

27 April 2023

Updated prospects for irrigation - forecast for 2023

Summary

Our updated prospects for irrigation across England in 2023 ranges from good through to moderate. Figure 1 shows a map of irrigation prospects for 2023 predominantly under average rainfall conditions. The insert shows the position in February 2023 when we produced the initial irrigation prospects.

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 irrigation prospects are generally seeing an improving or stabilising picture in all areas. It was the wettest March across England since 1981 with monthly rainfall totals above average in all catchments across England. Rain has typically continued into April and around normal rainfall totals for the month in many catchments are expected. Overall rainfall between January to March 2023 in England was 109% of the long term average (LTA).

This has helped reservoir stocks and groundwater levels continue to recover. Groundwater levels at some sites are still below normal for the time of year, but the majority are in the normal range. Most river flows are classed as normal or higher for the time of the year.

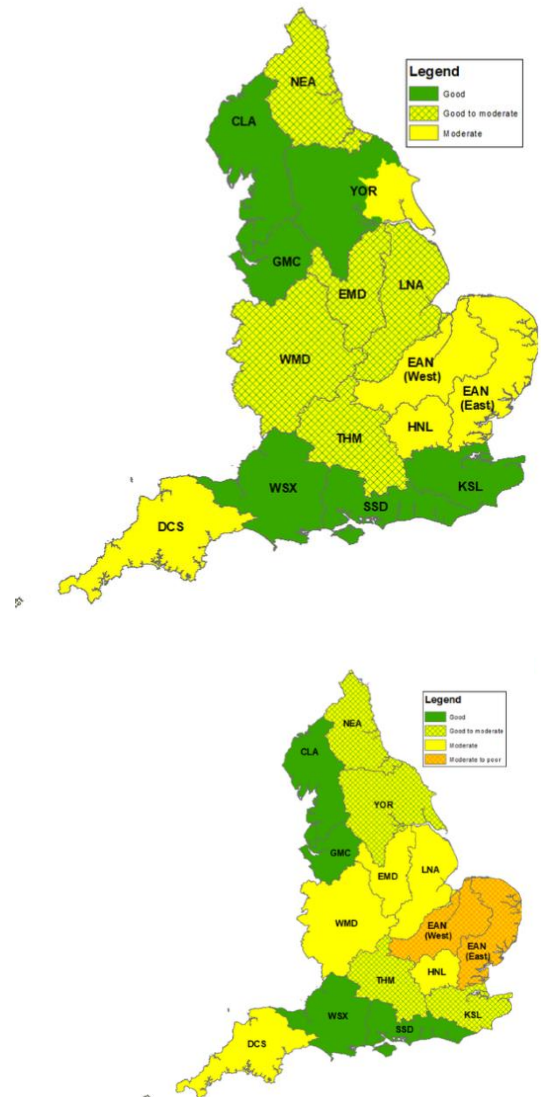
Predominately unsettled weather is forecast into May.

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/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 - Updated Irrigation Prospects spring - summer 2023



Environment Agency
Creation date: February 2023

NB Yorkshire Area was shown as moderate in the map in the initial Irrigation Prospects in error. This map now shows the correct Initial Irrigation Prospects for the Area in line with the Initial Prospects as Good to Moderate.

Definitions

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

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

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, "following a dry start to 2023, the rainfall in March was welcomed to support reservoir fill for many farmers. We continue to have two areas of England still in drought status and the focus remains on supporting those areas. The weather forecast remains varied. However, the longer term (three month) trend could see drier and warmer conditions. Monitoring the weather and water availability will continue as we move through the irrigation season as demand for water 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
Environment Agency East Anglia West (covering Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire)	Moderate
Environment Agency East Midlands	Good to 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
Environment Agency Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire	Good to 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	Good to Moderate
Environment Agency Yorkshire	Good in the West and are Moderate in the East*. *For more detail please refer to Yorkshire Prospects Forecast.