

27 February 2023

Initial prospects for irrigation - forecast for 2023

Summary

Our initial prospects for irrigation across England in 2023 ranges from good through to moderate to poor (the latter for East Anglia). Figure 1 shows a map of irrigation prospects for 2023. The insert shows the position this time last year which was again variable, but southern and eastern counties were only moderate.

We encourage irrigators to take action now to safeguard supplies for the summer, especially those in areas classed as moderate to poor. Possible actions include:

- Maximising opportunities to refill reservoirs
- Contacting us if having refill problems
- Planning cropping to meet reduced water availability

The irrigation prospects reflect the water situation using current river flows, groundwater conditions and latest available weather forecasts. The moderate to poor forecast for East Anglia is due to water resources not yet fully recovering from the drought in 2022 with reduced rainfall since mid January. Overall rainfall between November 2022 to January 2023 for England was 127% of the long term average (LTA). This national average masked variabilities across the country, with Norfolk having received below average rainfall in January (75% of LTA).

February's rainfall is likely to be well below average in much of the country, including East Anglia. The current outlook is for the dry weather to continue into March with a higher than normal chance of a dry spring. Following the predominately dry weather since mid January many rivers are now classed as below normal or lower for the time of year. Groundwater levels in many places responded well to the rainfall in the autumn and early winter. With recent dry weather, recharge has stopped or slowed, which is a concern. Some groundwater levels are still below normal, especially in parts of East Anglia and any further recharge will be dependent on sufficient rainfall later in March and April.

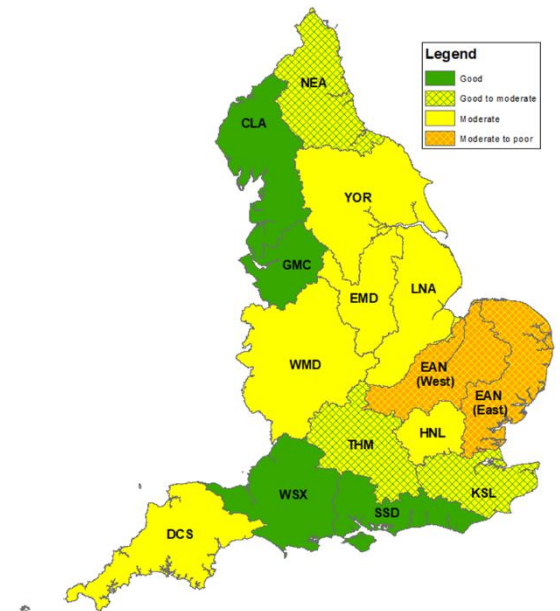
We will reflect any further changes in our next prospects which will be released in late spring.

More information on the water situation is available at [Water situation reports for England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-situation-reports-for-england).

More information on weather forecasts is available at [three month Met Office forecast](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/long-range-forecast) and <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/long-range-forecast>

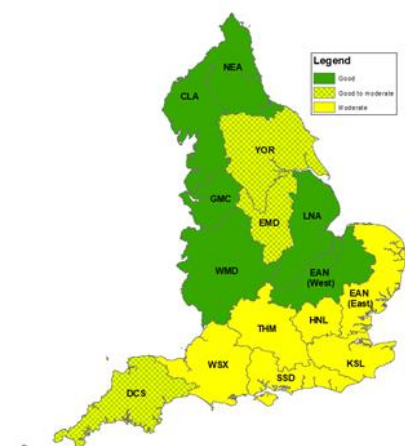
More detailed Area irrigation prospects are contained in a separate accompanying document at [Technical articles | Farming Advice Service](#) with abstraction information also available at [prolonged dry weather abstraction](#).

Figure 1 - Initial Irrigation Prospects spring - summer 2023



Environment Agency
Creation date: February 2023

Initial Irrigation Prospects spring - summer 2022



Environment Agency
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customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

Definitions

Prospects for spray irrigation are defined as ‘Good’, ‘Moderate’ or ‘Poor’.

Good	Water levels are average or above average and supplies are expected to be safe. There is a possibility of minor local controls on abstraction from surface water in late summer if the weather is exceptionally hot and dry.
Moderate	Water levels are low. Some controls on surface water abstraction are possible by midsummer if the weather is hot and dry. Controls on abstraction from groundwater are possible in small, sensitive groundwater areas.
Poor	Water levels are well below average. Soil moisture deficit is developing early and significant restrictions on abstraction from surface and groundwater are probable.

Kelly Hewson-Fisher, the NFU’s Water Resources National Specialist said, “Coming to the end of winter 2023 we are starting from a more challenging position in parts of the country compared to that experienced this time last year. Many reservoirs finished the 2022 irrigation season empty or at least lower than previous years and so every drop will be needed to secure filling. We have two areas of England still in drought status and reservoir fill for some continues to be a concern and a challenge. The picture is extremely varied and with very little rain on the immediate and longer term (three month) forecast farmers continue to closely monitor the weather and water availability as we move into spring as the demand for irrigation builds”.

Prospects for individual areas

Area	Prospects for 2023
Environment Agency Cumbria and Lancashire	Good
Environment Agency Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Moderate
Environment Agency East Anglia East (covering Essex Norfolk and Suffolk)	Moderate to Poor
Environment Agency East Anglia West (covering Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire)	Moderate to Poor
Environment Agency East Midlands	Moderate
Environment Agency Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire	Good
Environment Agency Hertfordshire and North London	Moderate
Environment Agency Kent, South London and East Sussex	Good to Moderate
Environment Agency Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire	Moderate
Environment Agency North East	Good to Moderate
Environment Agency Solent and South Downs	Good
Environment Agency Thames	Good to Moderate
Environment Agency Wessex	Good
Environment Agency West Midlands	Moderate
Environment Agency Yorkshire	Good to Moderate