

# Dry weather and drought briefing

## 1) Summary

Drought was declared by the Environment Agency covering northwest England on 21 May, with Yorkshire also declaring drought on 9 June.

Recent rainfall has helped stabilise the situation in some areas but has not reversed the impact of months of dry weather preceding it. Conditions have been warm and dry across most of England since last week and are expected to continue with occasional showers next week following a very warm weekend.

2025 was the driest spring across England since 1893 and drier than the same period in 1976. As of 17 June, average rainfall for England for the month to date was 41mm, which represents 63% of the Long-Term Average (LTA) for England. This ranges from 42% in the east and central England, to 95% in the northwest.

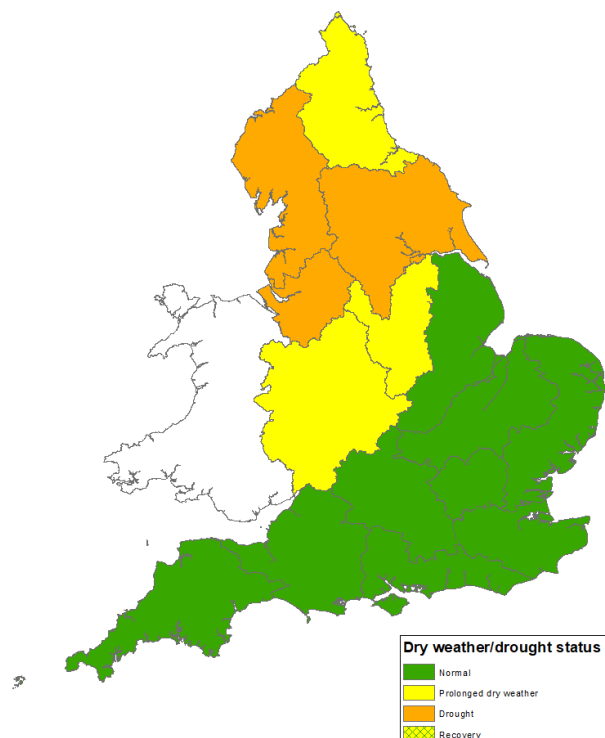
Public water supply reservoir levels across England are at 77% full but some are at historic lows for the time of year. Currently, our main concern this summer relates to the following water companies:

- Yorkshire Water
- United Utilities
- South Staffordshire Water
- Parts of Severn Trent Water

We are seeing the impact of the dry weather on the water resources more broadly and are also closely monitoring the situation of Southern Water, Thames Water and Wessex Water. South East Water has indicated issues with high demand that may require the use of drought measures.

## 2) Environment Agency status

The areas in drought status remain unchanged, being Cumbria & Lancashire, Greater Manchester Merseyside & Cheshire, and Yorkshire. East Midlands, West Midlands, Northeast are in Prolonged Dry Weather (PDW). In total, there are now three EA areas in drought and three areas in PDW, as shown in Figure 1. These areas have activated their drought plans. Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire Area is likely to move into PDW within the next 3 weeks.



**Figure 1: Dry weather / drought status by Environment Agency Area**

We respond under five stages of drought management. Refer to section 4.2.1 in the following link for further information: [Drought: how it is managed in England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drought-how-it-is-managed-in-england)

Natural Resources Wales confirmed that the whole of Wales remains in PDW status.

### 3) Current water situation

With the return of the dry weather this week; river flows have decreased at 80% of our national indicator sites. Just over half of these sites are below normal or lower. River flows are exceptionally low across central and eastern parts and in limestone catchments in central southern England.

Groundwater levels are receding as we would normally expect for the time of year. Broadly, groundwater levels are in a good position particularly in sandstone and slower responding chalk aquifers. The exception is in the limestone aquifers in the Cotswolds which are currently exceptionally low for the time of year, which may affect flows on the upper part of the Thames. Chalk aquifer levels in the Chilterns range between normal to notably high.

Soils remain very dry across most areas and are close to historic maximum soil moisture deficits for the time of year; the exception to this is parts of northwest and parts of southwest England which have benefited from the recent rainfall.

Further details are available from [Water situation reports for England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-situation-reports-for-england)

### 4) Sector drought risk

#### a) Public Water Supply

The dry weather continues to impact on water companies' public water supply reservoirs predominantly in central and northern England. These had been declining quicker than we would normally see at this time of the year, but rain in late May and early June has helped to stabilise levels in some reservoirs and slightly increased others. We continue to work with companies to monitor the situation and are discussing potential drought permits, orders and temporary use bans (TUBs) as necessary.

Forecast hot weather over the next few days is likely to increase demand, which could impact reservoir levels in drought affected areas. Further hot spells over the summer could see similar impacts in other parts of the country.

Water companies report their level of drought response from 1-4, linked to the actions in their drought plans. On the basis of water resource prospects submissions from companies, under a reasonable worst case scenario (80 percent long term average rainfall) the majority of companies in the north, midlands, south and southwest enter at least drought level 1 over the summer.

Under a stress test scenario of 60 percent long term average rainfall, 7 of the 17 companies enter level 2 or 3 over the summer. This is when more significant actions to maintain water supplies could be expected.

**United Utilities** (UU) has moved from drought level 2 to drought level 1 in its strategic zone (including Haweswater in the Lake District). This follows the recent rain and the work UU is doing to bring sources and water treatment works back online and to increase available supplies. Its Carlisle resource zone is at Business as Usual (BAU). UU continues to follow actions set out in its drought plan which includes repairing leaks, increasing customer communications, reducing outages and optimise sources.

**Yorkshire Water** (YW) remains at drought level 1, as reservoirs levels continue to decline. YW continues to take actions to optimise other sources to support reservoir supplies and increase leakage control. It is also enhancing its customer communications and preparing for further drought actions if required. YW's response continues at its gold drought management level.

