

Prolonged dry weather this year has led to exceptionally low river flows and reservoir levels falling across much of England. High temperatures, including this week's heatwave, continue to add additional pressures on the water environment and wildlife.

The National Drought Group met on Friday 12 August to discuss the response to the driest summer in fifty years. This group is made up of senior decision makers from the Environment Agency, government, water companies and key representative groups, and it was joined by Water Minister Steve Double. At the meeting, the Environment Agency confirmed that the drought trigger threshold had been met to move parts of the South West, parts of Southern and Central England, and the East of England into drought.

This change in status to drought indicates the impact prolonged dry weather is having on water resources and the environment. It does not automatically trigger actions itself but moving to drought status means the Environment Agency and water companies will continue implementing the stages of their pre-agreed drought plans to manage the impacts. These plans follow local factors including reservoir levels, demand and forecasts, and may lead to precautionary actions such as Temporary Use Bans. The last drought in England was 2018.

Essential supplies of water are safe. Water companies have a duty to ensure these supplies and have reassured regulators and government that they will remain resilient across the country. Defra and the Environment Agency are urging water companies to continue with their precautionary planning to protect essential supplies in the event of a dry autumn. Members of the public and businesses in drought affected areas are also urged to use water wisely.

### **Today, National Drought Group members agreed to:**

- Recognise the new risks and impacts associated with the current outlook;
- Ensure water companies are following their Drought plans; and
- Continue working collaboratively across sectors to manage current impacts – working together to balance water needs and conserve water.

You can view the press notice [here](#).

### **How does this affect your local area?**

East Anglia is experiencing a Drought. All catchments are affected by the hot and dry conditions. The purpose of this briefing is to outline what is happening, what actions we are taking to minimise damage to the environment and how local communities can help.

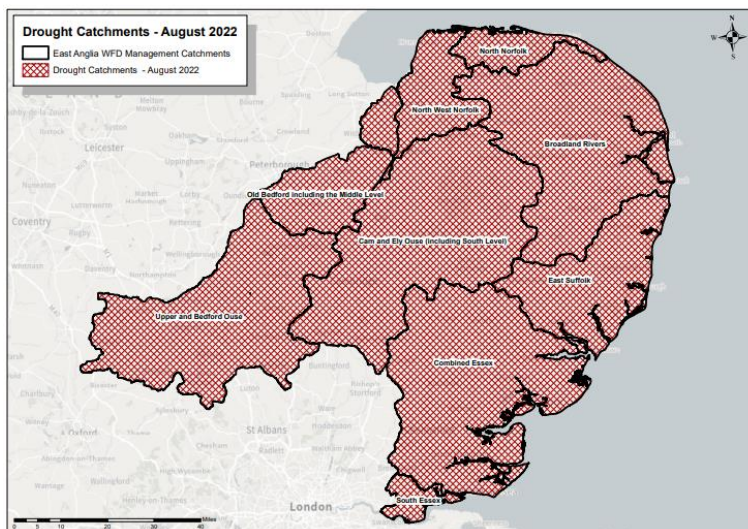
### **Background: Drought**

Winter is when we usually receive rainfall that recharges groundwater and provides flows in our rivers. Last year this recharge was modest and so far, 2022 has been dry; with July setting a new record for the driest month since records began and we have seen extreme hot weather.

All rivers in East Anglia have been impacted with some rivers at exceptionally low flows. We are operating river augmentation schemes where we have them but there remains a strain on water availability for people, agriculture, business, and the environment.

We have been monitoring the situation, reviewing the range of dry weather indicators, including groundwater levels, surface water flows and impacts on the environment.

All catchments in East Anglia are now in Drought.



Map of Drought catchments in East Anglia

### Potential impacts on the environment and our response

A lack of water in the environment can have severe impacts such as rivers and other habitats drying out which can lead to fish in distress, reduced river flows can exacerbate small pollution incidents causing more damage than at times of normal flow.

As we move into Drought, we expand and increase our monitoring of the environment using our telemetry systems and physical observations.

Our teams are responding to reports of environmental incidents, including blue/green algae and fish in distress. We expect to see more incidents during the Drought.

We increase our communication with partners and the public and encourage everyone to be careful in their use of water.

### Working with water companies

We are liaising with water companies to share information on water availability, operational activities and to understand any emerging concerns.

We are encouraging water companies to take appropriate actions in accordance with their own Drought Plans.

### Working with abstractors

We are working with farmers, businesses, and other abstractors to manage water availability and ensure that, as far as possible, they get the water they need to be resilient whilst maintaining our protection of the environment.

Abstraction licence holders in the most affected areas may already have received notice to restrict the amount of water they take as described in their pre-agreed licence conditions. This may take the form of taking reduced quantities or only abstracting at certain prescribed times and days in the week, depending on local circumstances. We are encouraging all licence holders to check their abstraction licenses to make sure they are fit for purpose to meet their current and future water needs.

### How communities can help

We can all do our part to use water wisely and manage this precious resource, and there are useful water saving tips for us all at [Waterwise](#).

We encourage the public to report sightings of fish in distress or other impacts on the environment by telephoning our 24hr Incident Hotline: 0800 80 70 60.

Today, the Environment Agency also published its monthly water situation national report for July [here](#), providing a picture of the rainfall, soil moisture deficit, river flows, groundwater levels and reservoir levels over the last month. The report highlights that it was the driest July across England since 1935, and since records began for the East and South East, with monthly rainfall totals for the majority of river catchments classed as exceptionally low for the time of year.

The National Drought Group will continue to work together very closely over the coming weeks. Environment Agency Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan, will chair a further meeting of the group with water company Chief Executives on Tuesday 23 August.

Kind regards

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More information can be found here:

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency)