# Scottish Water criticised for huge daily leakage amid historic drought



Scottish Water faces mounting criticism as revelations regarding its extensive daily water leakage emerge, coinciding with dire warnings about potential water scarcity in Scotland. The quango recently advised residents to conserve water amidst the driest spell in six decades. However, its own data indicates that this admonition comes amid a staggering loss of 454 million litres of water each day, a volume equivalent to 181 Olympic-sized swimming pools. This contradiction has sparked accusations of hypocrisy from critics, particularly as drought conditions persist across the region.

Douglas Lumsden, the Scottish Conservative spokesperson for energy and net zero, has voiced strong discontent, arguing that the high salaries and bonuses given to Scottish Water executives undermine the credibility of its water conservation message. “Highly paid bosses at this SNP quango should be leading by example,” he stated. The sentiment is echoed by Alex Cole-Hamilton, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, who noted that residents will find it difficult to accept conservation mandates while Scottish Water remains unaccountable for its leakage issues.

Recent climatic conditions render this leakage particularly concerning. Scotland is experiencing its driest weather for sixty years, with average reservoir levels dropping to 81 per cent, approximately 10 per cent below the norm for this time of year. In addition, recent data from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) indicates that below-average rainfall during the winter has exacerbated conditions, with certain regions receiving significantly less precipitation than usual. This environmental reality sets the stage for increased challenges in managing water resources, particularly for agriculture and ecosystem health.

In response to the situation, Scottish Water has suggested practical measures for the public, including taking shorter showers, using buckets to catch water, and refraining from using hoses. While it claims to have made reductions in leakage rates over the long term, the quango acknowledges that overcoming this persistent issue remains a priority. A spokesperson noted that many current leaks are small and difficult to detect, and they are employing innovative strategies to address these challenges. Moreover, around 25 per cent of leakage rates stem from pipework located within private properties, complicating the issue further.

Scottish Water has also attracted unfavourable attention in light of health concerns surrounding tap water quality. Earlier this year, the Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland issued an enforcement notice due to alarming maintenance backlogs. This notice followed episodes that raised concerns about safety, including the discovery of animal remains in tanks supplying water to thousands of homes. Responding to the enforcement action, Scottish Water promised to take urgent measures to resolve these pressing issues.

In parallel, the environmental organisation Surfers Against Sewage has been vocal about the widespread incidence of sewage spills, staging protests to highlight Scottish Water's shortcomings in managing infrastructure. Data from the charity indicates that there were 3,498 recorded sewage spills last year; however, the actual number may be significantly higher due to limited monitoring. A spokesperson for Scottish Water underscored the financial constraints related to monitoring sewage networks but cited a recent independent report that rated 87 per cent of Scotland’s water environment as either good or excellent.

As the heatwave continues, Scottish Water executives are under scrutiny not only for water conservation efforts but also for the perceived disparity between their exorbitant salaries and the service delivery challenges. The Chief Executive, Alex Plant, received a staggering £483,000 last year, a figure that includes salary, bonuses, and benefits. Critics have drawn attention to the stark contrast between these managerial packages and the realities faced by consumers and the agricultural sector.

While Scottish Water has been proactive in addressing issues pertaining to infrastructure and water quality, it is increasingly clear that a concerted effort is needed to restore public trust. The emphasis on conservation must be more aligned with performance in reducing water losses, lest the very trust of the communities it serves erode further. As conditions remain dry and future rainfall patterns become more unpredictable due to climate change, the stakes for effective water management have never been higher.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
2. Paragraphs 2, 4
3. Paragraphs 1, 5
4. Paragraphs 3, 4
5. Paragraphs 5, 8
6. Paragraph 9
7. Paragraphs 4, 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14721027/For-heavens-sake-just-fix-leaks-water-chiefs-sound-alarm-driest-spell-60-years-shock-figures-450-million-litres-lost-burst-pipes-day.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.watermagazine.co.uk/2025/03/10/scotlands-drier-than-normal-winter-signals-risk-of-water-scarcity-this-summer/> - Scotland's Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has warned of potential water scarcity this summer due to below-average winter rainfall. Despite brief wet spells, most regions experienced drier conditions, with the far north receiving significantly less rainfall in February. This poses challenges for water resources, as replenishing low groundwater levels relies on above-average spring and summer rainfall. Without this, there's an increased risk of water scarcity, affecting agriculture, local water supplies, and ecosystems. SEPA urges individuals and businesses to enhance water resilience and monitor usage to mitigate potential shortages.
3. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scottish-water-leaking-almost-185-27706598> - Scottish Water is losing approximately 463 million litres of water daily due to leaky pipes, equating to nearly 185 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Despite this, customers are urged to conserve water by reducing hosepipe use and turning off taps while brushing teeth. The company is installing water tankers and adjusting the network to redistribute water, especially in areas with lower reservoir levels. While no hosepipe ban is currently in place, Scottish Water emphasizes the importance of efficient water use amid ongoing dry conditions.
4. <https://beta.sepa.scot/news/2025/scotland-faces-increased-risk-of-water-scarcity-this-summer/> - The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has highlighted an increased risk of water scarcity this summer due to a drier-than-normal winter. Despite intermittent wet spells, most of Scotland recorded below-average rainfall, with the far north experiencing exceptionally low levels in February. This situation poses challenges for water resources, as replenishing low groundwater levels depends on above-average spring and summer rainfall. SEPA urges individuals and businesses to enhance water resilience and monitor usage to mitigate potential shortages.
5. <https://wics.scot/publications/scottish-water/performance/scottish-water-performance-report-2023-24> - Scottish Water's Performance Report for 2023-24 indicates a slight increase in daily water leakage, reaching 462 million litres per day, surpassing the target range of 438–453 million litres. This marks the first increase in leakage since 2007. Despite this, drinking water quality remains high, with 99.9% of samples complying with regulations. The report also highlights improvements in environmental pollution incidents, though challenges persist in reducing water loss through leaks.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-66267126> - Heavy rainfall in July has restored water levels across Scotland to normal, reversing previous water scarcity concerns. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) noted a significant turnaround from earlier in the month when five areas faced significant scarcity due to prolonged dry weather. The July rains have revitalized river levels, alleviating the immediate water shortage issues. However, SEPA emphasizes the need for continued vigilance and efficient water use to prevent future shortages, especially as climate change may exacerbate such conditions.
7. <https://nen.press/2025/04/04/sepa-warns-of-early-water-scarcity-risk-as-dry-spell-continues/> - The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has issued an early warning of potential water scarcity across Scotland due to a prolonged dry spell. March saw below-average rainfall in most regions, with some areas receiving less than a third of the usual amount. This trend follows a dry autumn and winter, leading to low river flows and declining groundwater levels. SEPA urges businesses and individuals to monitor water usage and implement measures to enhance resilience against potential water shortages in the coming months.