

Press release: Environment Agency responds to impacts of dry weather

The Environment Agency has stepped up its incident response to tackle the impacts of continued dry weather, following the driest June since 1925.

Record-breaking temperatures and very low rainfall throughout May, June and much of July is taking its toll on the environment, with wildlife suffering as river levels drop. EA teams have responded to 44 significant environmental incidents since the end of June including moorland fires, algal blooms, dry boreholes, low river flows and fish rescues.

The National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency convened today (Monday 23 July) to discuss the operational approach to managing water supplies and review preparation for the pressures ahead.

The group is made up of 30 organisations including water companies, regulators and environmental groups. During the meeting, water companies explained how they were implementing activity set out in their drought plans and increasing efforts to reduce leakage.

NDG members set out how they had stepped up activity on all fronts and urged everyone to reduce water use and wastage to conserve supplies and protect the environment.

See the NDG's full position statement [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive Environment Agency said:

The water that comes from the tap is taken from our rivers and reservoirs and the amount we use has a direct effect on people and the environment around us.

As we prepare for drought in the North West and dry weather continues around the country, we have stepped up our response to minimise wastage and tackle the impacts of low river flows on wildlife.

We all have a part to play to protect this precious resource. I expect water companies to step up their efforts to ensure supplies are well-managed and people at home should use water wisely.

The lack of rain has led to a rapid decline in reservoir levels in the North West. The EA is preparing for drought in the region and United Utilities have announced a hosepipe ban affecting 7 million people from early August. The company have applied for 2 drought permits and 1 drought order across Cumbria, which the EA are now considering. The company is preparing a further

3 drought permits to be submitted before the end of July.

Dry weather is also affecting a number of sectors, notably agriculture with concerns about water supplies needed for irrigation and potentially lower yields. The EA is meeting with affected groups to provide practical advice about conserving water and planning for drought, should the dry weather continue.

Further action the EA is taking includes:

- Frequent river monitoring and 50% increase in incident response for this time of year – mostly associated with extreme hot weather and prolonged dry conditions.
- Working closely with water companies to ensure they are following drought plans and implementing actions in a timely way.
- Robust regulation including increasing the number of inspections for businesses abstracting water to ensure compliance with licences.
- Operating strategic water transfers to help maintain river flows.
- Moving staff to affected areas to deal with increasing demand for incident response and regulatory work.
- Leading by example – from late July, not cleaning EA fleet vehicles or office windows to avoid unnecessary water usage.

Around the country, water companies have enough water to maintain supplies if resources are managed properly and if the public use water wisely but a dry end to the summer and dry autumn could see the risk of restrictions and further environmental impacts spread across the country.

Reducing the amount of water we use helps protect the environment and conserves supplies during extended periods of dry weather. There are a number of ways the public can use water wisely including:

- Avoid using sprinklers, use hosepipes sparingly and don't water your lawn – it will recover quickly when rain returns
- Ditch the paddling pool and head to the beach – [find your nearest bathing water](#)
- Water plants after 9pm – the water is less likely to evaporate
- Fit a water butt, so when the rain comes you'll have stored water for your garden
- Take a shorter shower
- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth
- Always put full loads in your washing machine and dishwasher

You can find more water saving tips at [waterwise](#)

News story: National Drought Group – Chairman's statement

The National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to coordinate action to maintain water supplies and manage the other risks associated with drought. The NDG convened today (Monday 23 July) to assess the present situation and coordinate plans for the weeks ahead.

The present situation and the prospects

We are in a continuing period of prolonged hot and dry weather. June 2018 was the driest June since 1925, with a rainfall total for England of only 15 mm.

One water company, United Utilities, has announced its intention to impose a hosepipe ban ("Temporary Use Ban") in parts of the North West from 5 August. The other water companies do not currently intend to introduce hosepipe bans, and there is no threat to essential public water supplies. But continued dry weather into autumn could see the risk of some further restrictions and further environmental impacts across the country.

Action we are taking

The water companies, the Environment Agency and others are taking action to reduce the risk of further water restrictions and to ensure that water users and the environment itself continue to get the water they need. Participants agreed to step up their activity on all fronts.

Water companies

The water companies are stepping up action to sustain a reliable water supply to their customers. They:

- Have put additional resources in place to do so.
- Are implementing their contingency drought plans as appropriate.
- Are actively advising customers on water efficiency and offering free water saving devices.
- Are stepping up their efforts to find and fix leaks to protect supplies and help reduce the risk of further hosepipe bans
- Are taking a range of other steps to sustain supply, including water trading between companies and additional measures to keep farmers and other customers supplied with a particular focus on vulnerable customers.

The Environment Agency is:

- Actively monitoring the weather, water situation and the environment, analysing the prospects and sharing its analysis with others.
- Working with the water companies to ensure they are following their

drought plans and implementing actions in a timely way.

