

# Water abstraction during prolonged dry weather

## Guidance for non-water company abstraction licence holders affected by prolonged dry weather

### Background

Spring 2020 was very dry. In England, May was the driest May on record, although June has largely seen above average rainfall. The Met Office's latest long term forecast is that wetter but hotter than average conditions are likely for the remainder of the summer.

### Effects of prolonged dry weather

Prolonged dry weather can affect:

- the ability to irrigate crops
- the quality and quantity of crops farmers and growers can produce
- the ability of licence holders to keep within their abstraction licence limits
- the reliability of normal water sources
- animal health and welfare, for example if livestock drinking water is not available and there is no mains supply – see the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board guidance on Water supply problems for livestock farms online at <https://ahdb.org.uk/water-supply-problems-a-guide-for-livestock-farms>
- private water supplies to properties
- managed wetlands and other environmental features due to reduced river flows and groundwater levels

### How abstraction licence holders can get help

The Environment Agency accepts that some abstractors may not be able to keep to the conditions of their abstraction licence because of prolonged dry weather. Abstractors who are affected by prolonged dry weather should contact us. We have updated the guidance for abstractors on prolonged dry weather on GOV.UK which available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/water-abstraction-flexible-options-in-exceptional-dry-weather>.

We will discuss the options available for improving their access to water. These options may include us allowing some temporary abstraction outside licence conditions. We can only consider options that are in line with our abstraction licensing strategies. Our abstraction licensing strategies are available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-abstraction-licensing-strategies-cams-process>. Any options must not damage the environment or affect the rights of existing lawful water users.

We may ask an abstractor to apply to vary their licence as part of any agreed option if we have either previously allowed them to temporarily take water outside their licence conditions or if they are likely to require what they are requesting on a permanent basis.

Successive prolonged dry weather events, mean that opportunities to temporarily abstract water outside licence conditions will be limited in future years. As a result, it is important

**customer service line**    **03708 506 506**

**floodline**    **03459 88 11 88**

**incident hotline**    **0800 80 70 60**

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that abstractors review their business' resilience to prolonged dry weather and, if required, apply to change their licences.

### **Plan for the future**

Climate change may increase the frequency of prolonged dry weather.

To reduce the risk of future problems, especially where there is no additional water available, abstractors should plan how they will improve the resilience of their water supplies during prolonged dry weather. For example, consider if they can:

- use the water they abstract more efficiently
- change their cropping plans or build a storage reservoir to fill in the winter, if they spray irrigate in the summer
- buy water from other abstraction licence holders – known as trading water rights
- collaborate with other abstractors through local water abstractor groups and/or work with other sectors to improve access to water.

### **Checking abstraction licences**

Abstractors should check their licence before they contact the Environment Agency to make sure:

- they know how to comply with it
- it meets their needs – if not they should change their licence
- guidance on how to change a licence is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/change-a-water-abstraction-or-impoundment-licence>

Abstractors can see their abstraction licence details and submit their abstraction returns online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-your-water-abstraction-or-impoundment-licences-online>

### **Contact the Environment Agency**

To discuss what options might be available, abstractors can get in touch with:

- their local area office by email -see [Annex](#) for email addresses
- the Environment Agency's National Customer Contact Centre

### **General enquiries**

National Customer Contact Centre  
PO Box 544  
Rotherham  
S60 1BY

Email [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Telephone 03708 506 506

Telephone from outside the UK (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm GMT) +44 (0) 114 282 5312

Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

The impact of COVID-19 on the Environment Agency means we may take longer to respond than usual as most of our staff are working from home. The Environment Agency is currently unable to deal with post sent to its offices in the usual way.

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**Annex: Area email addresses to contact for prolonged dry weather queries**

Yorkshire: [AEPYorkshireandNE@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:AEPYorkshireandNE@environment-agency.gov.uk) and  
[drought.yorkshire@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:drought.yorkshire@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Cumbria and Lancashire: [IEP\\_CLA@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:IEP_CLA@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire: [drought.northwest@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:drought.northwest@environment-agency.gov.uk)

North East: [drought.northeast@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:drought.northeast@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire: [Drought.LNA@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.LNA@environment-agency.gov.uk)

East Midlands: [Drought.EMD@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.EMD@environment-agency.gov.uk)

West Midlands: [Drought.WMD@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.WMD@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly: [Drought.DCIS@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.DCIS@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Wessex: [Drought.WESSEX@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.WESSEX@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Kent, South London and East Sussex: [ksl.gwh@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:ksl.gwh@environment-agency.gov.uk)

East Anglia - West: [Drought.CAMBED@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.CAMBED@environment-agency.gov.uk) and  
[andrew.chapman@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.chapman@environment-agency.gov.uk) or [Sam.Westwood@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Sam.Westwood@environment-agency.gov.uk)

East Anglia - East: [easterniep@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:easterniep@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Hertfordshire and North London: [alastair.wilson@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:alastair.wilson@environment-agency.gov.uk) and  
[Drought.HNL@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Drought.HNL@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Solent and South Downs: [aep\\_ssd\\_southern@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:aep_ssd_southern@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Thames: [iep\\_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:iep_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk)