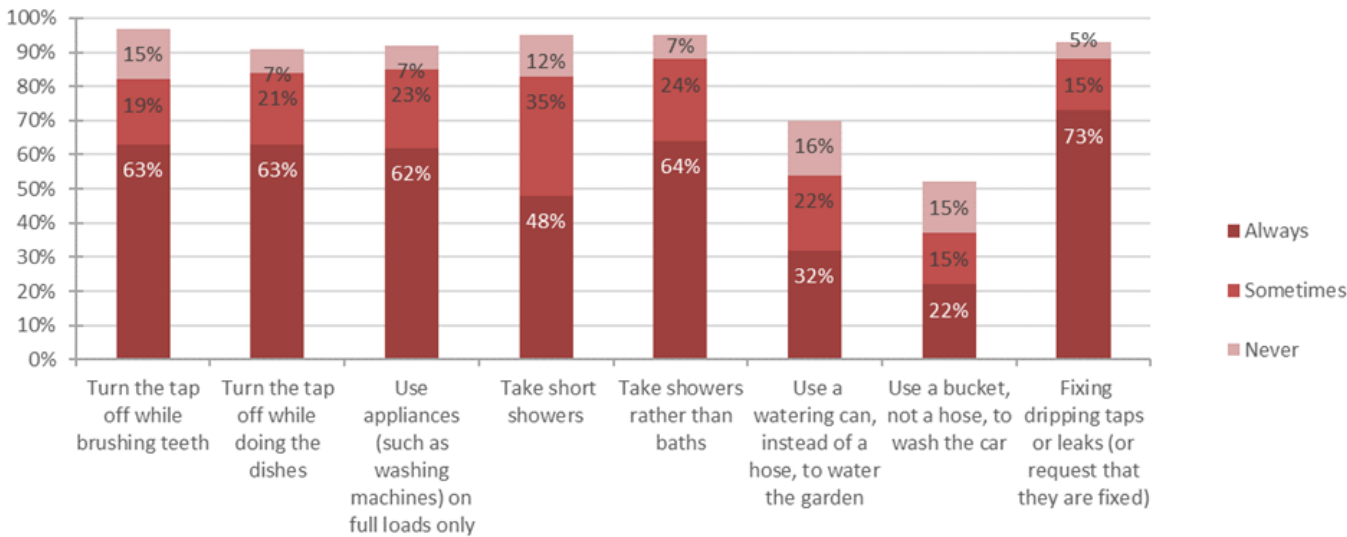
Figure 3.5: What might prevent you from saving water or saving more water at home?



- 3.23. Respondents were asked how frequently they engaged in a series of water saving behaviours. Responses to this question are displayed in figure 3.6 below.

3.24. The statement which had the greatest number of ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ responses was turning off the tap while doing the dishes (84%), followed by turning off the tap while brushing teeth (82%).

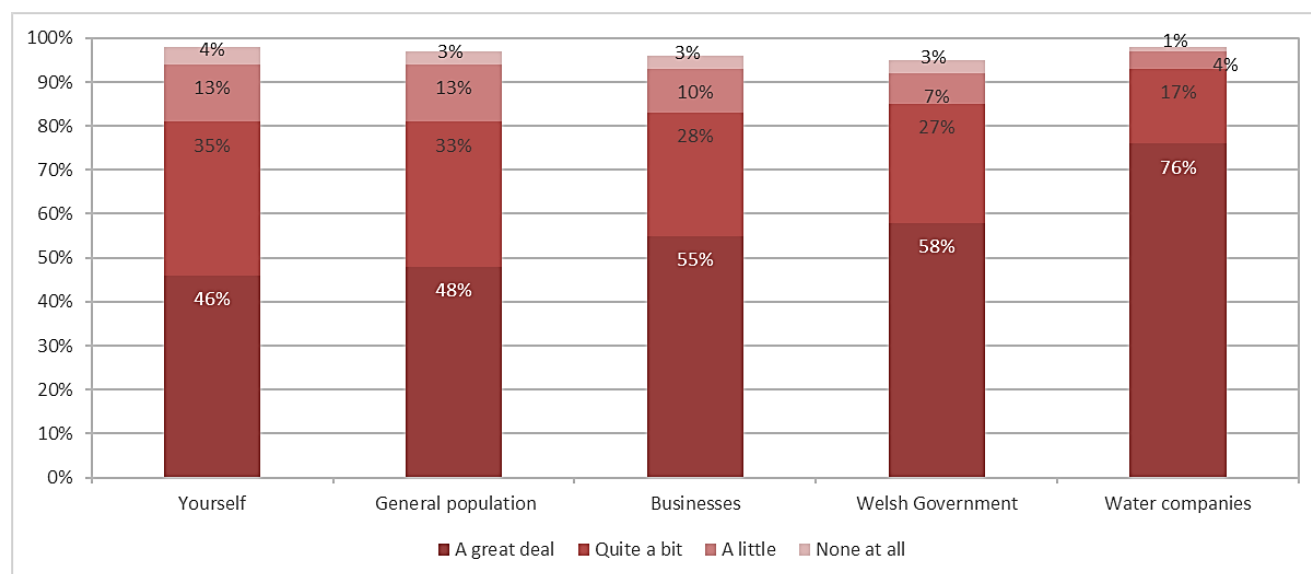
Figure 3.6: How often, if ever, do you do any of the following to save water?



