

## **Press release: National Drought Group agrees support for farmers and wildlife**

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Lower than average rainfall, continuing through April and May – particularly in the East of England – has seen some river flows decline to lower than normal for the time of year. In the south and east, rainfall has not replenished groundwater stores, with levels now declining. While there is no threat to public water supply, these conditions are putting particular pressure on the environment and agriculture.

Farmers in East Anglia, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire have reported they are facing significant pressures with irrigation. Environment Agency monitoring has shown a decline in water available so there were discussions about how the water companies and the Environment Agency can help farmers during the growing season, particularly in the east of England.

Environment Agency Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan met with government departments, the Met Office, National Farmers Union (NFU) and water company CEOs to agree the action needed to support farmers and wildlife as well as conserve water supplies if the dry weather persists.

The NFU urged farmers to consider how they could be affected by running out of water and to make plans, where possible, to manage water shortages. The EA set out a number of steps it has taken to support farmers including:

- Allowing farmers to flex abstraction licence conditions to take more water, wherever this can be done without damaging the environment, in order to safeguard food production and animal welfare. So far in 2019, the EA has approved 90% of requests.
- Extending the licence trading map from East Anglia to Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, East Midlands and West Midlands, to help abstractors look for opportunities to access other abstractors' unused water

- Working with the NFU, CLA and AHDB to hold advice sessions for farmers since January 2019.

Following the meeting, Environment Agency Chief Executive Sir James Bevan said:

Ahead of the summer months, the National Drought Group met to agree action to reduce the risk of drought measures and damage to the environment.

Some rivers and groundwater supplies are below average so the Environment Agency is ready to respond to incidents over the summer and we are supporting farmers where possible by flexing water abstraction licences and with water trading. We welcome action the water companies are taking to ensure maintenance of supply over the coming months.

The water that comes from the tap is taken from rivers and reservoirs and the amount we use has direct effect on wildlife, the environment and agriculture. The National Drought Group collectively asks industry and the public to use water wisely.

A full position statement from the NDG is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Despite reservoir storage decreasing during May, public water supplies are looking more stable. Reservoir stocks for public water supply are just below average for the time of year. During the meeting, water companies also set out the action they are taking to maintain water supply over the coming months, including:

- taking action to find and reduce leaks.
- making water transfers around their networks and between companies to meet demand and rest some sources.
- ensuring that all potential sites are application-ready for drought permits.
- working with farmers locally to identify ways to sustain and share water supplies

During last year's heatwave, the environment suffered the driest May to July across England since 1921 and it was the joint hottest summer on record. The Environment Agency reported a 330% increase in environmental incidents related to the dry weather as teams acted to protect wildlife and rescue fish struggling due to low river flows.

At today's NDG meeting the group heard that there is growing concern over the potential impacts of prolonged dry weather on the environment and the cumulative effect from last year. Environmental incidents such as wildfires, algal blooms and fish rescues have already been reported comparatively early for the time of year.

The EA has taken proactive action to protect wildlife and the environment

including:

- operating compensatory pumping schemes to support low river flows, such as the Slea augmentation scheme in Lincolnshire.
- installing aerators on the Ouse washes to enhance oxygen levels to protect fish, and by loaning aerators and dissolved oxygen meters to angling clubs and fisheries across East Anglia.
- continuing enforcement activity to ensure abstractors comply with their licences to help minimise the impact on the environment.

In his [“Jaws of Death” speech](#) Sir James Bevan recently called for more discussion about water use and a concerted effort to explain to the public that wasting clean tap water has an impact on the environment.

With the climate emergency and population growth and we will have hotter and drier summers in the UK. There will be more extreme weather events, with decreases in summer rainfall and increases in winter rainfall. That will mean more water shortages and a higher risk of more frequent and more extreme droughts.

The National Drought Group members renewed their commitment to collaborate on actions to address this long term challenge and explain the need for reducing water use.

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## [News story: Parole Board Chief Executive's blog – June 2019](#)

### **Recruitment update**

I have spoken at length about the lack of diversity amongst Parole Board members and the urgent need to change this, so that the Board better reflects the community.

To start to address this issue, we wanted to approach our most recent recruitment campaign differently.

The campaign focused on three regions in the North of England, rather than the whole of England & Wales. This is the first time we have recruited in specific regions and it really helped us share the campaign in a more targeted and thoughtful way, working with local charities and media outlets to reach as many potential applicants as possible.

However, words and aspirations are not enough – results are what the Board is going to be measured by. Therefore, I am glad to say that the signs are promising after the first stage of the recruitment campaign.

We had unprecedented interest following our campaign, with 590 people applying to be an independent member. Of these applicants, 27% identified themselves as being from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

There was an even higher proportion of candidates from BAME backgrounds who passed the sift of applications, making up 45% of the 130 candidates invited to interview. I think these numbers are very encouraging, both in terms of the overall number of people applying and the diversity of the applicants.

I wish every candidate the best of luck and I am excited to work with our cohort of new independent members once they have been announced.

## **Czech delegation visit**

We had the pleasure of meeting a delegation of policy makers, probation workers and judges from the Czech Republic. They have been running a project to introduce parole in the Czech Republic for the past 10 years and wanted to learn more about how parole works in England & Wales.

Their project 'Fragile Chance' has clear parallels to our system – panels of people making decisions on the potential risk of releasing someone, assessing if there have been signs of positive change during their prison sentence. However, there are also some stark differences, not least that people have to request to be considered for parole, rather than it being an automatic right.

The delegation wanted to learn how Parole Board members make risk assessments and so we arranged for them to observe a hearing from our offices via a video-link to a prison. This was the best way to demonstrate how parole works in practice.

