



Drinking Water Quality Regulator  
for Scotland

# Consumer Complaint Determination

2023/70

Taste complaint

**30 January 2023**

## Basis of complaint

The consumer contacted DWQR on the 12 December 2023. They explained that they were unhappy with the taste of their water and exhausted the complaints process with Scottish Water.

## Context of complaint

The consumer has, for a few years, experienced a taste and smell from their drinking water. They made a taste complaint to Scottish Water on the 01 August 2023. Scottish Water advised that this is caused by Geosmin, harmless to humans, although they acknowledged it does cause a taste or odour and some people are more sensitive to it, This consumer is. They started to deliver bottled water, and they reported to have received three deliveries. They were then advised they couldn't continue with the deliveries. Scottish Water advised them that levels of Geosmin in the supply were low and that Scottish Water had put sufficient methods in place to reduce the likelihood of taste. The consumer remains concerned about the taste of her water and would like to know what can be done about it.



## DWQR Assessment of complaint and the actions taken

On receipt of the complaint from the consumer, I set about requesting all the relevant information pertaining to this case and requested this to be sent to me by 26 January 2024. I received the requested information on time and commenced an investigation and assessment.

The water quality from the two samples taken from the consumer's property complied with the standards required by the Regulations. The Public Health team wrote to the consumer to advise them that no taste or odour had been detected from the samples and that their water was safe to use as normal. The second sample taken on 29 September 2023 contained less than 1.0ng/l of Geosmin but approximately 5.8ng/l of 2-Methylisoborneol (MIB). This compound can be detected by some consumers at concentrations above 6.0ng/l.

The service review team also provided them with Scottish Water's Geosmin factsheet via email on 6 December 2023 which I consider contains a sufficient level of information for consumers but could be expanded to include guidance on MIB.

Scottish Water has provided current and accurate information regarding taste and odour from their water supply and have also correctly advised them that some consumers with sensitive taste are more likely than others to detect an earthy musty odour from Geosmin/MIB in the Carron Valley water supply.

Scottish Water receive an influx of taste and odour complaints each year regarding taste and odour. In 2023, Scottish Water received 175 taste complaints from consumers in the Carron Valley Water Operational Area (WOA). 123 of these were recorded as being for 'Earthy/Musty'. These complaints peaked in August 2023 (66) but tapered off through September (32), October (9) and November (5).

Scottish Water has a sampling programme and an operational response plan to actively try and reduce the compound to low levels from the treated water. Whilst Geosmin levels were

elevated during the summer months, sample data shows that MIB concentrations remained elevated above 3.0ng/l through to November 2023 which could be contributing to persistent taste and odour into autumn and winter months.

DWQR is aware of the issue and has discussed Scottish Water's proposals to resolve it. DWQR has requested that Scottish Water design and install additional treatment to remove the two compounds and improve the taste of this water supply, however it is acknowledged that the construction of an additional treatment process takes time. In response, Scottish Water has given DWQR a commitment to install the treatment by May 2026, as well as taking steps to make short term improvements as far as possible. DWQR will be monitoring this closely.

Scottish Water has responded adequately to requests for information by DWQR.

**DWQR does not uphold the complaint**, as Scottish Water has responded in a reasonable and thorough way, showing that the water is compliant along with providing appropriate and correct information and advice relating to taste and odour. It is actively putting measures in place to try and reduce the prevalence and persistence of the compounds to improve the taste and odour of the water supplied to consumers. I will continue to monitor compliance and improvements to ensure these are delivered.

## Recommendations

DWQR recommends that Scottish Water:

1. Updates and provides guidance to consumers on 2-Methylisoborneol in addition to Geosmin guidance.

