

Press release: Grass greener, but rain needed to reduce drought-risk for 2019

- National Drought Group agrees action to reduce risk of drought in 2019
- More than 300 dry-weather environmental incidents this summer
- Water restrictions likely in spring 2019 if winter rainfall is below average.

The National Drought Group (NDG) met today (20 September) to assess the latest situation and agree actions needed to reduce the risk of water restrictions and protect the environment next year.

Members of the NDG, organisations affected by and responding to the risk of drought, heard that a number of water companies still have very low reservoir levels. The current environmental situation is fragile and dependent on good rainfall over the autumn and winter period.

The dry summer had a significant impact on water supplies, agriculture, the environment and wildlife, with the Environment Agency responding to 314 dry weather related incidents over summer – more than 3 times the usual amount.

Despite the recent rainfall, which has provided respite to rivers, wildlife and people's lawns around the country, the water resources situation has not yet returned to normal. At the end of August, overall reservoir stocks were at 65 per cent. The NDG heard today that if winter rainfall is below average, water restrictions on water company customers are likely in spring 2019.

Following the dry summer, Sir James Bevan, Environment Agency Chief Executive, invited water company representatives back to the NDG to explain their plans to protect water supplies and the environment. Today, they outlined a range of steps to reduce the risk of restrictions and ensure good water supplies into next year. Water companies are working to reduce leakage, capture and store as much water as possible over winter, identifying new water sources, setting up water transfers between companies and other operational contingency measures.

The summer has been tough on farmers. The Environment Agency responded quickly providing help and assistance with speedy decisions on allowing more water to farmers through August by approving 88 changes to licences to help farmers get more water.

Efforts to conserve water and recent rain has helped to stabilise water levels, easing pressure on the environment and agricultural sector. But the full impact of the summer heatwave is yet to be felt, with a delay on damage to some species and crops. With very dry soils, especially in the south east of England, there may be a delay refilling groundwater aquifers and reservoirs over the coming months. A delay in recharge may mean we start spring 2019 with below average groundwater levels, increasing the risk of drought in the east and south east of England next summer.

Sir James Bevan, Environment Agency Chief Executive, who chaired the NDG meeting, reminding members that early action and proper planning will reduce the likelihood, or extent, of drought measures next year. He said:

Ensuring sufficient water for the public, the economy and the environment is one of biggest challenges we face as a country. The Environment Agency will continue to work actively with the water companies and other water users to seek to ensure that.

But this is not just a matter for the organisations at National Drought Group. We all use water, and everyone has a role to play in ensuring we continue to have reliable access to it, so we encourage everyone to please use water wisely.

Notes to Editors

1. The full statement from NDG Chair and Environment Agency Chief Executive Sir James Bevan is available on request and will be on GOV.UK today.
2. List of attendees at this meeting:

Affinity Water; Anglian Water; Bristol Water; Cabinet Office; Canal and River Trust; Consumer Council for Water; Defra; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Drinking Water Inspectorate; Energy UK; Environment Agency; Met Office; National Farmers Union; Natural England; Northumbrian Water; Essex and Suffolk Water; Ofwat; Portsmouth Water; Public Health England; RSPB; SES Water; Severn Trent Water; South East Water; South Staffs Water; South West Water; Southern Water; Thames Water; United Utilities; Water Scan; Water UK; Wessex Water; and Yorkshire Water.

Ends.

For media enquiries, please call:
Environment Agency press office: 020 7714 1500

[News story: Game-changing ideas for civil aerospace: apply for funding](#)



There is up to £4 million for collaborative projects that lead to game-changing civil aerospace technologies.

The [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#), working through the [Aerospace Technology Institute](#) (ATI) and Innovate UK, has up to £4 million to develop world-leading civil aerospace technologies.

Organisations can submit their interest in one of 2 competitions for:

- fast-track collaborative research and development projects
- longer-term collaborative research and development projects

Projects must be in line with the UK aerospace technology strategy, [Raising Ambition](#). This strategy is supported by an annual investment of £150 million by the UK government in research and technology development.

A further £4 million will be on offer for feasibility studies in 2019.

Fast-track collaborative research and development

Exploit technology within 3 to 5 years

Up to £2 million is available for fast-track projects that could be exploited within 3 to 5 years.

Projects could look at:

- sensing for harsh environments and integrated vehicle health monitoring
- coping with extreme conditions
- creating secure, smart, connected and efficient sub-systems
- technologies to improve factory efficiency

Fast-track competition information

- the competition opens on 24 September 2018, and the deadline for expressions of interest is midday on 5 December 2018
- projects that meet the quality threshold will be invited to make a full funding application
- an SME can lead a project, working with other businesses or research organisations
- we expect projects to range in size from £425,000 to £1 million and to last between 1 and 2 years

- businesses could attract up to 50% of their project costs
- you will need to sign up to the [ATI framework agreement](#) to be eligible to apply

Collaborative research and development

Longer-term returns

Up to £2 million is available for longer-term collaborations, the results of which could be exploited in 5 years or more.

Themes include:

- how to enable single crew operations
- machines and electronics that allow for more electric aircraft
- supporting the next generation of materials and processes
- preliminary design and trade tools for future aircraft and systems

Competition information

- the competition opens on 24 September 2018, and the deadline for expressions of interest is midday on 5 December 2018
- projects that meet the quality threshold will be invited to make a full funding application
- a business must lead the project, working with other businesses or research organisations
- we expect projects to range in size from £425,000 to £1.5 million and to last up to 3 years
- businesses could attract up to 50% of their project costs
- you will need to sign up to the [ATI framework agreement](#) to be eligible to apply

Published 20 September 2018

[News story: National Drought Group – Chairman’s Statement – September 2018](#)

The NDG convened on Thursday 20 September to assess the present situation and review the action being taken to reduce the risk of drought in 2019.

Press release: Essex drug-dealer jailed following Attorney General's referral

A man who grew and sold cannabis from his bedroom has been jailed today after the Attorney General, Geoffrey Cox QC MP, referred his sentence to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient.

During a police search of James Brooks' Southend home, a false wall was discovered in the 24 year old's bedroom. Inside this concealed room, police found 6 cannabis plants. Elsewhere in the room, they found large amounts of cannabis, cocaine, and paraphernalia relating to the sale of drugs. They also found weapons including a machete and pair of nun-chucks.

Brooks was originally sentenced at Basildon Crown Court in July, where he was given 18 months imprisonment suspended for 24 months. He was also made the subject of a 12 month drug rehabilitation requirement, and ordered to complete a rehabilitation activity and unpaid work. Today, after the Attorney General's referral, the Court of Appeal increased his sentence to 32 months immediate imprisonment.

Speaking after the hearing, the Attorney General said:

"Drug production and dealing has severe impacts on a community and on individuals. Brooks was making a living from harming the lives of others, and it is important that this is reflected in his sentence."

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