

Press release: Environment Agency announces support for farmers during dry weather

Following the driest June since 1925 and a dry July, farmers have reported water supply concerns which could affect the irrigation of crops and welfare of livestock. Ahead of the National Farmers Union's drought summit today (Wednesday 1 August), the Environment Agency issued guidance to farmers detailing options to flex abstraction licences in serious cases.

The arrangements will allow farmers to trade water allowances – as set out in their abstraction licence – on a short-term basis, without the need to change their licence. The EA will fast-track the process to enable farmers to act quickly and arrangements will be agreed locally where the EA is satisfied that there will not be any adverse effects on the environment or the rights of other lawful water users. The EA also monitors river flow and will maximise access to water when it is available, such as following heavy rain.

In severe cases where there is a real or imminent threat to crops and livestock, the EA may temporarily allow additional, emergency abstraction. Each case will be assessed to minimise impacts to the environment or the rights of other water users.

Paul Hickey, head of water resources, Environment Agency said:

We know that farmers are facing considerable pressures in responding to drought conditions and we want to support them by allowing them to flex their abstraction licences in the most serious cases to safeguard food production and animal welfare.

We must also balance farmers' needs with those of wildlife and other water users so we will only allow these arrangements where we are satisfied there won't be any adverse effects on the environment.

As the hot, dry weather is set to continue we urge everyone to use water wisely to protect the environment and help prevent the need for water restrictions.

The Environment Agency will continue to carry out compliance checks on abstraction licences to ensure that abstractors keep to their licences and any agreed flexible arrangements.

The temporary arrangements do not apply to water companies as they are able to use a variety of drought measures defined in law to manage droughts and public water supply. The Environment Agency works closely with water companies to ensure they are following drought plans and implementing actions

to conserve water in a timely way.

Notes to Editors

It is up to abstractors to ensure that they use water wisely, efficiently and have sufficient water for their needs.

Any flexible arrangements will be one-off, limited to this event. If any abstraction outside a licence is likely to need to re-occur, licence holders must apply to vary the licence at the earliest opportunity.

It is important that water abstraction licence holders check their licence details – licence holders can now view and [manage water abstraction licences online](#)

The Environment Agency can review hands off flow conditions more frequently to allow abstractors to take advantage of any peak flows when significant rainfall occurs.

Use of water company headroom by other abstractors where this is sustainable. Southern and Anglian Water have said that in principle this can be provided and we are awaiting details from the companies on their proposals.