



Water Resources Forum, 27 October 2016

Briefing paper: Drought Plan

At the Water Resources Forum, on the 27 October 2016, we will provide an update on the Drought Plan (DP). The purpose of this paper is to provide background information.

In October we submitted our updated draft DP to Defra for approval to start the public consultation process. The updated DP covers the 5 year period to 2022 and demonstrates how we will respond to more severe droughts than have been experienced in the historical record. The plan is in accordance with the Drought Plan Guidelines (EA, 2016) and sets out the measures to achieve increased protection against more severe droughts.

The plan shows that, during the 5-year planning period, we can meet our planned levels of service for a range of more severe drought scenarios, although with less resilience. However the plan does not take account of the forecast increase in population in our supply area and associated increased demand for water, the future impacts of climate change on water available for supply, or potential future reductions in abstractions in order to provide greater protection for the environment, which are all forecast to have a significant effect in the Thames catchment.

Furthermore whilst the plan shows that we can maintain supply, it also shows that our current assets will be placed under great strain, impacting the robustness of the water system and potentially having a significant detrimental effect on the environment and ecology.

It is expected that more severe water use restrictions could be required for at least nine months, requiring a review of several, if not all, of our Drought Permits and Drought Orders for future drought plans.

The associated water use restrictions also have the potential to have a significant detrimental effect on a number of small businesses. Imposing a Drought Order to curtail non-essential water use for six months during a severe drought is estimated to cost businesses between £750 million to £1.7 billion¹.

The environmental and economic impacts have not been comprehensively evaluated for the current plan but would be important considerations when looking at the planning of future water resources over a longer timescale.

The associated increasing demand and reduced water availability have the potential to significantly affect the underlying supply demand balance and therefore the extent to which the DP could be relied upon to robustly protect customers from Level 4 water use restrictions in future periods. These aspects will be explored and developed further in our WRMP19 which will describe our longer term supply and demand position.

In summary, the DP for this planning period is robust, however there are significant potential issues for the future. Further assessment will be required to support future plans including the potential requirement for Environmental Assessment Reports (EARs) to cover a period of greater than 6 months and to address consecutive drought periods, and an understanding of the impact on small businesses of the imposition of Temporary Use Bans and Drought Orders for extended periods. The analysis to explore more severe droughts highlights the need for the Water Resources Management Plan to provide the significant resources requirement to address the future supply and demand balance and drought risk arising from population growth, climate change and the loss of existing resources associated with potential sustainability reductions.

¹ NERA 2012 A non-essential use drought order for London: economic impact assessment