- Working with businesses, farmers and others who abstract water under licence from the EA to manage down demand and protect the environment, using its regulatory powers as necessary.
- Stepping up engagement to encourage the public and others to cut down on non-essential water use.
- Operating water transfers such as the Shropshire Groundwater Scheme to help maintain river flows for water supply and the environment.
- Stepping up its incident response to ensure the environment is protected – responding to 50% more hot weather incidents, including fish kills.
- Moving its operations to higher alert status and increasing staff resources to support its own work and those of partners in affected areas.
- Leading by example: EA fleet vehicles and office windows will not be cleaned to avoid unnecessary water usage.

Other partners

- The National Farmers Union (NFU) and farmers are working closely with the EA, Internal Drainage Boards, water companies and Defra to manage the situation and sustain farming production, including through water trading and abstraction restrictions that are now in place in some catchments.
- The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) have produced top tips for farmers on coping with drought and heat.
- The Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT) are closing some navigations to save water, providing information to boat users on the situation and asking them to consider sharing locks where possible – as they always do in summer.
- The Angling Trust have distributed guidance to their members on fishery management during hot and dry weather. Anglers can report any fish in distress to the Environment Agency hotline on 0800 80 70 60.
- Other partners are taking action to preserve water supplies, sustain economic and leisure activity and protect as far as possible the environment, rivers, lakes and wildlife.

Advice to the public

Please use water wisely. Prolonged dry weather and localised drought is not unusual. Water companies plan for periods of exceptionally low rainfall. There is enough water for all if water resources are managed properly. All of us can play a role. We encourage everyone to follow the advice of their water company and use water wisely. This will help protect the environment and the economy, and reduce the risk of further water restrictions.

Enhanced coordination and next NDG meeting

The NDG agreed to step up coordination between its members to maintain a common assessment of the situation and ensure the closest possible cooperation to address the current challenges; and agreed to meet again on 29 August.

[Press release: Environmental permits issued for Holmwood drilling site](#)

The Environment Agency has issued environmental permits to the company to provide a high level of protection to the environment during its operations at the Holmwood site in Dorking, Surrey.

Before issuing the permits the Environment Agency carried out a detailed assessment of the application and considered all legal requirements, along with all comments received through two rounds of public consultation. The environmental permits issued set out the stringent conditions the site operator must comply with to ensure that the environment and local people are protected.

Europa Oil & Gas Limited will need to have all relevant permissions in place from other regulatory partners before it can start operations on site.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the public consultations. We have carefully considered all of the information received and are confident, in issuing these permits, that we have the right controls in place to ensure operations are carried out safely.

The Environment Agency plays a key role in protecting the environment. We take an evidence based approach to regulation and had to be satisfied that the necessary protections were in place before we would allow exploration to begin. We are confident that the legally binding conditions in the permits and our compliance checks will ensure that operations meet the highest standards.

We do understand the concerns that a large number of people have raised and we are committed to keeping local people informed of our work to regulate the site.

[View the oil and gas mining waste permit issued for Holmwood Wellsite, Surrey.](#)

Notes to editors

The permits authorise Europa Oil & Gas Limited to:

- drill a new oil well at Holmwood
- store oil on-site
- manage any radioactive waste arising from these activities (a separate

permit has been issued in this respect)

There is further information on how the Environment Agency determines applications, the time scales involved and how it regulates onshore oil and gas:

- [Environmental permitting: public participation statement](#)
- [Onshore oil and gas exploration and extraction: environmental permits](#)
- [Onshore oil and gas regulation – information page](#)

And information on radioactive waste permits:

- [Radioactive substances for non-nuclear sites](#)

[Press release: £40m extra funding to better protect thousands of homes against flooding](#)

Thousands of properties across England will be better protected against the threat of flooding thanks to a multi-million pound investment by the government, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey confirmed today (Friday 20 July).

Across the country 13 flood schemes will benefit from £40 million of additional funding which will unlock flood defence schemes and help support economic growth and regeneration in areas that have suffered from flooding in recent years.

The additional funding, first announced in the budget, adds to millions of pounds of government grant-in-aid already allocated to these projects and partnership funding already secured. It will help leverage an additional £24 million from other sources, enabling the flood schemes to go ahead. In total, more than 7,000 properties will be better protected against flooding, including over 5,000 homes. This additional money is part of our £2.6 billion investment from 2015 to 2021 to fund 1,500 flood defence schemes which will better protect 300,000 homes across the country.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

This extra funding for flood defences will unlock schemes that will better protect thousands of homes and businesses against flooding, supporting regeneration in important towns and villages in the north and coastal communities.

It will boost our resilience as a nation and help our communities

to grow and prosper.

In the historic English Channel tourist town of Weymouth, £1.2 million will improve the harbour wall, reducing flood risk to 450 properties and helping to kick start the regeneration of Weymouth town centre.

More than £10 million is also being awarded to a scheme to protect deprived communities in the St. Austell Bay area of Cornwall. The funding will unlock an additional £4.8 million of partnership funding contributions and is additional to £13.4 million of grant-in-aid which has already been allocated to the scheme. The funds will support an integrated regeneration partnership project, which will help to reduce flood risk and develop plans for new housing and community green space.

