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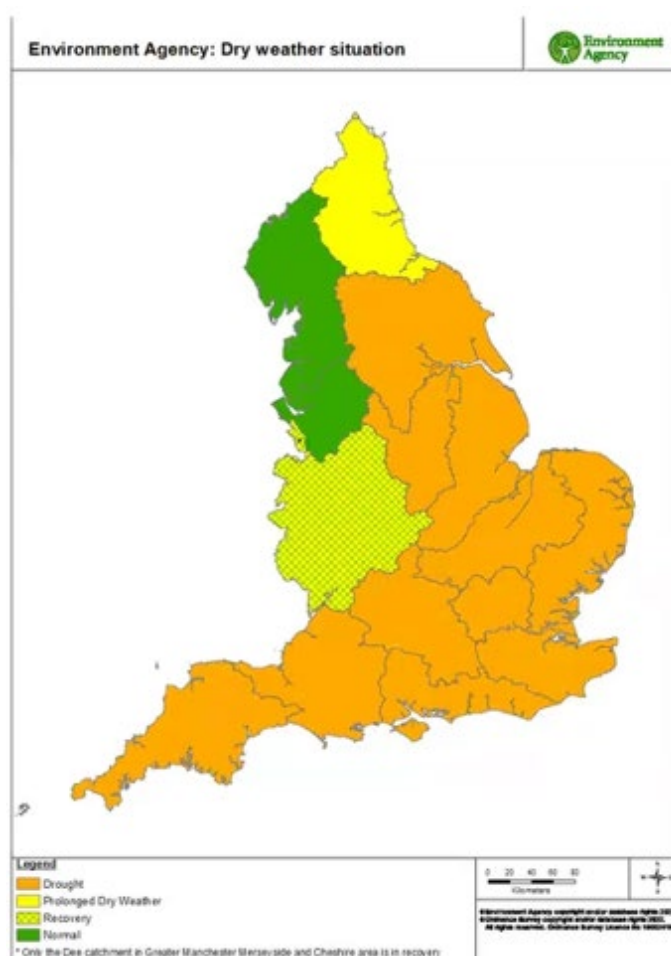
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### On-going dry weather update

The National Drought Group met on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November to continue to discuss the response to the driest summer in fifty years. Water Minister Pow attended the meeting and Fayza Benlamkadem (Head of Land Use & Innovation, NFU) joined Kelly Hewson-Fisher (National Water Resources Specialist, NFU) at the meeting. You can view the press notice [here](#).

The Environment Agency announced that 10 of the 14 areas remain in drought status:

- Devon & Cornwall
- Solent and South Downs
- Kent and South London
- Herts and North London
- East Anglia
- Thames
- Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire
- East Midlands
- Yorkshire
- Wessex



### The voice of British farming

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### What does this mean?

Drought status means the Environment Agency (EA) and water companies will continue implementing the stages of their pre-agreed drought plans to manage the impacts. These plans follow local factors including reservoir levels, demand and forecasts, and may lead to precautionary actions such as Temporary Use Bans.

The move from drought status to recovery, will commence when the EA is satisfied the data shows that the position within those regions is improving.

### Why do we remain in drought status?

Whilst rainfall has occurred in September, October and November, with November seeing nearly 1½ times expected, this currently amounts to 80% of the long term average (LTA) for where we should be at this time of year and follows the challenging conditions seen in 2022. It's said that we had the driest July across England since 1935 and we had the driest July on record across east and south-east England (since records began in 1891).

Groundwater systems are recovering albeit slowly across the Eastern regions. These provide the base flows for our surface waters and need steady rainfall through this winter period to allow for aquifer recharge.

Further information on the water situation can be found here: [Water situation: national monthly reports for England 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-national-monthly-reports-for-england-2022). Regional pages are available to provide a further insight.

### EA working with water companies

The EA is liaising with water companies to share information on water availability, operational activities and to understand any emerging concerns. All water companies are enacting their drought plans to maintain water supply and many will continue with their Temporary Use Bans (TUBs).

### EA working with abstractors

The EA is 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 whilst maintaining protection of the environment. Filling winter storage reservoirs is the priority and whilst some are filling well, others, in the Eastern Region continue to have abstraction restricted due to low flows.

The EA is urging abstractors to review their licences to ensure that they continue to meet their needs for long term resilience. Where they do not have long term resilience then they should implement alternative solutions such as: review cropping plans, water efficiency, developing new sustainable sources of water or providing winter storage. There may also be scope for collaborating with others to share licensed volumes, if actions taken individually are insufficient to provide resilience. Abstractors should apply for any new or varied licences needed to support increased resilience well before the start of the irrigation season and preferably before cropping decisions are made. The EA has allowed local enforcement positions (LEPs) during this year's drought. LEPs are a response to exceptional events and abstractors should not plan to rely on LEPs to provide dry weather resilience as there is no guarantee they will be available.

Further information and EA contacts are available here: [Dry weather information and advice – NFUonline](https://www.nfuonline.co.uk/dry-weather-information-and-advice)

## Weather Forecast

The MetOffice outlook for the next 3 months (December, January and February) shows the large scale weather patterns starting to change, with high pressure building which blocks wetter systems reaching the UK, in turn tending to lead to drier and colder conditions. The chances of a drier winter are greater than normal however, that doesn't mean that there won't be wet periods.

## National Drought Group

The National Drought Group will continue to work together very closely. The Agriculture and Environment sub group will next meet on the 12<sup>th</sup> December with the National Drought Group convening on the 27<sup>th</sup> January.

## NFU Asks

### Short-term

- The sector needs certainty and assurance that winter storage reservoirs will be filled
  - at high flows and when water is available i.e. outside of licence timings. We had authorisation to abstract before 1<sup>st</sup> November, on a case by case basis by request to the EA however the flows were not there and this was not an option. We have authorisation in principle to abstract after 31<sup>st</sup> March however, this is again on a case by case basis on request to the EA and dependent on flows.
  - staged abstraction within water bodies to allow abstraction e.g. an agreement with all abstractors within a water body to work together

### Medium-term

- Funding to be provided for planning for the sector
- Further alignment of the process to support grant schemes for on farm storage resources
- Further funding to promote more on farm storage reservoirs e.g. future rounds under ATP
- Urgency of exploring options with water companies to access water

### Long-term

- Support and creation of a sustainable mechanism of funding for the agricultural sector to allow future participation with the National Framework and the research it requires
- National water infrastructure for the agri sector and multi sector opportunities in line with the Agri Water Resources Management Plan

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