

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

[First phase of university transformation plan announced](#)

Proposals include new £35m facility in Dumfries & Galloway in SRUC transformation into Scotland's new rural university by 2022.

News story: National Drought Group – Chairman’s Statement – September 2018

The NDG convened on Thursday 20 September to assess the present situation and review the action being taken to reduce the risk of drought in 2019.

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More than 300 dry-weather environmental incidents in summer 2018

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](#)