



Now that it has stopped snowing and the snowman in the middle of the former-garage car park has bidden its final farewell (it was actually vandalised within hours of being constructed, but remained defiantly waving its presence to remind the destroyers of their cruelty), the latest environment news is focusing on the issue of drought. The South East and East of England have been suffering water shortages for some considerable time now, and even in the wet North West the reservoirs are lower than they used to be. That much is visible even in the interminable drizzle.

It puts me in mind of Rhod Gilbert's famous monologue on climate change on *Mock the Week* ("I was eight before I realised you could take a kagoule off...in *The Bible*

God made it rain for forty days and forty nights – that's still the best summer I remember!"), which is just that - a monologue. Rhod had already established his credentials in terms of the environment well before he raged against the dreary wetness that characterises the weather in much of the UK. It's the same for most of us here in the sodden North – we know climate change is a problem and needs urgent solutions; we also see the irony of holding those views while standing in a puddle.

In fact, we're a little two-minded when it comes to our attitude to water supply: a look at the Environment Directory on this site will show 12 companies under 'Water Desalination and Re-use' and one under 'Water Conservation', while there are 17 dealing with flood defences.

Actually, of course, the problems of water shortages here in England, whichever region, pale into insignificance when compared with much of the rest of the world. A map published this week in the environment news section of *The Guardian* illustrates the way in which the consumption of water (the 'water footprint') is often externalised by developed countries at the expense of poorer countries. The map was produced in connection with a study by researchers at the University of Twente in The Netherlands and published in the

*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

in the USA. Thus, in the UK we are a net importer of water via the produce and goods that we import; that is, part of our water footprint lies outside our borders.

Water is a commodity in many places and has the potential to provoke conflict. It's a sobering thought to take with me as I venture into the afternoon rain.