

## D Enquiries and Consumer Complaints

- Describing the Inspectorate's handling of general enquiries from consumers, organisations and businesses.
- Describing the Inspectorate's handling of water quality complaints from consumers and from organisations representing consumers.

### Introduction

The Inspectorate receives many enquiries relating to drinking water quality from the public, businesses and other interested parties. In order to respond effectively to these enquiries, the Inspectorate has developed a first response unit which can answer most of the routine questions. More complicated questions are always assessed by an appropriate Inspector.

A similar approach is used for handling consumer complaints about drinking water quality.

The Code for Enforcement sets a target for the Inspectorate to respond to all general enquiries, and straightforward complaints, irrespective of origin, within three weeks.

### Enquiries

The Inspectorate received a total of 1,580 general enquiries during 2002, a reduction of 41% compared with the total number received in 2001.

The table below details enquiries received and recorded. It shows the form of enquiry and the number of responses that reached or fell short of the desired target.

#### General enquiries received by the Inspectorate during 2002

Forms of Enquiry	Number received where response has been within 3 weeks	Number received where response has exceeded 3 weeks	Total	(% meeting target)
Phone	723	2	725	99.7%
Letter/Fax/E-mail	846	9	855	98.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,569</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1,580</b>	<b>99.3%</b>

Enquiries are received on many subjects including the following:

Bottled water	Water hardness/softness
Lead in drinking water	Fluoride in drinking water
Chlorine, smell and taste	Water supply fittings
Nitrates in drinking water	General information on drinking water
<i>Cryptosporidium</i>	What does the DWI do?
Pesticides in drinking water	Information on water companies
Discolouration	Other
Private water supplies	

Leaflets are available on most of the above subjects. These may be obtained free of charge from the Inspectorate or viewed at the web site [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk).

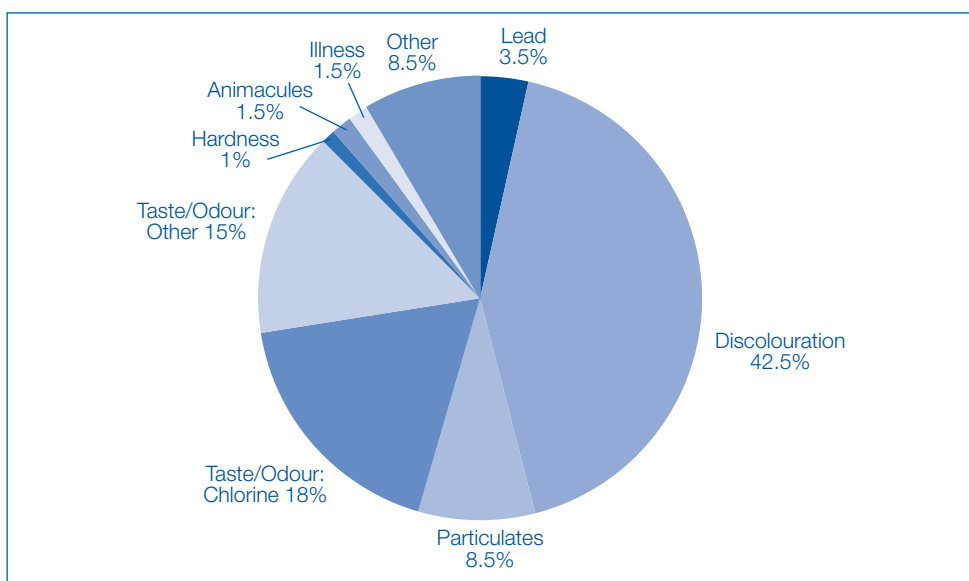
## Consumer Complaints

Most complaints on drinking water quality are handled effectively by the water companies without reference to the Inspectorate. However, the Inspectorate occasionally receives calls from consumers who are not satisfied with the response received from their water company.

In 2002, the Inspectorate investigated 139 complaints from consumers about drinking water quality, a decrease of 60% compared with 2001.

The largest number of complaints related to the supply of discoloured water, with complaints about taste and odour also featuring highly.

