

## Case Study

# Sewage sludge – communicating the issues

### Introduction

Water UK represents water and wastewater service suppliers at national and European level. The 'voice' of the water industry, it is directly funded by its 25 members.

Mistral was hired by Water UK (then the Water Services Association) to assist in communicating an emotive issue – recycling of sewage sludge, or biosolids, to agricultural land.

An EU directive meant that water companies could no longer dispose of sewage sludge at sea from the end of 1998. Recycling to farmland therefore became an even more important route for sewage sludge disposal.

### Objective

- Raise the profile of land-based recycling to not only create more demand from agriculture, but to protect this outlet.

### Strategy and results

This was the first water industry campaign to promote the benefits of sewage sludge to agriculture. We worked closely with Water UK to develop an appropriate strategy, with supporting tactics including media relations, technical exhibitions and positioning statements.

The campaign generated widespread positive media coverage and demand for biosolids from the agricultural industry. For example, Mistral organised Water UK's presence at the Grassland Event,

developing exhibition boards and organising media briefings (coverage achieved on Radio 4's *Farming Today* and in key agricultural titles).

Prior to the Water UK activity, Mistral had carried out a biosolids communication campaign for Northumbrian Water's waste management arm, Northumbrian Environmental Management (NEM). The objective was to raise the benefits of sewage sludge incineration at local and national levels. The programme included media relations, and consultation with business influencers, pressure groups and MPs. As a result, research showed NEM to be a credible and caring company – an excellent foundation for its subsequent growth.

Mistral also worked with Severn Trent Water (STW) to develop a sewage sludge communications strategy to defend its recycling routes and develop new options, including use in land restoration projects. Mistral worked with STW to identify messages and develop a strategy that included media relations, direct communications, events, literature production and influencer lobbying for a wide range of audiences. Farmer newsletters were also produced and issued.

The recycling of sewage sludge is an emotive issue – Mistral was involved with a pioneering water industry campaign to promote its benefits to agriculture

