

Press release: Abstraction reform: further moves made towards Green Brexit

Access to clean and safe water supplies is essential for people and the environment, however increasing demand for water is putting pressure on supplies.

Latest data shows that five per cent of surface water bodies and 15 per cent of groundwater bodies are at risk from increasing water use by current abstraction licence holders that could damage the environment.

Today's new [abstraction reform plan](#) will improve better access to water by:

- Preventing unsustainable abstraction by reviewing existing licences and introducing more controls to protect rivers, lakes and groundwater.
- Developing a strong focus on catchment areas for water bodies to encourage more partnership working between [the Environment Agency](#), abstractors and catchment groups to protect and enhance the environment and improve access to water.
- Modernising the abstraction service to allow online applications for licences and bring water resources regulations in line with other environmental permitting regulations.

Environment Minister, Thérèse Coffey said:

The abstraction licencing system is in clear need of reform and I am very pleased to set out how we will do this in our plan. I believe our approach will work for all parties and, most importantly, will protect our precious water supplies.

Our ambition is to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it and we will keep building on our successes by enhancing our environmental standards and delivering a Green Brexit.

Making sure that abstraction is sustainable and contributes to healthy water bodies that are able to provide good support to fish and other aquatic life is at the heart of these plans.

While good progress has been made in recent years, the plan emphasises the importance of the Environment Agency, the water industry and other

stakeholders working in partnership at a catchment level to improve and protect the environment and improve access to water.

From January 2018 the Environment Agency will begin to regulate around 5,000 water users that have historically been exempt from regulation. This will create a fairer system and help protect the environment.

The Environment Agency's work to address unsustainable abstraction should see around 90 per cent of surface water bodies and 77 per cent of groundwater bodies meet the required standards by 2021.

Notes to editors:

- The Environment Agency will produce updated abstraction licensing strategies that detail the solutions to environmental issues in local areas around rivers and groundwaters and set out approaches to help abstractors access the water they need.
- Since 2008 the Environment Agency has made changes to over 270 abstraction licences to prevent over 30 billion litres of water per year being removed from the environment where abstraction is unsustainable.
- In the New Year, the Environment Agency will begin piloting and testing a digital system for handling licence applications and data reporting. Modernising these services will improve the user experience as well as supporting reforms to better protect the environment and improve access to water.
- A report will be made to Parliament by May 2019 on the progress made on abstraction reform.