

## Press release

### Assessing the relationship between agricultural groundwater abstraction and ecological impacts in the Cam and Ely Ouse catchment



The UK Irrigation Association (UKIA) is financially supporting a research project with Cranfield University to better understand the relationships between groundwater abstraction in the Cam and Ely Ouse catchment and the impacts that this has on riverine ecology.

All time-limited licences due to expire in 2015 and beyond are being assessed to ensure they comply with the EU-Water Framework Directive (WFD) and in some circumstances, licence conditions may change if there is a risk of environmental deterioration. The impact of this is likely to be felt initially in the Cam and Ely Ouse catchment.

These changes could have profound impacts on individual irrigated farming businesses, the nature and composition of irrigated agriculture and horticulture in the catchment (and nationally) as well as beyond the farm gate in terms of fresh produce supply chains. In particular, it raises important questions about how changes in future licensed allocation might impact on growers' ability to cope with future dry years, how they can maximise productivity and economic output and how best to plan strategically for changes in future water allocation.



Research is urgently needed to gather and assess the evidence available on the relationships between groundwater abstraction and impacts on

ecology as a basis for decision-making. This research project will gather available evidence in the catchment and will seek to:

- Understand the patterns of abstraction, river networks, geology and monitoring locations in the Cam and Ely Ouse;
- Understand the relative timing of maximum irrigation abstraction, maximum soil moisture deficits, minimum groundwater levels, and minimum river flows;
- Understand the vulnerability of the aquatic ecology in the Cam and Ely Ouse to abstraction and other pressures; and
- Produce recommendations for further work.

The research will be undertaken over between February and May 2015 by a group of postgraduate students and supported by Prof Ian Holman and Dr Jerry Knox from Cranfield University. Their report will be made available to members of the UKIA following completion of the work.

Melvyn Kay

UKIA Exec Secretary

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