

CASE STUDY



Water UK

Water UK's first Head of Resilience & Drought

SOURCING CROSS-SECTOR FOR A NEWLY CREATED POLICY ROLE.

Water UK is the representative body for the UK water industry. This Head of Resilience & Drought search was initiated following Water UK's decision to strengthen its capability around resilience policy, industry preparedness and response to emerging sector-wide risks.

The role sits within a developing policy team and was designed to provide dedicated leadership across resilience challenges affecting the water sector, including drought preparedness, supply chain disruption, cyber threats and wider critical infrastructure dependencies.

Results

75+

Individuals identified and reviewed.

40

Candidates formally qualified.

6

Candidates shortlisted.

A COMPLEX AND NICHE SEARCH.

Looking for transferable skills beyond the water sector.

This was a particularly complex and niche search as Water UK was seeking a combination of skills that rarely sit within one individual. Candidates needed to demonstrate:

- Genuine policy development experience with strong analytical and strategic thinking
- Experience operating within complex infrastructure or regulated environments
- Understanding of resilience, risk and system-wide challenges
- Capability to operate across both strategic and practical resilience challenges
- Ability to engage credibly and influence across complex stakeholder environments

The search extended well beyond the water sector to identify candidates with transferable resilience expertise. The longlist was developed from candidates across the water industry, government, regulators, healthcare, financial services, energy, infrastructure and national resilience functions.

A MULTI-STAGE RIGOROUS PROCESS.

Assessing for genuine policy ownership experience.

Murray McIntosh worked closely with Water UK's senior leadership team, including the Director of Policy, Deputy Directors for Water and Wastewater, and the Deputy Chief Executive, to define the role's requirements and refine the brief as priorities evolved. The process consisted of:

- Longlisting and qualification: 75+ individuals identified and reviewed, with 40+ formally qualified against the brief.
- Shortlisting and interviews: 6 candidates shortlisted, taken through 6 first-stage and 4 second-stage interviews.
- Assessment and alignment: candidates tested against true policy ownership rather than stakeholder engagement alone, with detailed candidate preparation and market insight provided throughout.

A multi-stage assessment process, including strategic presentations and executive interviews, meant the final appointment was tested against the full range of the role's strategic and practical demands before an offer was made.

BRINGING NEW CAPABILITY INTO WATER UK.

The Impact of a Wider Talent Search.

The successful appointment emerged from a highly competitive field, with candidates identified well beyond the traditional water-sector talent pool.

The hire provides Water UK's growing policy team with a senior lead responsible for resilience risk across the sector, addressing a gap that previously lacked dedicated ownership.

Water UK described the shortlist as exceptionally strong, advancing several candidates from outside the water sector through a rigorous, multi-stage assessment process. This demonstrates that the search accessed high-calibre talent that a conventional sector-focused approach would likely have overlooked.

The engagement reflects Murray McIntosh's approach across policy, public affairs and strategic communications: prioritising capability wherever it is found, rather than relying solely on direct sector experience.

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND WATER UK.

The future of resilience leadership.

This search points to something building across trade bodies and infrastructure organisations more broadly. Critical infrastructure challenges increasingly demand policy capability, not just stakeholder engagement: identifying emerging risks, developing robust policy positions, and influencing decision-makers across industry, government and regulators at once.

The strongest resilience leaders often come from adjacent sectors, and restricting a search to direct sector experience can significantly narrow access to that talent. Organisations best placed to respond to future resilience challenges will be those willing to broaden their talent pools and focus on capability over familiarity with the sector.

THE PEOPLE YOU NEED **DO EXIST.**

Just let us know how we can help you.

Murray McIntosh is the recruitment partner for businesses, trade associations, NGOs, Charities and regulators. We place experts in a range of niche policy subject matters in Policy, Public Affairs, Strategic Communications, Economics, Corporate Affairs and External Affairs with our clients to make change happen.

We are well-versed in recruiting professionals across multiple industries such as Energy & Utilities, Financial Services, Healthcare & Pharma, Transport, Education, Built Environment, Manufacturing. Akin to strategic communication practices, our recruitment process involves research, insight, consultation and evaluation to find solutions and keep up with market changes.

In an environment comprised of disruption, regulation and increased public scrutiny, the professionals that we represent, specialise in helping organisations assess and navigate the political landscape, and deliver real, meaningful change.



Get in touch



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