**Severn Trent Water** (STW) reservoirs remain at drought level 1b although total storage rose by about 1% in response to the recent rain. These conditions have arisen earlier than normal and are likely to reduce the water availability for summer and autumn use. STW is increasing leakage “find and fix” rates in hot spots, escalating outages, and increasing customer communications. River Wye regulation releases have commenced.

**South Staffordshire Water** (SSW) is in drought level 1. SSW's Nethertown pumpback scheme has been turned off as the river level has fallen below the hands off flow. SSW continues to monitor the situation, is reviewing planned outages, and is bringing some of its groundwater sources back to normal output.

**Northumbrian Water** has formed its Drought Management Group and is appealing for constraint on demand during the warm dry conditions, although there are no water supply availability concerns.

**Thames Water** (TW) has activated its drought plan and is in drought level 1, driven by risks to surface water and reservoir storage, particularly in its Swindon and Oxfordshire (SWOX) zone. London zone is less of a concern. This is a precautionary escalation to drought level 1 and TW are doing media campaigns and preparing further actions to reduce water demand. The company report this decision was taken to enable the company to formalise its drought response and get the team in place early should things accelerate, learning from 2022.

**South East Water** (SEW) is also in drought level 1 and has activated its drought plan. The company is experiencing high demand and report demand for drinking water in May was the highest ever seen, reaching 635 million litres in a single day. It is considering further actions to reduce water demand. The company is monitoring its Arlington reservoir closely, which has declined quicker than normal. Augmentation releases from its Ardingly reservoir have also started earlier than normal although storage isn't a concern at the moment.

**Wessex Water** (WW) has reached drought level 1 for its groundwater sources. The company has activated its drought plan, and its drought team are meeting fortnightly. WW has implemented water efficiency actions and messaging.

**Southern Water** (SW) has crossed its 90-day internal planning trigger for its Testwood drought management option following receding flows on the River Test. SW is preparing for and taking actions in accordance with its drought plan.

We continue to regularly engage with all companies on the situation.

We expect water companies to follow their drought plans and act early to ensure there are sufficient supplies. This will include early public awareness campaigns as well as reducing leakage. We have written to all companies on 28 May to remind them of our position on TUBs, including the need to have them implemented before applying for drought permits.

## **b) Agriculture**

Rainfall at the start of June has provided some short-term relief on irrigation for farmers and growers but this has not reversed impacts seen from the dry weather over the spring. Soil moisture deficits remain higher than expected across most of England. Impacts on the livestock sector are currently limited to issues with reduced grass growth over the spring. In some areas, the dry weather has driven a substantial drawdown of farm irrigation reservoirs, which may lead to resilience issues ahead of the summer season.

The current hot and dry spell this week is likely to increase further demand on storage reservoirs and abstraction licences. Should there be a continuation of the dry weather into the summer season, there will be an increased risk to irrigation water supplies, particularly where there have already been significant reductions on reservoir storage capacities.

An updated irrigation prospect report is being finalised this week to inform the agriculture sector on the latest water resources situation. The report is showing a deterioration in the spray irrigation prospects across the country. This will be published to help the sector to plan and make any necessary adjustments for the remainder of the irrigation season and inform on the options to help improve water resilience this summer.

Where there are pressures on water resources this summer, we are advising farmers and growers to contact the Environment Agency and the National Farmers Union to discuss the short and long-term options that are available to help improve water resilience.

### **c) Energy**

The energy situation remains unchanged, with risks to the operation of some of the High Head Hydropower schemes in Cumbria and Lancashire due to hands off flow constraints.

### **d) Environment**

Fish kills and algal bloom incidents have continued to rise in the first half of June, albeit at a slower rate following the wetter and cooler conditions experienced up to mid-June. With the warmer drier conditions, we expect confirmed low flow incidents to continue to rise this month (and exceed 2023 and 2024 levels for June, but be below 2022 levels).

## **5) Weather forecast**

Friday and Saturday will see particularly hot conditions with heatwave criteria thresholds likely to be exceeded across many parts of the country. On Sunday the very hot weather is expected to be confined to eastern areas. The dry, settled and warm weather is expected to continue next week with occasional showers in places. The Met Office 3-month outlook (June to August) indicates that for the UK near average rainfall is likely, with an evenly balanced chance of a drier or wetter summer, plus a greater likelihood of hot spells (2.3 times normal) and increased risk of heatwaves.

## **6) Drought readiness actions**

In response to the drought and dry weather, the Environment Agency continues to take action by:

- Scaling up our incident response at a national level by implementing our Gold command structure.
- Co-ordinating closely with water companies to implement statutory drought plans, taking necessary action to safeguard public water supplies.
- Activating drought plans in response to moving to 'Drought' or 'Prolonged Dry Weather' status in the following areas: Cumbria & Lancashire; Greater Manchester, Merseyside & Cheshire; Northeast; Yorkshire; East Midlands and West Midlands.
- Issuing hands off flow restrictions and warnings to some abstractors in areas suffering from low flows. Enforcement of abstraction licence compliance.
- Preparing and responding to incidents caused by low river flows with close monitoring of the water environment affected by sustained low flows, particularly in those areas in Drought status.
- Preparing dry weather advice to fishery operators to help protect their waters.
- Update our irrigation prospect report to inform the agriculture community of the current water resources situation, to help farmers assess their water needs for the remainder of the summer.
- Increasing the frequency of national drought meetings to update the group on the latest dry weather situation and actions sectors are undertaking over the summer

The next NDG meeting is scheduled for 15 July (in person).

**This briefing is weekly, with the next edition due on 26 June.**

**For any questions, please contact [drought.national@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:drought.national@environment-agency.gov.uk)**