

SEPA warns of low water levels across North of the country

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has warned of an increasing water scarcity situation in the North-East and Highlands, with businesses which abstract water all year round being encouraged to take steps to reduce their water usage.

- Warning comes as groundwater levels in the North-East of Scotland are extremely low and at one site have reached the lowest levels ever recorded, while some rivers in the Highlands run low.
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is providing information for businesses that abstract water year-round on actions to take as resources reach critically low levels.
- Changing weather patterns caused by climate change means water scarcity will become more common in Scotland, and low water levels likely to run into 2021.
- Businesses looking for information on water scarcity and meeting license conditions urged to contact SEPA at WaterScarcity@sepa.org.uk

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has warned of an increasing water scarcity situation in the North-East and Highlands, with businesses which abstract water all year round being encouraged to take steps to reduce their water usage.

The latest weekly [water situation report](#) published by SEPA shows that low groundwater levels in the North-East means parts of the region remain at moderate scarcity, while dry conditions and low river levels in the Highlands have led to some catchments being escalated to moderate scarcity.

Even with periods of heavy rain and thunderstorms in recent weeks, groundwater levels in the North-East are extremely low and at one site have reached the lowest levels ever recorded. This follows on from a spring in which there was exceptionally low groundwater levels as well as the third driest April on record.

Water is a resource that underpins key industries across the North and Scotland more widely, from food and drink production through to farming and golf course management, and while some businesses abstract seasonally, others need access to water all year round.

Those reliant on private water supplies are also feeling the effects of water scarcity. Of 22,000 private water supplies, almost 4,000 provide water to large numbers of domestic properties or businesses, including tourist accommodations, schools and care homes. There has been an increase in the number of users seeing supplies dry up.

Businesses have been asked to act in order to mitigate the impacts of depleted resources in the area. These actions are:

- Those in the agriculture sector still abstracting should stagger abstractions with other operators
- Where possible reduce the volume of water being abstracted
- Switch to other supplies or suspend abstractions if possible

Water abstractors licenced by SEPA should have a plan to deal with the range of conditions they may experience, including drought. They should monitor their water usage and equipment to ensure they are operating at maximum efficiency and avoiding any unnecessary leakage.

Changing climate patterns and extreme rainfall events put us in a position where an area can be experiencing water scarcity but still suffer from surface water flooding.

Terry A’Hearn, Chief Executive at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, said:

“The severity of the water scarcity picture in parts of the North of Scotland is further evidence that water scarcity will become more and more prevalent across Scotland – and is just one of the many consequences of climate change the country faces.

“SEPA’s strategy for tackling this definitive challenge of our time is called ‘one planet prosperity’, focused on helping our communities and businesses thrive within the resources of our one planet.

“That is why it is important for businesses that abstract water to understand that SEPA is here to offer support and guidance, and we are setting out the key measures abstractors should be taking to conserve water, which is shared and finite.

“We want to work with businesses to plan long-term about their water usage so that we can preserve the resource as effectively as possible. This will protect both Scotland’s rivers and lochs and reduce their business risks.”

More information on water scarcity can be found at sepa.org.uk/water-scarcity. Businesses having difficulty obtaining water supply or that are concerned about meeting licence conditions should contact SEPA at WaterScarcity@sepa.org.uk. Those concerned about private water supply levels should contact their local authority.

Ends

Notes to editors

Links for further information

- Information about water scarcity including weekly updates can be found at – sepa.org.uk/water-scarcity
- The [National Water Scarcity Plan](#) explains how water resources will be managed prior to and during periods of prolonged dry weather. This is to ensure the correct balance is struck between protecting the environment and providing resource for human and economic activity.

- SEPA's regulatory response to COVID-19 – coronavirus.sepa.org.uk
- Those concerned about private water supply levels can contact their local authority. Moray – privatewatersupplies@moray.gov.uk, Aberdeenshire – water.admin@aberdeenshire.gov.uk, Aberdeen City – envhealth@highland.gov.uk, Aberdeen City – https://integration.aberdeencity.gov.uk/service/Public_health_problem_report
- Scotland's climate is changing – from periods of drought to extreme flooding, the weather patterns we are experiencing, as a result of climate change, mean we all have a duty to more carefully manage the country's resources – and water is no different.

A water scarcity situation builds up over a long period of time. Missing rainfall would have topped up reservoirs, raised groundwater levels and provided moisture in the soils.

The weekly report categorises the situation across Scotland through a five tiered approach. Appropriate action should be taken within these five categories:

Normal Conditions

Early warning

- Start to consider how you can optimise water use efficiency.

Alert:

- If you are irrigating your land, check equipment, don't over spray, use trickle irrigation and irrigate at night to avoid evaporation.

Moderate scarcity:

- In prolonged dry periods, reduce abstractions by staggering with other operators, reduce the volume and switch to other supplies or suspend your abstractions.

Significant scarcity:

- This means Scotland's water resources are becoming scarce – switch supplies or temporarily stop abstracting.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Newsdesk : 01786 45 25 65 (Weekdays) I 07557 497 947 (24 Hrs)

media.sepa.org.uk I media@sepa.org.uk I @ScottishEPA

DISTRIBUTION:

If you want to receive all of SEPA's news releases, please email media@sepa.org.uk.

You can also use this address if you want to be removed from our list.