

# Press release: Grass greener, but rain needed to reduce drought-risk for 2019

- National Drought Group agrees action to reduce risk of drought in 2019
- More than 300 dry-weather environmental incidents this summer
- Water restrictions likely in spring 2019 if winter rainfall is below average.

The National Drought Group (NDG) met today (20 September) to assess the latest situation and agree actions needed to reduce the risk of water restrictions and protect the environment next year.

Members of the NDG, organisations affected by and responding to the risk of drought, heard that a number of water companies still have very low reservoir levels. The current environmental situation is fragile and dependent on good rainfall over the autumn and winter period.

The dry summer had a significant impact on water supplies, agriculture, the environment and wildlife, with the Environment Agency responding to 314 dry weather related incidents over summer – more than 3 times the usual amount.

Despite the recent rainfall, which has provided respite to rivers, wildlife and people's lawns around the country, the water resources situation has not yet returned to normal. At the end of August, overall reservoir stocks were at 65 per cent. The NDG heard today that if winter rainfall is below average, water restrictions on water company customers are likely in spring 2019.

Following the dry summer, Sir James Bevan, Environment Agency Chief Executive, invited water company representatives back to the NDG to explain their plans to protect water supplies and the environment. Today, they outlined a range of steps to reduce the risk of restrictions and ensure good water supplies into next year. Water companies are working to reduce leakage, capture and store as much water as possible over winter, identifying new water sources, setting up water transfers between companies and other operational contingency measures.

The summer has been tough on farmers. The Environment Agency responded quickly providing help and assistance with speedy decisions on allowing more water to farmers through August by approving 88 changes to licences to help farmers get more water.

Efforts to conserve water and recent rain has helped to stabilise water levels, easing pressure on the environment and agricultural sector. But the full impact of the summer heatwave is yet to be felt, with a delay on damage to some species and crops. With very dry soils, especially in the south east of England, there may be a delay refilling groundwater aquifers and reservoirs over the coming months. A delay in recharge may mean we start spring 2019 with below average groundwater levels, increasing the risk of drought in the east and south east of England next summer.

Sir James Bevan, Environment Agency Chief Executive, who chaired the NDG meeting, reminding members that early action and proper planning will reduce the likelihood, or extent, of drought measures next year. He said:

Ensuring sufficient water for the public, the economy and the environment is one of biggest challenges we face as a country. The Environment Agency will continue to work actively with the water companies and other water users to seek to ensure that.

But this is not just a matter for the organisations at National Drought Group. We all use water, and everyone has a role to play in ensuring we continue to have reliable access to it, so we encourage everyone to please use water wisely.

Notes to Editors

1. The full statement from NDG Chair and Environment Agency Chief Executive Sir James Bevan is available on request and will be on GOV.UK today.
2. List of attendees at this meeting:

Affinity Water; Anglian Water; Bristol Water; Cabinet Office; Canal and River Trust; Consumer Council for Water; Defra; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Drinking Water Inspectorate; Energy UK; Environment Agency; Met Office; National Farmers Union; Natural England; Northumbrian Water; Essex and Suffolk Water; Ofwat; Portsmouth Water; Public Health England; RSPB; SES Water; Severn Trent Water; South East Water; South Staffs Water; South West Water; Southern Water; Thames Water; United Utilities; Water Scan; Water UK; Wessex Water; and Yorkshire Water.

Ends.

For media enquiries, please call:  
Environment Agency press office: 020 7714 1500

---

## **Press release: Environment Agency and Fire Service team up to tackle emergencies**

The Environment Agency and the Fire & Rescue Service are rolling out new equipment which could save lives, land and property across the country from flooding by connecting fire service hoses to the EA's high-volume trailer

mounted pumps.

The two organisations have developed a 'hose coupling adaptor' which will give the Environment Agency access to over 150,000 metres of hose stored by the Fire & Rescue Service at locations around the country. This will enable the Environment Agency to get pumps to the communities that need them most, more quickly in a flood.

The new kit, developed between the Environment Agency Northumberland, Durham and Tees Field Team and the County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service will benefit communities by providing access to high-volume pumps which can move as much as 7,000 litres of water per minute and can pump over a distance of 3 kilometres.

The adaptor has already been put to good use in tackling the large protracted wildfire on Saddleworth Moor, Greater Manchester during, the hot, dry summer. It is now being rolled out nationally and will play a major role in the Environment Agency's preparations for winter flooding.

Caroline Douglass, Director of Incident Management & Resilience, Environment Agency said:

As an emergency responder, the Environment Agency attends many incidents alongside the Fire & Rescue Service and this innovation is another great example of us working together to provide greater safety for communities across the country.

With winter around the corner, we have 6,500 staff trained to respond to flooding and this new kit will form an important part of our preparation.

Chris Lowther, Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Operations Coordination Committee, said:

This new equipment is a result of excellent collaboration between the Environment Agency and the Fire & Rescue Service, which means we will be better placed to tackle flooding.

We are committed to working alongside other blue light services and partners to ensure the best possible response is delivered to communities when they are affected by flooding. Being able to mobilise assets from across the country quickly is an essential part of our national resilience response, meaning the public can have confidence that the emergency services can and will respond quickly when needed.

The Environment Agency continues to use new technology to prepare for and respond to floods, including investment in 40km of temporary flood barriers and 250 high volume pumps. The Environment Agency also has 6,500 trained staff across the country ready to respond to flooding, including 500 flood support officers.

The Environment Agency provides year-round advice to residents and businesses on how to protect themselves, their property and possessions against flooding. To check your flood risk, prepare for flooding and sign up for free flood warnings visit: [check your flood risk](#)

---

## **News story: Appointments to National Park and AONB boards**

Appointments to England's National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Conservation Boards have been made by Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove.

National Park Authority members have a primary responsibility to ensure that the Authority furthers the statutory purposes of the Park. Five members have recently been appointed for four-year terms (ending June 2022) on the following National Park Authorities and Broads Authority:

- Broads Authority: Simon Roberts
- North York Moors: Patrick James
- Peak District: Ken Smith
- South Downs: Graham Morrison
- Yorkshire Dales: Julie Hutton

Additional information regarding the members listed will be made available on the [individual Authority websites](#).

Secretary of State Members on AONB Conservation Boards have a primary responsibility to ensure that the Conservation Board furthers the statutory AONB purposes as set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Six members have recently been appointed for three-year terms (ending June 2021) on the following AONB Conservation Boards:

- Cotswolds AONB: Nicholas Bumford, Jaqui Fenn, Catherine Le Grice-Mack, Garry King and Andy Parsons
- Chilterns AONB: Elaine King

Additional information regarding the members listed will be made available on the [Cotswolds AONB](#) and [Chilterns AONB](#) websites.

The following reappointments to the National Park Authorities and Chilterns AONB Conservation Board have also been made in April 2018:

- Peak District NPA: Paul Ancell for 2 years
- South Downs NPA: Sebastian Anstruther and Margaret Paren for 2 years,
- Exmoor NPA: Robin Milton for 2 years
- Northumberland NPA: Jean Davidson and Fiona Gough for 4 years
- Lake District NPA: Peter Allen for 4 years
- Chilterns AONB: Ray Payne for 3 years
- Yorkshire Dales NPA: Julie Martin for 4 years
- Lake District NPA: Cathryn Hayhurst for 4 years

The appointments are made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Ministerial Code on Public Appointments, and are made on merit. There is a requirement for appointees' political activity during the past five years (if significant) to be declared. None of these appointees declared significant political activity.

---

## **Press release: Torcross nominated for international engineering award**

Torcross sea defence repair is one of 10 projects worldwide nominated for the Institution of Civil Engineers People's Choice Award 2018.

The award recognises top civil engineering projects and the winner is chosen by public vote. Anyone can vote – you can read about each of the 10 projects and vote on the [ICE Website](#). Voting closes on 28 September 2018.

The Environment Agency team based in Devon worked with contractors Bam Nuttall Mott Macdonald Joint Venture (BMM JV) to complete the £2.4m project within 14 months of problems being identified. The work was funded by Defra flood defence grant in aid.

The original seawall was constructed in the 1980s, protecting a row of properties along the seafront. Significant storms since 2014 had caused beach levels to drop, leaving the wall's foundations exposed. The winter storms of 2015/16 damaged the connecting road and caused movement in the wall and promenade. This indicated that the defence had been weakened and may no longer offer protection to adjacent properties.

The project had a tight deadline. The Environment Agency needed to identify the underlying issues with the wall and rectify them before the next winter storms arrived. The team faced a variety of challenges including tides encroaching into the working area, constrained access routes and a high risk of unexploded ordnance as Exercise Tiger – a live-fire training exercise for the D-Day landings – took place on the beach.

Environment Agency Project Manager Becky Richards said:

We would love Torcross to win this very prestigious industry award, but the competition is tough and we need votes to help us get to the top.

I'd like to thank all involved in getting us nominated, especially the local community who were really understanding throughout construction. Working with the tides meant long, noisy shifts. We couldn't have completed the project so quickly without the support of people in Torcross.

Voting for Torcross takes less than a minute and you could help a local project be recognised as the international top civil engineering project of the year. The winner of this year's People's Choice Award will be announced on 6 November 2018.

---

## **Notice: Police Rowing Champs: river restriction notice**

River Thames restriction information for Friday 21 September 2018.