### Breakdown of complaints by type



Most of the complaints were responded to by the Inspectorate asking the relevant water company to investigate the matter and take remedial action where necessary. Additionally, where appropriate, the Inspectorate advised consumers on any action which they themselves could take.

If the consumer remained dissatisfied with the water company's response, the Inspectorate investigated the complaint further. In some cases this was done in association with the environmental health department of the local authority concerned.

The Inspectorate continued to liaise closely with WaterVoice. Occasionally the WaterVoice committee also referred drinking water quality complaints to the Inspectorate for investigation.

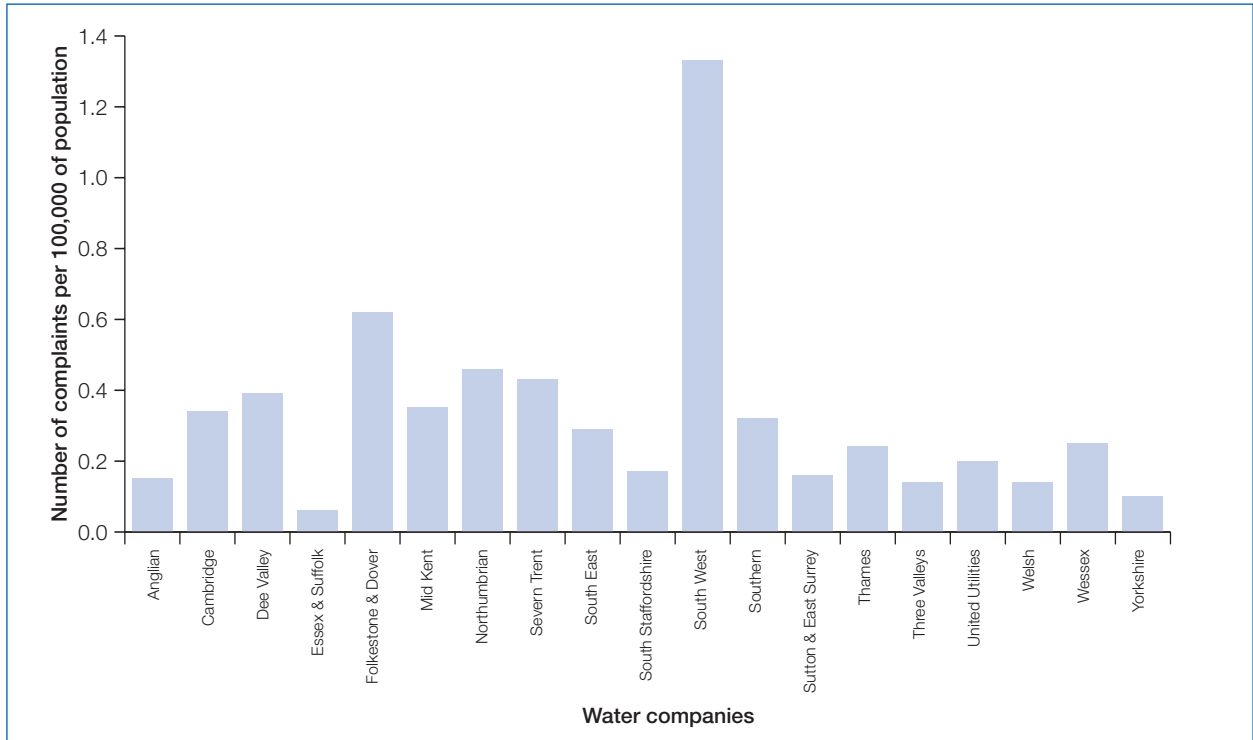
Every effort was made to complete investigations within the timescale set out in the Inspectorate's Code for Enforcement. However 25% of the complaints required more detailed investigation, often with other parties, and took longer to bring to a satisfactory conclusion. Occasionally it has not been possible to achieve a satisfactory resolution for the consumer.

### Breakdown of consumer complaints by company

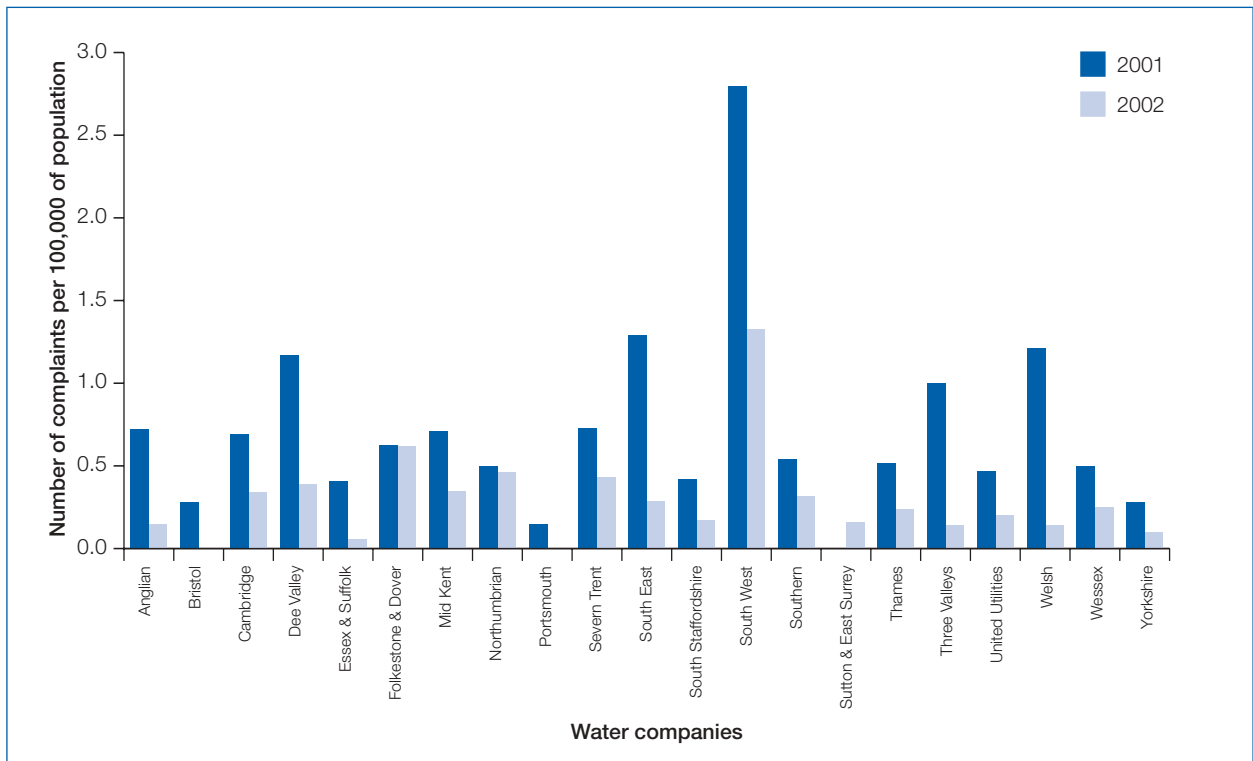
The larger water companies cover wider areas of supply and consequently tend to receive far more complaints from the consumers. To give a fair and balanced comparison of customer complaints, the number of complaints received by the Inspectorate per 100,000 people of the population served by each water company was used as a basis for comparison.

Figure 1 shows the number of complaints received by the Inspectorate per 100,000 of the population, and Figure 2 gives a comparison between the numbers of complaints for 2001 and 2002.

**Figure 1 Number of complaints received for each Water Company per 100,000 of the population in each service area for 2002**



**Figure 2 A comparison between numbers of complaints received for each water company for 2001 and 2002.**



The Inspectorate received no complaints in 2002 from consumers served by those companies not shown in Figure 1.

While most consumers who contacted the Inspectorate have a concern about their drinking water quality, some complaints related to consumer dissatisfaction with the way their complaint was handled by the water companies. During 2002, 24 companies were audited on the quality of their responses to a selected number of complaints. It was found that companies generally have suitable procedures for dealing with consumers. However, where complaints had not been handled appropriately it was normally due to a break down in communication within the company or with the consumers. Suggestions for improving complaint handling have been made to most companies and this will, hopefully, see a further reduction in the number of complaints being referred to the Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate also receives a number of calls from persistent complainers, where it is not possible either to establish the basis for their complaint or to resolve the issue of concern.