

Supporting Scottish farmers on water abstraction returns

✘ 18 December 2019

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency today (Wednesday 18 January 2019) confirmed that Scottish farmers and landowners who hold a water abstraction license would have until 31 January 2019 to submit annual returns.

The returns, a mandatory requirement for license holders, ensure that their abstraction of water doesn't impact on the ecology of Scotland's rivers and reservoirs. The data is also a key indicator of compliance and forms an important component of SEPA's annual Compliance Assessment Scheme.

The move recognises the impact of external factors such as extreme weather and EU Exit preparations impacting farmers. It also acknowledges that whilst a commonly understood annual deadline, an annual reminder issued by the agency in previous years had been delayed.

Ian Buchanan, Chief Officer at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, said:

"The data that water abstractors supply is really important in helping understand the state of Scotland's environment. The process is both quick and simple, involving the downloading and return of a document at www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/abstractions/#five which can either be posted or emailed to WRDataReturns@sepa.org.uk

"We're grateful to those who have already completed their returns or plan to do so by the end of December. For those who need a little more time, we're here to help. We'll be writing to abstractors to advise of the extra time and support available and our colleagues are here to help on 03000 99 66 99."

NFUS Environmental Regulations Policy Manager Jenny Brunton said:

"NFUS appreciates that SEPA has extended the water abstraction licence deadline return until the 31 January 2020 in recognition of the low return rate and current pressures on Scottish growers.

"It is important that data returns are submitted to SEPA in order to allow them to make an accurate assessment of the impact of irrigation on watercourses. Even if no water has been abstracted for any period, a nil return must still be submitted to SEPA using the abstraction data returns form."

"We remind all Scottish growers that a failure to submit data returns is considered a non-compliance with the conditions of the licence and could affect payments under the Basic Payment Scheme or result in a Cross-Compliance inspection."

Further information on abstraction returns is available at www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/abstractions/#five