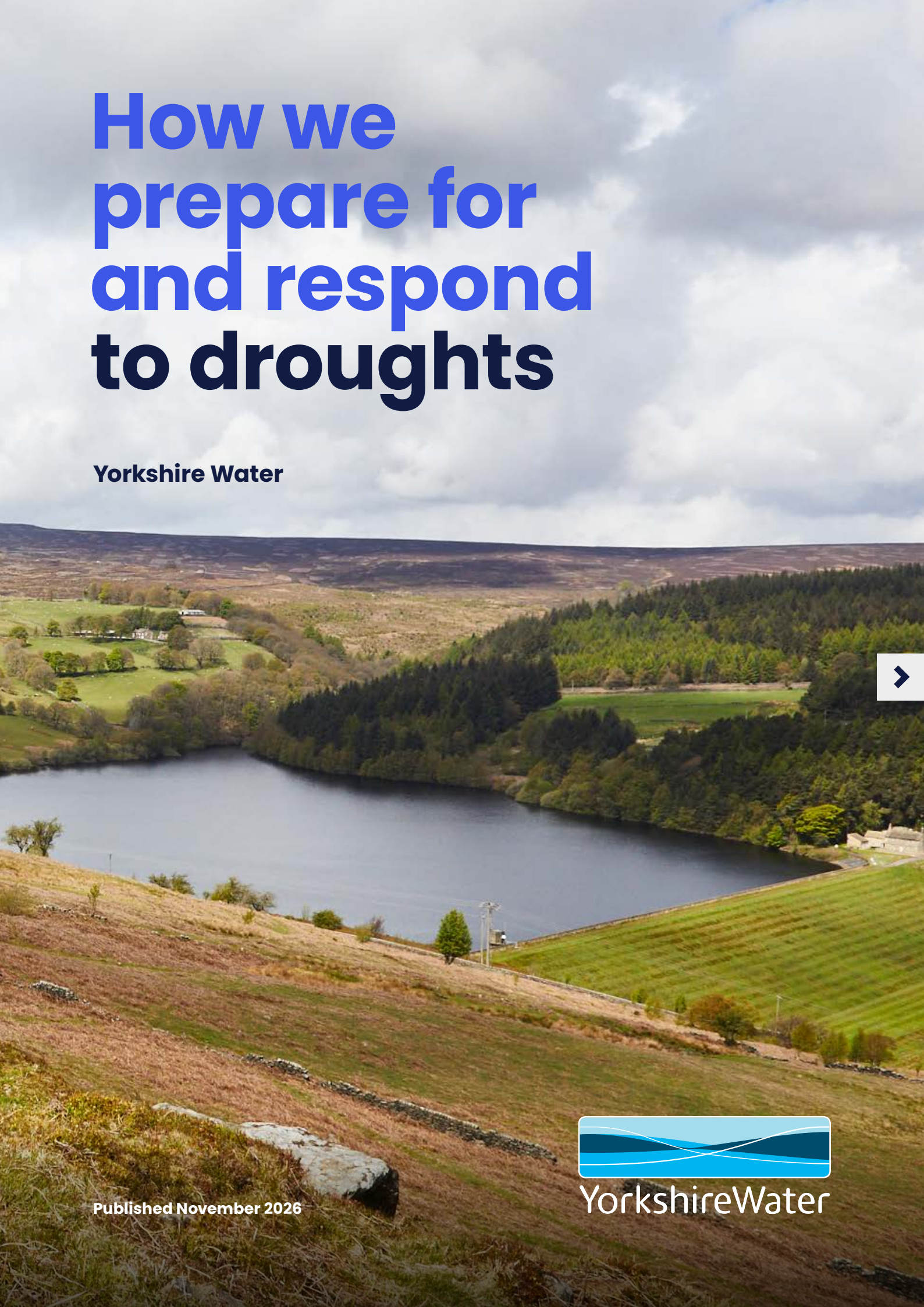
How we prepare for and respond to droughts

Yorkshire Water



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YorkshireWater

How to view this document

Contents page

Our contents page links to every section within this document. Clicking on a specific section will instantly take you to it.

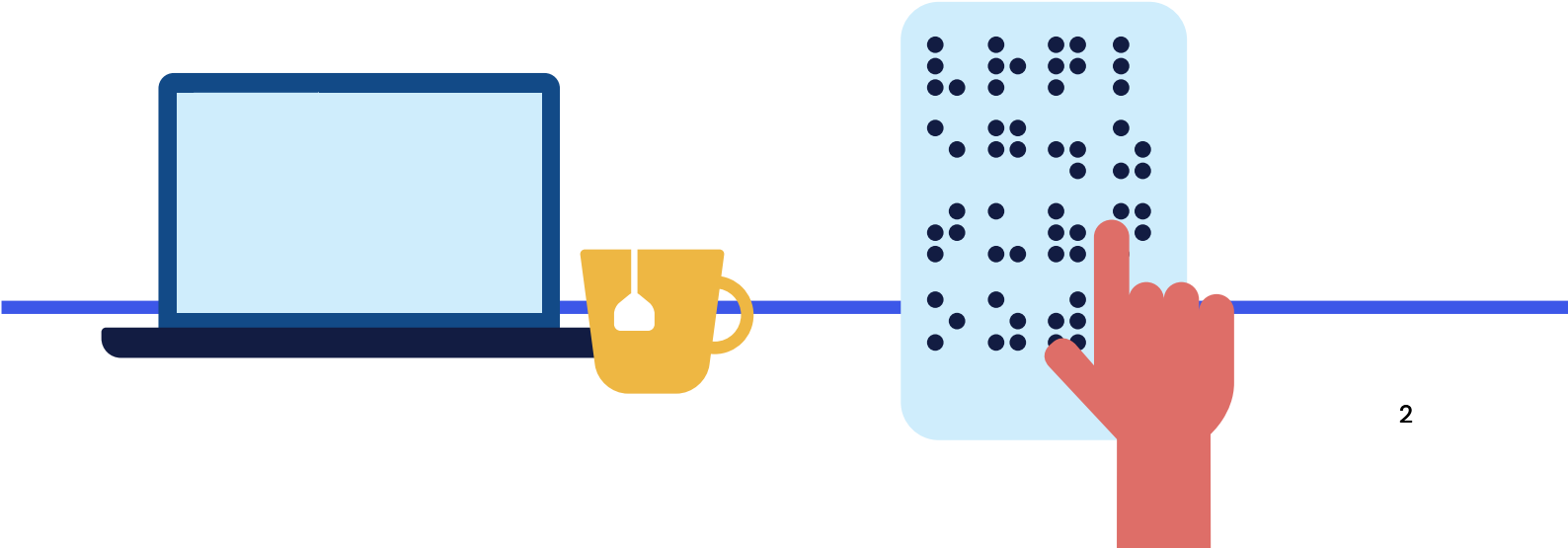
1. Click on the contents button to return to the contents page.
2. This button takes you to the previous page.
3. This button takes you to the next page.

There are also many other clickable links within this document which we've made easy to spot by underlining and **highlighting** them in blue.

Accessibility matters. It's really important that everyone can navigate our Drought summary plan.

To help with this, we've taken steps to make sure this document supports accessibility needs:

- Screen readers will recite content in a logical order, as well as spotting headers and using different text for images.
- Compatible with text-to-speech programmes and Braille displays.
- Easy navigation with contents table and bookmarked links.
- Simple text structure with clear headings, paragraphs and tables.
- Comfortable colour contrasts.



Contents

We've created colour-coded sections to help you to navigate this report easily. Just click on the section you are interested in on the contents page, and it will navigate you to that section.

The report is structured as follows:

Overview 04

What is a drought? 05

Our supply area 07

Drought levels and triggers 08

Water use and weather monitoring 10

Drought actions, what do they mean? 11

How You Can Help Protect Water Supplies During Dry Weather 14

Environmental assessment 17

Communications strategy 19

What has changed since our previous plan? 21

Glossary 22

Overview

Water is essential at home, at work and for the environment. We supply water to around 5.5 million people and 140,000 businesses every day. Our Drought Plan explains what we'll do before, during and after prolonged dry weather to keep water flowing and protect rivers and wildlife.

It aligns with our long-term Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP24), the Water Resources North (WReN) Regional Plan, statutory requirements, and the Environment Agency's 2025 Drought Plan Guidance.

This document provides a summary of our Drought Plan 2027. The full plan, appendices and supporting environmental documents can be viewed here.

Updates to our Drought Plan

This non-technical summary supports our Drought Plan 2027. We consulted on our plan in May - July 2026 and produced a Statement of Response. We will continue to review our plan regularly and revise every five years as a minimum.



What is a drought?

A drought is a naturally occurring, prolonged period of dry weather that can last from several weeks to several years. Droughts build up over months, not just during a hot spell. When there's not enough rainfall to replenish water supplies in rivers, reservoirs and underground sources, we enter a drought. Every drought is different and the duration, intensity and impact on customers and the environment will depend on rainfall, temperatures, and time of year.

What this plan means for you

A Drought Plan sets out the actions we'll take before, during, and after dry weather and droughts: how we monitor conditions, when we act, how we prioritise demand reduction ahead of supply measures, and how we'll communicate clearly with households, businesses, and other interested parties at each stage.

During most dry periods our supplies are sufficient to meet demand, and customers are not directly impacted. During droughts, we may need to take extra steps to make sure there is enough water for homes, businesses and essential services, while protecting the environment.

Our approach is step-by-step. We start with actions that help save water without formal restrictions, like enhanced water-saving advice, increased leakage reduction activity and operational changes to make the best use of our supply network. If dry conditions continue, we may need to introduce temporary restrictions on certain water using activities and apply for legal permissions to make short-term changes to how we manage water resources. More severe emergency actions that restrict water supplied to homes and businesses are a last resort and have never been implemented in our region.

Throughout a drought, we'll keep you updated on what's happening, what we're doing, and what we're asking you to do.

Links to our other water resource plans

Our Drought Plan is one of several plans we use for managing short- and long-term risks to meeting our customers' demand for water.

Our Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (WRMP24) sets out how we'll invest over the long-term to meet increasing demand, offset climate change impacts and reduce the water we take from rivers and groundwater sources where there could be a risk to the environment. You can find our WRMP24 online here.

Water Resources North - We're part of Water Resources North (WReN), alongside Northumbrian Water and Hartlepool Water (part of Anglian Water). During drought, WReN provides a forum to share data, align messaging where appropriate, and coordinate across sectors such as agriculture, navigation and energy. You can find our WReN Regional Plan here.

Our **Emergency Drought Plan** is an internal document that would only be needed if we reached level 4 drought. Unlike drought plans, there is no statutory requirement to publish emergency drought plans.



Our supply area

We provide an average of 1.3 billion litres of water to over five million domestic and 140,000 business customers each day. During dry weather, demand for water increases and some days we see water use rise by 15 per cent.

For planning purposes, our region is divided into two water resource zones – **the Grid Surface Water Zone** and the **East Surface Water Zone**. Over 99% of our customers are supplied by our grid zone, which has high interconnectivity, allowing water to be taken from a range of water sources and used flexibly to meet customer demand.

Across our region, we operate more than 100 reservoirs. Much of this water is treated and supplied to customers. We also manage compensation water flows from our reservoirs into streams and rivers. These releases are part of legal agreements we hold with the Environment Agency that allow us to impound water. This means that during dry weather, the environment and downstream water users have a reliable flow, even when there is no rainfall.

As well as reservoirs, we're permitted to take water from 9 rivers and 50 groundwater sources each day. The water we take from all our sources is transferred to one of 50 water treatment works, where it's filtered and treated so that it's safe for drinking. It's then transferred to customers via 32,000km of pipelines.

Drought levels and triggers

The Environment Agency define drought levels that increase in severity. We use these levels to categorise drought conditions in our supply area.

Normal (non-drought) conditions

Our reservoirs are at levels that are average for the time of year, we may experience short summer heat waves.

Level 1: Prolonged dry weather

We're experiencing below average rainfall and our reservoir levels are lower than they are in most years.

Level 2: Drought

Rainfall, temperatures and low reservoir levels are indicating that we're in drought.

Level 3a: Drought

The dry weather continues for a prolonged period, and reservoirs are notably low.

Level 3b: Severe drought

Reservoirs are exceptionally low and there is no indication of the situation recovering soon.

Level 4: Severe drought

Reservoir levels reach unprecedented low levels and emergency action is needed.

Recovering drought

Rainfall levels are sufficient for reservoir storage to begin replenishing, and forecasts indicate that we'll soon return to normal conditions.

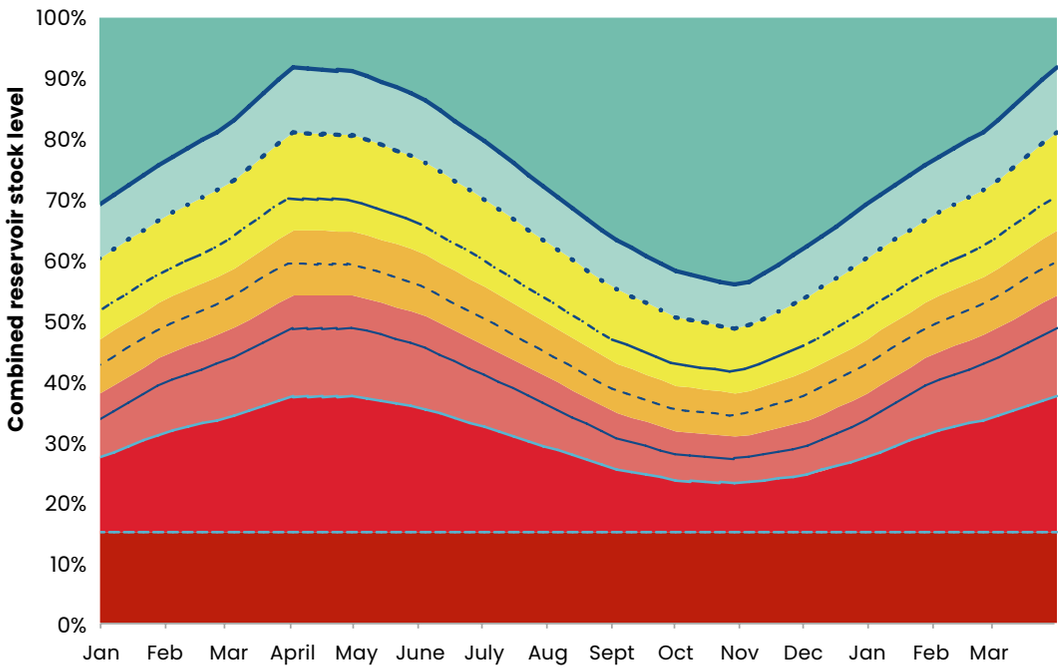
We often experience dry weather that doesn't lead to a drought and not all droughts progress to each level. Historically, we've never reached level 4 in Yorkshire. Our Drought Plan provides information on drought levels up to level 3b, at which point we'd transition to our Emergency Drought Plan.

Drought triggers

It's normal for our reservoir stock levels to reduce over the summer when there's typically less rainfall and hotter, drier weather. In most years, they replenish in autumn and winter and are full when we go into spring. In drought years, they may not replenish, or levels may reduce more rapidly over the summer months.

We use reservoir levels, rainfall forecasts, water use demand data and scenario modelling as drought indicators. Our reservoir levels determine our drought status and which actions we should consider implementing. Each drought status is represented by a reservoir band, and we use all our drought indicators in combination to decide when to implement the actions once in the band. To ensure we are ready to take action we will start preparatory activities for each action in the preceding band.

The combined volume of water stored in our reservoirs is presented in the diagram below to illustrate the drought status at different reservoir levels.



Band name	Upper boundary	Lower boundary
Above NCL	100% stocks	Normal Control Line (NCL; CL3)
Below NCL	NCL (CL3)	Environment Agency Control Line (EACL; CL4)
Level 1	EACL (CL4)	Midway between CL5 & CL6
Level 2	Midway between CL5 & CL6	Midway between CL6 & CL7
Level 3a	Midway between CL6 & CL7	CL8
Level 3b	CL8	15% stocks (CL10)
Level 4	15% stocks (CL10)	0% stocks

CL3 (NCL)
CL4-EACL
CL5
CL6
CL7
CL8
CL10

Figure 2-1: Drought level trigger bands

Water use and weather monitoring

We use a range of data to assess the risk to water supply at the onset, during and after a drought. Data we use is available on our website Water Situation Report

Reservoirs (how much water do we have)

We monitor our reservoirs both individually and in combination. They're organised into five geographical groups, reflecting the fact that different parts of the region can be affected differently by low rainfall. This approach allows us to redirect supplies across our grid system and to make decisions on drought actions.

The 5 reservoir groups are:

- **North**
- **North West**
- **South**
- **South West**
- **East**

Demand and rainfall indicators (how much is being used, and how much is coming in)

- We track **customer demand** to understand when people are using more water than usual. It's normal for demand to show summer spikes but heatwaves prolong periods of high demand which increases the rate of reservoir levels declining.
- We track **rainfall** and other weather factors including temperature and soil moisture deficit. If we have less rain than expected, our reservoir stocks and other water sources will be depleted.
- We model repeats of **historical droughts** to assess the risks of reaching trigger levels.
- **Weather forecasts** are also key to our decision making as they indicate if the situation will improve or get worse in the short term.

Drought actions, what do they mean?

We keep a close eye on how much water we have stored in our reservoirs and how quickly it's being used up. If stocks start to decline more than usual for the time of year, we start to take action ahead of a drought fully developing.

We have a range of drought options that we consider implementing as we move from normal conditions through to level 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Operational optimisation - in most years, we experience periods of dry weather, and we manage this by making operational changes to balance reservoir levels and avoid any area's supplies reducing disproportionately to the others. If reservoirs fall below the normal or average levels, it's common practice for us to prioritise the use of rivers and groundwater sources above the use of reservoirs as much as possible.

Appeals for constraint – we have an "always on" approach to water saving communications and will promote water efficiency and offer free devices regardless of the weather. In drought we enhance the tone and frequency of messaging.

Water is precious – please always use it wisely

Everyone can help by using less water at home and at work. Find practical tips and free resources on our **Save Water** page.

Visit **here** for more details.

Leakage and pressure reduction – we manage leakage and water pressure each year and we have objectives to achieve a year-on-year reduction in daily average leakage. During droughts, dry ground leads to increased leakage and we'll increase leakage control activity to counteract these breakouts. We'll also reduce pressure on our network within permitted minimum limits.

Water use restrictions – in some droughts we may need to limit water use to slow the rate of decline in our reservoirs until we receive sufficient rainfall for them to recover. These include:

- **Temporary use ban** – we can restrict specific usage such as using a hosepipe to water your garden, wash your car or fill a paddling pool.
- **Non-essential use ban** - requires Defra to grant an ordinary drought order that allows us to restrict specific non-household activities such as operating a mechanical vehicle washer, cleaning non-domestic premises, or watering outdoor plants at a commercial location. We would only impose if there was a clear benefit to do so.
- **Emergency restrictions** – requires Defra to grant an emergency drought order. These permit actions such as rota cuts (where customers' access to water is limited to certain times of day) or significant pressure reductions.

If restrictions are introduced, we will explain which activities are restricted, any exemptions that apply, and the support available for customers who may need additional help.

Customers on our Priority Services Register may use a hosepipe if they are physically unable, or cannot make reasonable adjustments for health reasons, to use a watering can or bucket safely. Customers who meet these criteria but are not on the Priority Services Register, including Blue Badge holders, should contact us to register. If we enter a severe drought we may remove these exemptions.



Our levels of service set expectations for how often restrictions might occur on average:

- **Temporary use bans:** no more than 1 in 25 years.
- **Non-essential use bans/supply-side drought permits & orders:** 1 in 50 years moving to 1 in 80 years from 2028.
- **Level 4 emergency measures:** 1 in 100 years, improving to 1 in 200 years in 2024 and 1 in 500 years by 2040.

Increasing supply – we may need to find ways to increase water supply availability or to conserve water in our reservoirs for longer. We can only do this if we're granted drought permits by the Environment Agency or ordinary drought orders by Defra.

- **Reduce reservoir Compensation Water Flows** – this conserves water in reservoirs for longer, which means it's available later in the year if the drought continues for both supply and maintaining a release into the environment at a lower volume.
- **River abstractions** – these options temporarily alter constraints on our river abstraction permissions to allow us to take water at lower flow levels or take a higher annual volume than usual.

Extreme drought options – if we reach level 3b we have more extreme demand reduction and supply options available. We'll implement those that will have the most benefit.

- Examples of extreme demand reduction options include a national demand reduction campaign to reduce water use to very low levels or extreme pressure management.
- Extreme supply option examples include new river abstractions and pipes to connect to treatment works and tankering of supplies. These require additional investigations and permissions such as environmental assessments and planning consents.

Drought actions: what we do first, and how actions escalate

Our drought action sequencing prioritises demand-reduction ahead of options to increase supply. This helps us to limit the impact of drought on the environment. Actions are implemented successively and accumulatively as a drought progresses through the levels.

