

Important: Low water flows & levels

The decision has been taken by our Wessex Area drought team to move status from Normal to Prolonged dry weather.

Due to the recent long period of hot and dry weather, many of our rivers in Somerset are at low levels and it is becoming difficult for us to maintain the desired water penning levels as detailed in the Water Level Management Plans. This follows the fourth driest March to June 4-month period on record (since 1871) and the driest since 1976.

During this period, we would like all Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) and landowners to help us conserve water and minimise the impact on river flows.

Due to the very low levels, we are unlikely to grant requests to abstract more water, we therefore ask you take these actions:

- Look for opportunities to alter inlet control structures to reduce water taken into the IDB area. This will help to conserve the water held within penned rivers and ensure some water is available over the coming weeks if the dry weather continues.
- Repair leaky sluices or level control structures to preserve valuable water resources. The Environment Agency may be able to assist with a limited number of sandbags if required.
- Maintain non-viewed rhynes and ditches to help in distributing the limited water available throughout the system, taking care to prevent sediment pollution or fish kills.
- Low water levels in the ditches will mean wet fencing becomes less effective. Electric fencing may be required to deter cattle from straying into neighbouring fields.
- Cattle unable to drink from lower water levels may become an issue and an alternative drinking supply may be needed.

Please note:

- During this dry weather, the Environment Agency has penned water at a higher level where possible, to store more water for longer. However, this store of water has now been lost.
- We will not be able to respond immediately to requests to alter water levels for wet fencing. We will have to consider the impact of such changes on the wider river network and moors.
- Sudden storms after long periods of dry weather can lead to major pollution when stagnant ditch water is released into the main rivers and rhynes. Water level management structures

should therefore be opened slowly and with care, during heavy rainfall. This will minimise the chance of fish kills.

- To enable us to manage our water resources fairly, we will increase monitoring of abstraction and compliance with licence conditions during this period.

If you see any fish in distress in any river system, please tell us immediately by calling our **National Incident Hotline** on **0800 80 70 60**.