

# First-hand...

“We are an international company, but we have deep local roots, which is reflected in our communications”

At the Communication and Corporate Sustainability department, Juan Pablo Merino is tasked with highlighting the essential work of Aqualia, both internally and externally, as an agent specialising in the sustainable management of the end-to-end water cycle. This task involves raising awareness amongst the company's stakeholders, getting them involved in caring for and preserving this critical natural resource.

Transparency and permanently listening to stakeholders are key to sustaining Aqualia's social legitimacy thanks to the commitment of its entire workforce.

#### How does Aqualia handle communication with its stakeholders?

We manage it with professionalism and rigour. We are aware that actively listening to all our stakeholders, which we include as part of our sustainable management model, is the key to constructing a successful strategy. We have also oriented this listening process outwards. Over the past five years, we have

interviewed and surveyed more than 25,000 people in all the countries we have a presence in. This year, we have also rolled out surveys as part of a new customer satisfaction study. Internally, we work in step with the People and Culture department, supporting all actions that generate cohesion and pride of belonging.

The challenge we face is relaying to all our stakeholders that we are a specialist international operator that, by pursuing efficient responses to the supply, management, treatment and purification needs of each community, offers technical solutions and provides quality services throughout all phases of the end-to-end water cycle, preserving water resources and the environment, restoring social cohesion and caring for people's lives.

Furthermore, we communicate honestly, transparently, closely and, as goes without saying, through verified information. Our messages have an educational bias, both in our corporate channels and on social media as well as in the local media, to enhance the appreciation we have for water management, which often goes unnoticed. I would like

to touch on the relationship with local journalists, who allow us to relay significant information. We are an international company, but we have deep local roots, which is reflected in our communications.

#### Which actions has your department undertaken to contribute to the 2030 Agenda and, therefore, to the 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan?

Communication is the driving force behind our activities, our efforts and achievements to make the end-to-end water cycle more efficient. We directly contribute to the Strategic Sustainability Plan, adding value and increasing the scope of each of the activities undertaken by the different areas. Thus, for example, we enhance the company's activity when communicating projects undertaken in the field of waste recovery (Technology) or when we emphasise the actions undertaken to maintain the natural wealth of the environment (Climate Emergency).

We also contribute to the Strategic Sustainability Plan in the form of actions aimed at enhancing activity itself and raising awareness among local residents. We raise

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awareness of SDG 6, we roll out savings campaigns and visits to treatment plants, we share advice on responsible consumption and we have launched our Sosteníblómetro, a test that tells participants how they can be more sustainable. We participate in global campaigns like Earth Day or Earth Hour, which demonstrate the global nature of these challenges. We are sustainable natives: we have always cared for water and that is now an advantage when it comes to communication. What for us has always been our way of working has now become fashionable.

#### Thinking back to 2022, which actions or projects would you make particular mention of?

We feel responsible for sharing our knowledge, training and raising awareness amongst society about using and caring for water. To this end, our educational actions have been particularly important: the Digital Drawing Contest, which we have organised for the past 20 years and in which 250,000 students have participated. We believe that it is crucial that today's children are aware about the work that goes into being able to turn on a tap and have quality water.

Another milestone is the Cultural Transformation training project towards sustainability; these face-to-face sessions saw more than 100 employees participate to dive deeper into the 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan. The process has been very enriching: we have relayed our sustainability strategy and gathered knowledge

from participants. The profile of those receiving the training, most of whom serve in key management positions in the different regions, has helped to include their assessments, proposals and comments in the preparation of the next plan that looks beyond 2023. This is all part of sustainability: getting teams involved in the strategy.

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#### With these achievements in mind, what are the next challenges facing the department?

We are aware that communication and sustainability are closely related to one another. And although we have come a long way in terms of rigour in sustainability, we cannot let up implementing improvements that have come to be known as the

regulatory tsunami. We have to pay close attention to anticipate the requirements of the new directive (double materiality, new standards, taxonomy, etc.). I believe, thanks to 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan and the creation of a non-financial information data system, we have built a knowledge base in relation to sustainability that will make us more agile and prepare us for 2024. This will also inevitably affect the sustainability report; it is not just an informative tool, it is also an exercise in transparency to relay how we integrate sustainability into the business model.

Online communication is another challenge. The department's work to generate content of real value is crucial in generating engagement. Without a doubt, this is a field in which we must increase our presence in 2023. I believe that the content that we generate, natural and close to people, helps us to demonstrate that we respond to the requirements of a diverse community that is increasingly involved in social and environmental causes.

And, as goes without saying, it enhances the visibility and value our activities: efficiency in water care and its sustainable management. I have always considered this as a priority, although it is true that it is a factor that is becoming progressively more urgent.