

First-hand...

“Sustainability is a major business ally which forces us to focus on the long-term”

At the Operations and Technology department, Pedro Rodríguez is tasked with managing a large strategic support team to ensure that all Aqualia services perform their work as efficiently as possible. This area focuses on environmental innovation, a major challenge facing 21st century companies already immersed in the decarbonisation challenge facing Europe.

How does your department face this corporate challenge of moving towards an increasingly sustainable model?

We are at a key time and the water sector is facing major challenges. The effects of the climate crisis, such as water stress, combined with the lack of awareness among people when it comes to caring for the resource, are a risk to our activity. Furthermore, the framework in which we are moving is by no means simple: the regulations are increasingly demanding and there are different market players who question our legitimacy as managers of the resource. That should not be the case.

In our sector, partnerships and collaboration are critical when it comes to designing a resilient water cycle.

Despite this context, Aqualia's commitment to moving towards a more sustainable model is unwavering since, thanks to our specialisation, we have a genuine concern for water and its future. In this sense, and as is the case in Steven Johnson's novel *The Ghost Map*, on how the cholera crisis that engulfed London in 1854 and that changed modern cities was resolved: “*whoever has resolved the water problem has resolved one of the transcendental problems facing society*”. I believe that we are a very valuable stakeholder for society and we have the opportunity to reinvent our model, placing sustainability at the core as an essential ally that provides us with a long-term vision to offer innovative solutions.

And how are you facing the regulatory tsunami that is now materialising in Europe with the approval of the new directive and the arrival of the EU taxonomy?

The EU regulation forces us to direct capital towards sustainable

investments that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This entails establishing a common reporting framework for all companies and setting universal criteria for activities considered sustainable, according to an equally common taxonomy. We are well placed to face these challenges. Since 2006, we have reported to all our stakeholders as per the GRI guidelines and we recently closed a green financing deal for €1.1 billion on account of the measures taken in the field of the climate emergency and caring for the planet. I think we're doing a good job of staying ahead of the regulations and collaborating with all departments to make regulatory trends genuine opportunities for growth.

From a more global perspective, we play a leading role in Europe in the race towards sustainability. We understand and assume our responsibility as drivers of this transition in all the countries that we are present in.

PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

#Decarbonisation #CircularEconomy #Regenerate #Biodiversity #Biofactories



In 2021, Aqualia launched the first strategic document that is not exclusively economic in nature, the 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan. How does your department contribute to this?

We are a corporate area and we regard this as a company achievement. However, our action is directly related to the strategic line of entitled “Climate Emergency and caring for the planet” to address the already well-known twin crises (climate and biodiversity). To this end, we are sparing no efforts when it comes to improving efficiency in distribution networks, optimising energy and reducing emissions or promoting the transfer of R+D+i projects to the production area, which this year we increased from two to eight.

The circular economy initiatives have been particularly important: harnessing reclaimed water for the recovery of ecosystems, transforming effluents into water suitable for irrigation purposes or generating energy from wastewater. Furthermore we have two projects that are at the cutting-edge of innovation, Zeppelin and Eclasion, that involve researching the production of green hydrogen and biomethane. The energy transition is also a key element and at the moment we are working on four lines: calculating the individual carbon footprint by country, improving the energy efficiency of facilities, using renewable energies that, following the incorporation of Georgia, has increased from

19,100 to 673,806 GJ (up by 3.478%) and the transformation of the vehicle fleet, which has gone from accounting for 7% to 12.54% in 2023.

We also undertake actions to protect biodiversity. All of these are inherent to our purpose. I would highlight the recovery of wetlands or rivers, caring for and promoting wildlife and the regeneration of land to improve habitats.

In our sector, partnerships and collaboration are critical when it comes to designing a resilient water cycle

Looking back to 2022, which actions or projects undertaken by your department do you believe have had the biggest impact?

One of the milestones we have achieved has been the company's excellent growth, which has resulted in a strategy to export our operations and standards to other countries. We have reinforced the Operations and Technology area, which is focussed on providing that corporate management and procedural umbrella, to do things better and more swiftly. We hope that this entails an

improvement for all our technical departments and, by extension, all our professionals.

When it comes to Aqualia's purpose, of guaranteeing access to water, I believe that the LIFE INTEXT project, which aims to combat water scarcity in small communities, represents a milestone. This project has a significant room for growth, and impact, and through it we are also linking innovation to market needs.

After all these changes, what are the challenges that Aqualia faces in the short-term?

Undoubtedly, digitalisation poses a difficult challenge, nonetheless, it is a challenge that, at a sector level, we must make progress with. Another area that we must address is innovation, which has a lot to contribute to sustainability. In this case, we have to promote the generation of ideas and be able to deploy them.

In the near future, we will continue working on renewing our roadmap, Aqualia's 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan. We must enhance it and ensure it serves as a reference document for all employees. Achieving the goals it sets out will be key on this path towards sustainability, which for us is and has always been as strategic as it is necessary.