

Prolonged Dry Weather in East Anglia Area. 15 July 2022

IDB & Abstractor Groups briefing.

Purpose of this briefing

East Anglia is experiencing a period of Prolonged Dry Weather. The purpose of this briefing is to explain where is affected, to outline what this means for the community, and what actions we are taking to minimise damage to the environment.

Potential impacts on the environment and our response

A lack of water in the environment can have severe impacts such as rivers and other habitats drying out which can lead to fish in distress, reduced river flows can exacerbate small pollution incidents causing more damage than at times of normal flow. Our officers assess reports of such incidents and will decide how best to respond and deal with the situation.

As we move into Prolonged Dry Weather, we increase our monitoring of the environment using our telemetry systems and physical observations.

Our teams prepare to respond to reports of environmental incidents because of Prolonged Dry Weather, this could include river pollution and/or fish mortalities.

We increase our communication with partners and the public and encourage everyone to be careful in their use of water.

Background: Prolonged Dry Weather

Winter is when we usually receive rainfall that recharges groundwater and provides flows in our rivers. Last year this recharge was modest and so far, 2022 has been dry; in the last three months we have only received between 54%-69% of long-term average rainfall across East Anglia.

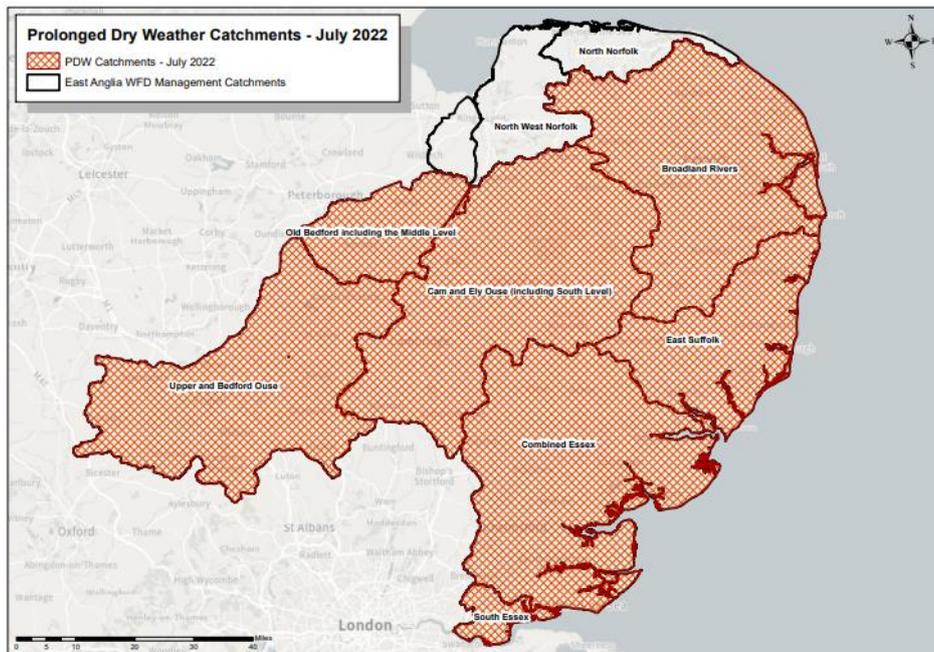
This has led to low or notably low river levels which puts a strain on water availability for people, agriculture, business, and the environment. A period of prolonged dry weather can lead to drought conditions.

We have been monitoring the situation for a number of weeks now, reviewing the range of dry weather indicators, including groundwater levels, surface water flows and impacts on the environment.

The reduced rainfall experienced over the last three months and the recent increase in temperatures have all contributed to a deterioration in surface water flows.

We have started to record, and have received reports from others, of environmental issues exacerbated by low river flows and the deterioration in water quality.

Areas affected include: the Upper Bedford Ouse, Cam & Ely Ouse, Old Bedford & Middle Level, Broadland (excluding the rivers Wensum and Bure), East Suffolk, and Essex catchments in East Anglia Area.



Map of Prolonged Dry Weather catchments in East Anglia

We are responsible for safeguarding water resources in the East Anglia area and protecting the environment. We have a role in making sure that water companies can secure public water supplies but must also ensure that they cause no unacceptable environmental damage. Other water users (agriculture and industry) make use of raw water directly from rivers or underground strata and we have a duty to ensure that they too avoid causing environmental damage. We must ensure that water is used efficiently by water companies and other users. We plan and manage how much water is taken from rivers and underground through a system of licences.

We are working with partners, including Internal Drainage Boards, farmers, and water companies, to manage abstraction and, where necessary, we are asking abstractors to reduce the amounts they take, in accordance with their licence conditions.

If the hot and dry period persists, we cannot rule out imposing more formal restrictions to abstraction if required.

Working with water companies

We are liaising with water companies to share information on water availability, operational activities and to understand any emerging concerns.

Importantly, the water companies who operate and supply water in this area have assured us that for this summer, water will be available without restrictions. However, they are keen to emphasise their own messages regarding the careful and efficient use of water, and to make sustainable water savings, not just now but also on an ongoing basis.

Working with abstractors

We are working with farmers, businesses, and other abstractors to manage water availability and ensure that as far as possible they get the water, they need to be resilient while maintaining our protection of the environment.

Abstraction licence holders in the most affected areas may already have received notice to restrict the amount of water they take as described in their licence conditions. This may take the form of taking reduced quantities or only abstracting at times, depending on local circumstances. We are encouraging farmers to check their abstraction licenses to make sure they are fit for purpose to meet their current and future water needs.

We can all do our part to use water wisely and manage this precious resource, and there are useful water saving tips for us all at [Waterwise](#).

We encourage the public to report sightings of fish in distress or other impacts on the environment by telephoning our 24hr Incident Hotline: 0800 80 70 60.

If you would like further information

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www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency