
MANAGING THE DROUGHT AND WATER RESOURCES

Key Issues Statements
approved by the Board of the NRA
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NRA

National Rivers Authority

NRA Offices

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GENERAL

1. *Over the last four years parts of Eastern and Southern England have been short of the equivalent of ten months rainfall. Some other areas of England and Wales have also suffered a serious shortage of rain. In parts of the country, this has been the most prolonged dry period this century and consequently underground water reserves and some rivers are extremely low. However, some areas such as the North West have had sufficient rainfall for resources to be in a healthy state and no problems are expected.*
2. *The National Rivers Authority cannot cure a drought, but it can help to manage it. It is essential that rivers and wetlands are protected from permanent damage and that the needs of the public, industry and agriculture are balanced.*
3. *The water companies, industry and agriculture, and the public all have a role to play in helping to conserve water supplies, and the NRA is liaising closely with the major users. Businesses and farmers can help during periods of drought by minimising their use of water and the NRA has been helping them to plan for this. It is important that members of the public comply with any restrictions such as hosepipe or sprinkler bans in their water company areas. Saving water helps to protect the environment and helps the limited resources to meet the needs throughout a prolonged drought.*

LOW FLOWS

4. *The current drought is severe and it is unavoidable that many rivers and groundwater levels are very low. However, there are some rivers suffering low flows due to excessive abstraction as well as the drought. The NRA is taking positive action to solve these problems and will, where necessary, vary or revoke licences unless agreement is reached with water companies on the timetable for solving these problems.*
5. *The NRA has been carrying out detailed investigations into rivers with depleted flow due to excessive abstraction and in appropriate situations intend:*
 - (a) *to withdraw or amend abstraction licences and require abstractors to use alternative sources. Where abstractors can establish legal rights of compensation, the NRA will make use of existing legislative powers to charge compensation to the Water Resources Account to which all abstractors in a region contribute by means of abstraction charges. Where possible, companies will be encouraged to negotiate alternative agreed schemes of supply that avoid complex compensation arrangements.*

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10. *Surface water abstractions near tidal limits are favoured, but even here sufficient flows to protect the environmental interests of estuaries must be ensured.*
11. *Adequately treated effluents are an important water resource, and the NRA will expect such discharges to be made as far upstream as possible, rather than discharging into or near the sea.*
12. *Abstraction of surface water during winter when flows are normally higher is encouraged, together with storage so that summer demand can be met from the storage, and not from the river itself.*
13. *The NRA believes that in the long-term, users should be able to have sufficient water for their reasonable needs, but they must be prepared to pay the real economic cost which must take account of the cost of protecting the water environment. This will require legislative change and development of suitable techniques and the NRA will co-operate fully on these initiatives.*

WETLANDS

14. *It is essential that wetlands and other areas of significant environmental interest are protected. The NRA will ensure its own operations take account of this need. Where possible, the NRA will influence and regulate the activities of others towards this end as well.*

RIVER BUFFER ZONES

15. *River buffer zones of natural vegetation of 10m or more width can do much to improve the river environment by preventing pollution and silt reaching the rivers. Landowners could introduce such buffer zones quickly at relatively little cost.*

WISE USE OF WATER

16. *It is essential that everyone does all they can to use water wisely. Specialist advice and calls for restraint should be followed which include:*
 - *Repair dripping taps and any leaks;*
 - *Generally, do not use excessive amounts of water whether in baths or showers. Be aware of the amount of water used in the bathroom;*
 - *Try to use full loads for washing machines and dishwashers;*
 - *Do not waste water by letting hoses run while washing cars — turn it off when not actually being used, or better still use a bucket;*
 - *Do not over-water gardens. Less frequent but a good watering is better and uses less water in total;*
 - *Use a water butt to collect roof drainage for the garden;*
 - *Do not waste water on lawns. By not cutting the grass too short, it will help it stay green.*



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- (b) *Where alternative sources of public supply are not immediately available in a way that would allow the companies to meet their statutory obligations, the NRA will amend licences on the basis that alternative supplies will be promoted to agreed timetables and programmes.*
- (c) *The NRA is satisfied with its existing powers to enable abstraction licences to be amended and withdrawn where their use is in conflict with the statutory requirement for conservation, but it will also be discussing with Ministers the need for any further legislative measures that may be needed, with a view to their being included in the promised Environment Bill.*

NEW SOURCES

- 6. *Before any new sources are developed, it is essential that water companies make sure they are doing all they can to reduce leakage and to carry out effective demand management. The NRA supports selective domestic metering, with an appropriate tariff, in areas where water resources are stressed. Where it can be shown that proper attention is not being given to the control of leakage, or where appropriate consideration has not been given to the introduction of selective metering, the NRA will not grant licences for new sources. Some new sources are needed soon, but effective demand management and the sensible use of water could delay the need for new major sources by many years. The NRA's recently published discussion document on strategic options is an important initial step in the work. When suitable resources cannot be developed locally the NRA favours transfer of water from wetter regions where surplus resources are available to supplement resources in the drier regions. Water companies and others must co-operate with the NRA in taking this work forward. New sources take a number of years to develop and are not the answer to the current drought problems. These can only be realistically overcome by sensible use of water and demand management.*
- 7. *In areas hit by the drought, where there is any doubt about long term sustainability of resources, the NRA will not grant any new licences from these resources until the current drought is over and its impact can be assessed. New licences will only be granted where the NRA is confident that the available resources are able to sustain the proposed abstraction in the long term without harm to the environment.*
- 8. *The NRA has already announced a moratorium on new licences in the worst hit areas.*
- 9. *In many parts of the country, especially the South and East, groundwater supplies are fully utilised and the scope for further groundwater development is limited.*