

# Developing dry weather event

October 2018

## Handling enquires about abstraction during drought and prolonged dry weather

### Background

This is an update on our position in July 2018 to provide clarity on the latest criteria for agreeing flexibility for non-public water supply sectors such as agriculture. We have extended the range of flexibility options in anticipation of the prolonged dry weather period continuing into the winter. We will review this document in the spring using experience over the winter, the latest hydrological situation and possible need for flexibility next summer.

It is important that abstraction licence holders check their licence details to ensure that they know how to comply with them and to check that their licences meet their needs. Licence holders should take steps to change their licences if they don't meet their needs. Licence holders can now view and manage water abstraction licences online at [manage water abstraction impoundment licence service](#).

### Regulatory position

#### What flexible options can we provide?

Subject to there being no adverse effects on the environment or the rights of existing water users we may be able to:

- review hands off flow conditions more frequently to allow abstractors to take advantage of any peak flows when significant rainfall occurs;
- fast track water rights trades and access to additional water;
- extend the winter abstraction season to permit abstraction in October to refill winter storage reservoir;
- consider proposals to 'borrow' groundwater from future allocations.
- Effluent reuse - the current [Regulatory Position Statement](#) (RPS) expired on the 1st October. We will review the RPS in March 2019 to see if it should be reinstated dependent on how much winter rainfall has been received.

#### When can we be flexible?

We would expect requests made in the following circumstances:

- preventing damage to crops already 'in the ground';
- wetting soils to enable harvesting;
- establishing seedlings or root stocks;
- refilling storage reservoirs to mitigate against future water shortages;
- safeguarding animal and human health and wellbeing;
- preventing environmental damage;
- operating critical infrastructure; or
- where water shortages would lead to significant economic impact.

It is up to abstractors to justify why they need the flexibility.

customer service line  
03708 506 506

incident hotline  
0800 80 70 60

floodline  
03459 88 11 88

## Constraints on flexibility

We will aim to approve requests for flexibility where we can. There are, however, some constraints on how flexible we can be in certain circumstances as set out below.

- More frequent review of hands off flow conditions will depend on availability of flow data and local systems for notifying abstractors.
- To apply for flexibility, an abstractor needs to already have a licence under which they can abstract.
- Water rights trades and additional water will be depend on local water availability, pressures on the environment and the effect on the rights of existing water users.
- Refilling storage reservoirs prior to the start of the winter abstraction season will only be possible if river flows are above any specified 'hands off flow'.
- For a water rights trades:
  - the buyer and seller's water sources must be hydrologically connected - trades are therefore generally restricted to the same catchment or groundwater management unit;
  - trades between groundwater management units (GWMU) in the same aquifer will depend on local circumstances and how the GWMU boundaries have been defined - these trades are likely to be complex and need more detailed assessment potentially involving groundwater modelling;
  - there may be some scope for trading between groundwater and surface water depending on the interaction between them and how any abstraction impacts have been considered.
  - we may not be able to trade all the quantity on a licence if there are abstraction pressures on the environment in the catchment or aquifer.
- Borrowing groundwater from future allocations:
  - these are likely to need more detailed assessment;
  - depending on the local circumstances, we may need to use our groundwater models to see if there will be any adverse effects on the environment
- We may take longer to make a decision where flexibility requests require more detailed investigation such as groundwater modelling.
- Any groundwater proposal that requires a test pumping must be submitted through the normal application route and cannot be fast tracked.
- We may not be able to approve all requests for flexibility, so abstractors should be prepared to look for other sources of water or take action to reduce their need for water.

## Applying for flexibility

Abstractors may contact the Environment Agency to discuss flexing abstraction conditions during drought through either their usual local Area office contacts or through our National Customer Contact Centre:

- National Customer Contact Centre, PO Box 544, Rotherham, S60 1BY, United Kingdom.
- Email [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)
- Telephone 03708 506 506
- Telephone from outside the UK (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm GMT) +44 (0) 114 282 5312
- Minicom (for the hard of hearing) 03702 422 549

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