Five flood schemes in the north of England will receive almost half of the total funding – £17.4 million- in a boost to the Northern Powerhouse. Rochdale in Greater Manchester will receive a total of £5 million to develop one of the largest inland flood schemes in the region. The defences in Rochdale will increase the level of flood protection to 1,000 residential properties as well as critical infrastructure such as the tram network, a bus station, a grid sub-station and a waste water treatment works.

Eight miles to the west, £7 million has been awarded for new flood defence work around the River Irwell in Bury and Radcliffe as a first step towards the development of a new £46 million flood defence scheme, better protecting 870 properties. In addition to raising flood defences at key locations along the river's edge another key aspect of the scheme will be the creation of a wildlife habitat and amenity areas for the public by setting defences further back from the river.

The new funding for flood defences in the north of England adds to the £3.4 billion already invested into the Northern Powerhouse to build a more prosperous and inclusive economy where everybody has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Minister Thérèse Coffey added:

The north of England is a hotbed of culture, innovation and growth and this multi-million investment in flood schemes will help protect more than 2,700 homes and businesses from flooding.

The defences will also enhance the environment and bolster economic growth as part of our commitment to better protect 300,000 homes from flooding by 2021.

Over the past three years, the Environment Agency has completed more than 400 new flood schemes to better protect more than 142,000 homes. In addition to building hard defences, it has improved its response by investing in new technology and equipment like temporary flood barriers, pumps and 6,500 trained staff across the country.

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said:

Across the country we are seeing more extreme weather, which makes the Environment Agency's role to protect people, homes and businesses from flooding even more important.

From 2015 to 2021 we will reduce the risk of flooding for at least 300,000 homes so this £40million is another welcome boost to achieving that. It is great news for communities – not only will it help us build flood schemes but it will also help wider economic growth.

Further information:

A table with details of the schemes is below.

Project	Location	Additional funding (£m)	Potential leveraging of partnership funding contributions (£m)
Egremont, Skirting Beck defence improvements	Cumbria	1.60	4
St Austell Bar Resilient Regeneration Project – Par & St Blazey	Cornwall	10.79	4.8
Portreath Flood Alleviation Scheme	Cornwall	1.50	0.5
Paul stream channel/culvert refurbishments	Cornwall	0.68	0.1
Great Yarmouth Flood Defence improvements	Norfolk	5.40	1.5
Wiggenhall, Tidal River Bank improvements – Great Ouse Tidal Embankments	Norfolk	0.20	0.1
River Roch, Rochdale & Littleborough Flood Alleviation Scheme	Greater Manchester	5.00	2.0
Radcliffe & Redvales Flood Risk Management Scheme	Greater Manchester	7.00	2.0
Humber, Winteringham and South Ferriby tidal defence improvements	North Lincolnshire	1.90	5.6
Corbridge Flood Alleviation Scheme	Northumberland	0.14	0.4

Weymouth harbour wall improvement works	Dorset	1.20	Additional contributions being secured as part of the development of the wider strategy to further improve defences.
Fowlea Brook Flood Risk Management Scheme	Staffordshire	0.5	0.5
Holderness Drain Flood Alleviation Scheme & East Hull and Gt Culvert	Yorkshire	3.70	2.6

[Press release: Boaters' views sought in consultation on proposed charges](#)

Boat owners who keep or use a boat on waterways managed by the Environment Agency are being encouraged to have their say in plans to increase charges.

A public consultation into proposed increases to boat registration charges for 2019-20 and 2020-21 launched today and will run until the 30 August 2018.

The Environment Agency is the second largest navigation authority in the UK and is responsible for more than 1,000 km of navigable waterways including the non-tidal River Thames, River Great Ouse and Upper Medway Navigation.

The proposed charges form part of plans to create a financially sustainable service on waterways used by almost 30,000 boats. Currently the cost of running the service far exceeds the income generated from charges, risking a reductions in the levels of maintenance of waterway structures such as locks and the standard of customer service boat users expect.

The two year proposal gives time to complete a wider review of navigation charges alongside bringing in other measures to make the waterways less reliant on government grant-in-aid funding.

Mark Ormrod, the national manager for navigation at the Environment Agency, said:

Our navigation service plays an important role in protecting our waterways and supports both recreation and business for thousands of people.

This consultation is a valuable opportunity for our customers to tell us what parts of our service are most important and give us

their ideas about how we should fund them so I would encourage as many boaters as possible to take part.

An increase in charges is essential to work towards creating a sustainable service that covers the cost of maintaining our valued waterways and delivering a safe and efficient service for our customers.

The proposed increases will raise an additional £930k to invest in the waterways over the proposed 2-year period. The increases by waterway are:

- River Thames: 5.7%
- Anglian Waterways: 7.5%
- Upper Medway Navigation: 10%
- Unpowered and boats covered by joint registration agreements: 7.7%

Subject to the consultation response, new charges could be implemented from 1 January 2019 on the River Thames and 1 April 2019 for our Anglian Waterways and the Upper Medway Navigation.

To take part in the consultation, please visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)