Normal

- No drought actions in place.
- We make business as usual operational decisions.
- We deliver water use and leakage reduction activities.
- Customers can make small changes to save water all year round.

Level 1

- We make operational changes to manage supplies and conserve reservoir stocks.
- We enhance leakage control and reduce water pressure.
- Customers can take additional action to save water.

Level 2

- In summer months, a temporary use ban will be in place to limit usage.
- We continue to enhance leakage and pressure management.
- Households and businesses continue to save water where possible and adhere to the temporary use ban.

Level 3a

- We implement extreme drought actions to reduce demand further and to increase water supplies.
- We consider a non-essential use ban to restrict non-household use. We'd only impose if there was a clear benefit to do so.

Level 3b

- We implement extreme drought actions to reduce demand further.
- Initiate actions to introduce new supplies.
- Households and businesses limit water use as much as possible so that only using for essential purposes
- We prepare for level 4 activities in case needed.

Level 4

- We follow our Emergency Drought Plan.
- We convene an emergency response team.
- We take emergency actions permitted under an emergency drought order.

Drought recovery

When the situation returns to normal conditions, we revoke actions in reverse order and only if our data shows the risk of a return to drought is extremely low. We use the same indicators we use during drought (including reservoir levels and forecasts) to help decide when to lift measures. However, we often experience heavy rainfall following a drought meaning reservoirs refill extremely quickly and all actions may be lifted in quick succession.

How you can help protect water supplies during dry weather

Even in times of plentiful supply, we ask customers to use water wisely. Small changes made by lots of people can make a big difference in reducing the risk of restrictions and leaving more water in rivers and reservoirs for wildlife.

Saving water can also reduce your water bill if you have a metered supply and if you reduce hot water your energy bill too!

What We're Asking You To Do

In Your Home

- Keep water in the fridge - Instead of running the tap until it feels cold, keep a jug or bottle of drinking water in the fridge ready to use.
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth - A running tap can waste several litres of water every minute.
- Fill washing machines and dishwashers before use - Always try to wait until you have a full load before switching them on.
- Use a bowl for washing up - Using a bowl rather than running the tap continuously can save water every day.
- Choose shorter showers instead of baths - Reducing shower times by just a few minutes can save significant amounts of water.
- Install water-saving devices - Free water-efficiency products are available through **our website**.
- Check for leaks - Look out for dripping taps, leaking toilets or damaged pipework.
- If you spot a leak on our network, please report it to us straight away.

In Your Garden

- Reuse water where possible - Water used for rinsing vegetables or washing up bowls can often be reused for plants.
- Install a water butt - Collecting rainwater helps reduce demand on treated drinking water supplies.
- Use a watering can instead of a hosepipe - It's a more efficient way to water plants and helps reduce water use.
- Choose drought-tolerant plants - Selecting plants that need less water can help create a resilient garden during dry periods.
- Water wisely - Water plants during the early morning or evening to reduce evaporation.
- Let your lawn rest - Brown lawns are normal during dry weather and usually recover once rainfall returns.

Around Your Home

- Wash vehicles with a bucket and sponge - Using a bucket can use much less water than a hosepipe.
- Sweep rather than hose - Use a broom to clean patios, paths and driveways instead of washing them down with water.

As we enter drought and progress through the levels, we will heighten our appeals for water conservation and updates will be provided on the developing situation via the Yorkshire Water website.

Level 1: Prolonged dry weather

When rainfall is below average and water resources begin to decline customers can help by taking additional measures to reduce their water use. Such as:

- Stop using hosepipes where possible.
- Limit car washing.
- Avoid filling paddling pools.
- Reduce non-essential water use.
- Follow water efficiency advice provided by Yorkshire Water and shared through local media.

At this stage all requests are for voluntary demand reduction to help protect supplies and the environment and potentially avoid the need for restrictions.

Level 2: Drought

If drought conditions worsen, we may need to introduce a temporary use ban, often referred to as a hosepipe ban. This will prohibit certain uses and is legally enforceable. These restrictions apply to domestic or private use of water but require businesses to comply where relevant. Customers such as those on our Priority Services Register or Blue Badge holders may be exempt unless we are in extreme drought. When a temporary use ban is in place we will publish information on restrictions and exemptions. Some uses may be exempt for health, welfare or accessibility reasons, depending on the terms of the ban.

