

What happened to the water? Exploring the need for wider integration of water and rural and islands policy through a Scottish case study.

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Abstract

The concept of water security is often employed as a desired goal for water management policies, and relates to the notion of access and availability of water of sufficient quality for all. Although the exact definition of the term is still up for debate, the need to adequately balance human and environmental water needs remains central to the underpinning of the idea. Independent of what definition is used, the changing climate and evolving requirements and demands of human populations has resulted in a dynamic outlook on which areas of the world are considered 'water secure' and which suffer from 'water insecurity'. Islands, whether autonomous nation states, or a smaller body of land governed by a mainland, are increasingly known as environments that regularly undergo extended periods of water insecurity. This is no less clear than in the 'hydro nation' of Scotland where remote rural and island communities frequently experience issues with both quality and quantity of water. Using a Scottish case study, we demonstrate how a historical policy approach that has failed to prioritise water service provision for all, especially those in remote rural spaces, has ultimately contributed to the current scenario of water insecurity events across Scotland. We highlight the need to include and integrate water and wastewater services in wider rural and island policy, and the requirement for the development of a wider water governance framework that works for those in both urban and remote rural spaces. Finally, we provide a case study example of how one small Scottish island community are working together to ensure water security through the establishment of a community water scheme, and how lessons learnt from their approach may help us all transfer to a more equitable and sustainable model of water service provision.

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