We also invited senior leaders and professional practitioners from probation and the Public Protection Casework Section to speak to the delegation about their roles in the parole system. This really demonstrated that for parole to work, agencies throughout the justice system must work together.

Visits like these give us opportunity to learn from others but also to reflect on how we are doing things. What is clear from the discussions we had with our Czech colleagues is that the Board has done a lot of positive work over the past year and is continuing to improve parole by working with others

in the justice system.

## **Visiting Rye Hill Prison**

During May I also had the pleasure of visiting HMP Rye Hill.

The day was a real success. I was really impressed with all the residents and staff that I had the pleasure of meeting, all of whom communicated and engaged both confidently and articulately.

I hope that my visit went some way to demonstrate that the independent Parole Board is committed to reviewing each case on its merits and ensure that people who no longer represent a significant risk to the public are progressed or released.

I would like to sincerely thank all of the staff and residents at Rye Hill for the insightful and impressive day that I had.

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## **News story: National Drought Group – EA Chief Executive's Statement**

The National Drought Group (NDG) brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of dry weather by coordinating action to maintain water supplies and protect the environment.

The NDG met on Tuesday 4 June, chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, to assess the latest water resource situation and actions being taken to reduce the risk of drought this summer.

### **Current situation**

After the heatwave last year and a dry winter, this spring again saw lower than average rainfall. Low rainfall in April and May, particularly in the East of England, has seen some river flows decline to lower than normal for the time of year. In the south and east, rainfall has not replenished groundwater stores, with levels now declining. While there is no threat to public water supply, these conditions are putting particular pressure on the environment and agriculture. It will be some time before conditions can return to normal. Rainfall over the next few weeks will not be sufficient.

### **Position of the water companies**

It is the responsibility of the water companies to maintain supplies. Despite the lack of full recovery in the water resources position over winter, most water companies have good reservoir storage for the summer.

The water companies confirmed they do not expect to need to bring in household water restrictions this summer (“hosepipe bans”) unless the next few months are exceptionally dry. One or two companies may need to apply for drought permits later this year, allowing them to take more water than usual from rivers or boreholes. While the current situation is manageable and there is no present threat to public water supplies, a third dry winter in 2019/20 would cause significant problems for summer 2020.

The water companies set out the actions they are taking to ensure maintenance of supply over the coming months, including:

- refilling their reservoirs where possible.
- taking action to find and reduce leaks.
- making water transfers around their networks and between companies to meet demand and rest some sources.
- taking forward a range of other work to increase the resilience of their networks, including bringing unused sources online and testing water standards.
- seeking to minimise the risk of unplanned outages and infrastructure failure by reviewing their assets and tackling known issues such as algal growth.
- working with farmers locally to identify ways to sustain and share water supplies
- ensuring that all potential sites are application-ready for drought permits.
- continuing to promote water efficiency and metering, including widening campaigns to target specific zones or groups of customers.

## **The Environment Agency**

The Environment Agency:

- has permitted temporary flexible abstraction to allow rapid access to water for abstractors within environmental limits. During 2018, it received 150 requests to flex of which two-thirds were agreed. In 2019, so far the EA has received 94 requests of which 90% have been approved.
- has extended the licence trading map from East Anglia to Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, East Midlands and West Midlands, to help abstractors look for opportunities to potentially access other abstractors’ unused water
- is reviewing the groundwater and surface water position to consider if more water could be made available during peak demands – by the means of flexible abstraction and rapid trading – wherever this can be done without damaging the environment and ensuring lawful abstraction is maintained.
- is ensuring that the water transfer schemes it owns and operates which support public water supply, such as the Ely Ouse Essex Transfer Scheme are operating, or are ready to operate when needed.
- is operating compensatory pumping schemes to support low river flows and protect the environment, such as the Slea augmentation scheme in Lincolnshire.
- has taken proactive action to protect wildlife and the environment, for

example by installing aerators on the Ouse washes earlier than normal to enhance oxygen levels to protect fish, and by loaning aerators and dissolved oxygen meters to angling clubs and fisheries across East Anglia.

- is continuing its enforcement activity to ensure abstractors comply with their licences to help minimise the impact on the environment.

## **Agriculture**

Low rainfall this winter and spring is causing increasing concern for water resource availability, both in surface water and groundwater abstraction for the forthcoming irrigation season, particularly in the east of England.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) and farmers are working closely with the EA, Internal Drainage Boards, water companies and Defra to manage the situation and sustain farming production, including through water trading and flexible abstractions that are now in place in some catchments. Working with the NFU and CLA the EA has held five advice sessions for farmers since January 2019.

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) have produced advice for farmers on coping with drought and securing resilient water supplies.

## **Environment**

We have seen some environmental issues including fish incidents, algae bloom and wildfires, comparatively early this year. Groundwater chalk streams remain vulnerable if dry weather continues and is exacerbated by high temperatures.

The group noted growing concern over the potential impacts of prolonged dry weather on the environment and the cumulative effect from last year. Another dry summer could cause significant and widespread impacts on the environment.

## **Navigation**

The Environment Agency and Canal and Rivers Trust are working together to advise boaters of best practice to help conserve water in the lock systems and asking them to consider sharing locks where possible – as they always do in summer.

## **Advice to the public**

There is enough water for all if water resources are managed properly. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that this happens. At present the average person in the UK uses 140 litres of water a day: long term water security will require all of us to reduce that figure.

The NDG reaffirmed its core message to the public: please use water wisely.

## **Conclusions and next steps**

The Environment Agency, water companies and others agreed to sustain their efforts to ensure that water users and the environment continue to get the water they need, and to further strengthen their collaboration to this end. They agreed to stay in close touch at national and local level, and that the NDG would meet again in late July to assess the latest situation and take any further necessary measures.