Activities restricted when a temporary use ban is in place:

- Watering a garden using a hosepipe.
- Cleaning a private motor-vehicle using a hosepipe.
- Watering plants on domestic or other non-commercial premises using a hosepipe.
- Cleaning a private leisure boat using a hosepipe.
- Filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool.
- Drawing water, using a hosepipe, for domestic recreational use.
- Filling or maintaining a domestic pond using a hosepipe.
- Filling or maintaining an ornamental fountain.
- Cleaning walls, or windows, of domestic premises using a hosepipe.
- Cleaning paths or patios using a hosepipe.
- Cleaning other artificial outdoor surfaces using a hosepipe.

Level 3a: Drought

If dry weather persists, we may impose a non-essential use ban which restricts commercial water use. Unlike a temporary use ban we do not have automatic authority to impose a non-essential use ban, but we can apply to Defra for an ordinary drought order. If this is granted we can enforce the actions listed below for up to six months with an option to extend. Some customers or activities are automatically exempt due to safety concerns. Full details of exemptions will be published if a ban is in place.

Water use activities that may be prohibited on successful application of an Ordinary Drought Order:

- Filling or maintaining a non-domestic swimming or paddling pool.
- Filling or maintaining a pond.
- Operating a mechanical vehicle-washer.
- Cleaning any vehicle, boat, aircraft or railway rolling stock.
- Cleaning non-domestic premises.
- Cleaning a window of a non-domestic building.
- Cleaning industrial plant.
- Suppressing dust.
- Operating cisterns in any building that is unoccupied and closed.

Watering outdoor plants on commercial premises using a hosepipe (does not include watering plants that are: grown or kept for sale or commercial use; or part of a National Plant Collection or temporary garden or flower display).

Level 3b: Severe drought

In a severe drought customers may also be asked to:

- Make significant reductions in daily water consumption.
- Follow additional restrictions - we may need to remove exemptions on temporary use and non-essential use bans.
- Support measures designed to protect drinking water supplies and sensitive environmental habitats.

Level 4: Severe drought

Regular communications will keep customers informed of restrictions, water-saving measures, and drought impacts. If conditions worsen significantly, emergency drought orders may be required as a last-resort measure.

Recovering drought

Water conservation remains important during recovery, as water resources can take time to return to normal levels. We will notify customers once water use restrictions are lifted. Customers will be encouraged to continue conserving water while reservoir and groundwater levels recover, helping reduce the risk of further restrictions.



Environmental assessment

Why we assess

Actions we take to reduce reservoir compensation water flows or increase river abstraction during droughts have potential environmental impacts. We carry out assessments and have an environmental monitoring plan to check conditions before, during and after the action. The plan is also screened under the Habitats Regulations and includes a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), ensuring the environment is considered throughout.

What we assess

For each potential action, we prepare an Environmental Assessment Report that looks at:

Habitats and species in the river or reservoir downstream (such as fish, invertebrates, protected species and designated sites).

Flows and levels (how a temporary change could affect river depth, river flows, wetted area, and habitat connectivity).

Water quality risks (total ammonia, phosphate and oxygen content within the rivers).

Cumulative effects (what else is happening in the area, including actions by other parties).

Duration and timing (short, time-limited changes, avoiding sensitive seasons like when fish are spawning where possible).

We screen all drought options under the Habitats Regulations and where a protected site could be affected we follow guidance from Natural England. The Drought Plan also goes through a Strategic Environmental Assessment process, so cumulative impacts are assessed not just each option in isolation.

Where we can support the wider environment and other water users

As a water company our statutory duty is to provide public water supply during dry weather. Where feasible and not contradicting our statutory obligation, we will take action to support the wider environment and other water users.

- We assess and monitor environmental impacts throughout a drought.
- We work with regulators and as part of the WReN Regional Group to help protect rivers, reservoirs and wildlife.
- We support fire teams at all times including during wildfires in dry weather by providing information on hydrants and the availability of network assets suitable for the purpose of firefighting.
- We can offer advice to people who are not our customers and rely on their own private water supplies, such as farms and rural properties.
- If you have a private water supply and prolonged dry weather affects your water availability or quality, you should contact your local council. Where there is a danger to life or human health they may contact us to provide alternative water supplies.



Communications strategy

We communicate the drought situation and request customers take action to reduce their water use throughout a drought, from onset through to recovery. We use an agile approach using multiple media channels and scaling communications up or down depending on how the drought develops.