Responsibility for saving water

- 3.25. Respondents were asked where they felt the responsibility for reducing water use lay. The majority (76% of respondents) felt that ‘a great deal’ of this responsibility lay with the water companies, 58% felt the same amount of responsibility fell to the Welsh Government, and 55% to businesses.
- 3.26. Eighty-one percent of respondents felt that ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a bit’ of responsibility lay with themselves and the general population (see figure 3.7 below).

Figure 3.7: How much responsibility do each of the following groups have for reducing water usage in your opinion?



Potential usage of more water efficient products

- 3.27. Respondents were asked whether products which use water, such as washing machines, dishwashers or kettles displaying information on their water efficiency would this encourage them to choose more water efficient products. The majority of respondents (73%) agreed that it would encourage them to choose more water efficient products. Joint bill payers were more likely to say yes to this question (80%), compared to non-bill payers (76%) and sole bill payers (70%).
- 3.28. Respondents were then asked whether they would consider choosing more water efficient products if they cost more or only if they cost the same. The most common answer here was 'only if it cost the same' (45%). Thirty-four percent responded that they do not know, or that this would depend on the cost difference. Twenty-two percent stated they would pay more for this.

Water meters

- 3.29. Respondents were asked whether they had a water meter. Thirty percent responded that they did, 64% responded they did not. 6% responded that they 'don't know'.
- 3.30. Those respondents who reported having a water meter in their home were asked whether this encouraged them to use water more carefully, 82% of respondents agreed with this statement while 10% disagreed.

3.31. Respondents who had a water meter were then asked whether they thought all households should be required to have a water meter. The majority of respondents agreed with this statement (79% agree vs. 8% disagree).

4. Conclusions

- 4.1. Overall, most respondents agreed with statements relating to the importance of saving water. Many respondents had made a conscious decision to use less water and the majority were engaging in behaviours to reduce their water consumption. This implies that saving water is something that is seen as valuable and worthwhile.
- 4.2. The majority of survey respondents who had a water meter were in favour of making water meters a requirement for all households. The responses to the open-ended questions relating to what would encourage respondents to use less water, suggest water meters may promote this. This indicates that water meters could potentially be an effective way of encouraging people to use less water.
- 4.3. In a number of the questions relating to whether water meters lead to a reduction in water use, or a greater awareness of the amount of water used, the majority of respondents felt they did. It is not possible to distinguish from this research whether this is because water meters provide feedback on water use and therefore lead to a greater reduction in water use, or whether individuals who are more concerned about their water use are more likely to have a water meter. Further research would be needed in order to make this distinction.
- 4.4. The second most common response to a question on what prevents respondents from saving water, was not knowing what more they could do to reduce their water use (see figure 3.5). The third and fourth most common responses also related to a lack of information about the importance of saving water, or an individual's water use. A small proportion stated that receiving information about saving water encouraged them to use less. This suggests that providing additional information both about the importance of saving water, and about how to do this, may be beneficial in encouraging a reduction in water use.
- 4.5. The cost of water appears to play a key role in many people's decision-making about reducing their water use. The second most commonly referenced factor that would cause respondents to use less water was if the cost of bills went down if they were to do so, or if there were financial incentives to use less water. When asked about whether they would purchase more water efficient products, the majority of respondents stated that they would only do so if this saved them money.

- 4.6. Sixty-two per cent of respondents reported that they felt reducing water use was the 'right thing to do'. However, when asked what would encourage them to use less water, many respondents cited financial savings. This disparity could imply a potential disconnect between the respondents attitudes to saving water and their behaviours around reducing water use. Alternatively, this discrepancy could be as a result of a tension between what people think is the right thing to do and their desire to save money.
- 4.7. Finally, there appears to be some regional variation in responses to questions relating to reasons for and barriers to using less water (see paragraph 3.9). This information could be used to target communications strategies around water use and what individuals can do to save water or the value of saving water to the relevant regions.