We promote water efficiency throughout the year, adapting our advice to the season and increasing communications during periods of drought or high demand. We provide customers with drought situation updates and request water saving through our website, social media channels and local radio. We only use customer emails and text messages if we have prior consent. Our customer contact centres will be briefed to answer drought related questions, and we will engage with local media throughout the drought.

We engage regularly with the Environment Agency, as well as with retailers and new appointments and variations operating in our area. Other key stakeholders, such as Natural England, river trusts, agricultural representatives, anglers and recreational groups, will be kept informed and formally consulted where appropriate, depending on which drought actions are implemented.

We make customers aware of any need for water use restrictions or drought permit/order applications through media channels and formal notices published in newspapers.

We communicate the end of restrictions using the same channels we used to announce them and keep promoting water saving as part of our normal activities.

New appointments and variations are companies that provide a water and/or sewerage service. This is usually a water and/or sewerage service to new developments.

Water retailers are companies who supply water to non-domestic customers and either purchase wholesale water to supply non-domestic premises or introduce water into the supply system for supplying its own customers.

How businesses are affected by restrictions

- A temporary use ban is introduced primarily to reduce domestic use but some restrictions apply to commercial water users.
- A non-essential use ban impacts on commercial water users.

We notify retailers and new appointments and variations operating in our area in advance of imposing any restrictions.

Supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances

If you are older, have a disability, a long-term health condition, young children, or need extra help communicating with us, you may be eligible for our Priority Services Register (PSR). Joining the Priority Services Register is free and will not affect your water bill. As a PSR customer you are exempt from a temporary use ban unless we're in a severe drought (level 3b/4).

Priority Services Register

- Priority support during water supply interruptions.
- Alternative water supplies in emergencies.
- Information in accessible formats such as large print, Braille or audio.
- Additional help during severe weather and other incidents.
- Tailored communications and support when needed.
- Password scheme for home visits.
- Find out more or register on our website **Priority Services Register (PSR)**.

If you rely on a private water supply - Some households and businesses use private water supplies and are not a Yorkshire Water customer. This means they should have their own contingency plans for dry weather but may seek advice from their local authority or Yorkshire Water. In certain circumstances, where a local authority considers there to be a danger to human health, bottled water may be provided for a specified period.

What has changed since our previous plan?

We review and update our Drought Plan every five years as a minimum. Since we published our Drought Plan 2022, we have experienced drought in 2022 and 2025. Both droughts reached level 3a and tested our drought plan showing it to be effective. The 2025 drought highlighted some areas for improvement and work to identify solutions is still ongoing.

For our draft Drought Plan 2027, we've made changes to our drought action triggers to better align with the Environment Agency's drought status classification. We have also shortened the time between imposing a temporary use ban and submitting drought permit and order applications, and we have reviewed and updated our drought options.

Our region entered drought level 1 status in 2026 during the time we were developing our Drought Plan 2027. This has not led to any changes but we will review again once we return to normal conditions.

We review and update our Drought Plan every five years as a minimum.

Glossary

Abstraction	The removal of water from any source, either permanently or temporarily.
Compensation water flow	A compensation water flow is a mandatory release of water from a storage reservoir into a downstream river to maintain baseline aquatic life and flow.
Emergency drought order	A temporary legal order that allows water companies to restrict supply of water and take emergency action to protect water supplies during a drought.
Habitats regulations	The Habitats Regulations (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017) is domestic legislation which transposes the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives into UK law and replaces the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.
Habitats regulation assessment (HRA)	A HRA will identify whether actions will have an adverse effect on the integrity of European sites which are designated under the Habitats Directive.
Normal control line (NCL)	When reservoir stocks are above this line, our operations are considered business as usual and drought management actions are not required.
Ordinary drought order	An authorisation granted by the Secretary of State under drought conditions which restricts non-essential use of water and/or allows for abstraction/ impoundment outside the schedule of existing licences on a temporary basis.
Soil moisture deficit	Soil Moisture Deficit measures the amount of water needed to restore soil to saturation, serving as a critical indicator for monitoring emerging drought conditions, tracking spatial variations, and timing groundwater recharge.
Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) directive	The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive ensures significant environmental effects arising from proposed plans and programmes are identified, assessed, subjected to public participation, taken into account by decision-makers and monitored.

Thank you for reading

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YorkshireWater