Annex A

September Wales Omnibus Survey

Water Usage Questions FINAL 05.09.19

Showcard

Q1. Which of these actions, if any, are you personally taking nowadays? Any others? Code all mentioned

Composting left-over food
Cutting down on the use of plastics
Cutting down on my energy consumption at home (e.g. turning the thermostat down)
Eating less meat
Recycling as much as I can
Using less water
Using the car less

None of these

Showcard

Q2. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about water use. Do you strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree or strongly disagree that...?
READ OUT – RANDOMISE ORDER

- i) Everyone needs to do what they can to reduce the waste of water
- ii) I can't see the point in trying to save water
- iii) I save water even if it requires additional effort
- iv) It's too much hassle to save water
- v) Using water in the home uses a lot of energy and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions

Q3. Would you say you have made a conscious decision to use less water over the past few years?

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Yes | - ASK Q4 |
| No | - GO TO Q5 |
| Don't know | - GO TO Q5 |

IF USING LESS WATER

Showcard

Q4. Which of the following reasons for deciding to use less water apply to you?
Any others? Code all mentioned

As a result of receiving information from my water company about saving water
As a result of receiving information from elsewhere about saving water
For environmental reasons – to take less water out of rivers and help wildlife
Seems like the right thing to do
To save money on my water bill

Other (please specify) _____
Don't know

ASK ALL

Q5. What if anything would encourage you to use less water? Anything else?
Record verbatim

Nothing

Don't know

Showcard

Q6. Thinking about what might prevent you from saving water or saving more water at home, which of the following apply to you? Can multicode

I can't be bothered to save water
I do all I can already to save water
I don't feel it's a priority – there's so much water in Wales
I don't have enough information about my personal water usage
I don't know what more I can do to save water
It doesn't cost me any more whether I use a lot or a little water
It's not easy to save water
It's someone else's responsibility to save water
It's unhygienic to limit the water you use for baths and showers
I've never thought about saving water
My actions won't make a difference
There's not enough information about water scarcity
There's not enough support and advice on how to make changes
Water efficient equipment (for example, washing machines) is too expensive to buy

Don't know

Showcard

Q7. How often, if ever, do you do any of the following to save water? READ OUT – ORDER TO BE RANDOMISED

| | Always | Sometimes | Never | Not applicable | Don't know |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|----------------|------------|
| Turn tap off while brushing teeth | | | | | |
| Turn tap off while doing dishes | | | | | |
| Use appliances (such as washing machines) on full loads only | | | | | |
| Take short showers | | | | | |
| Take showers rather than baths | | | | | |
| Use a watering can, instead of a hose, to water the garden | | | | | |
| Use a bucket, not a hose, to wash the car | | | | | |
| Fix dripping taps or leaks (or request that they get fixed) | | | | | |

Showcard

Q8. How much responsibility do each of the following groups have for reducing water usage in your opinion? READ OUT – RANDOMISE ORDER

| | A great deal | Quite a bit | A little | None at all | Don't know |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| You yourself | | | | | |
| General public | | | | | |
| Businesses | | | | | |
| Welsh Government | | | | | |
| Water companies | | | | | |

Q9. If products which use water, such as washing machines, dishwashers or kettles were to display information on their water efficiency, would this encourage you to choose more water efficient products?

Yes - ASK Q10
No - GO TO Q11
Don't know - GO TO Q11

IF YES

Q10. Would you consider choosing more water efficient products if they cost more or only if they cost the same?

If cost more
Only if cost same
Don't know / depends on cost difference

ASK ALL

Q11. Do you have a water meter at home?

Yes - ASK Q12
No - GO TO Q13
Don't know - GO TO Q13

IF HAVE A WATER METER AT HOME

Showcard

Q12. To what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about water meters? Do you strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree or strongly disagree that having a water meter...?

READ OUT – RANDOMISE ORDER

- i) Having a water meter encourages you to use water more carefully
- ii) Having a water meter makes you more aware of the amount of water you use
- iii) All households should be required to have a water meter so that they only pay for the water they use rather than a fixed fee

ASK ALL

Showcard

Q13. Are you responsible for paying the water bill in your household?

- Yes – I'm the sole bill payer
- Yes – I'm the joint bill payer
- No – I'm not responsible for paying the bill
- Not applicable