



To whom it may concern

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Re: Application for a Drought Order – River Test Abstraction and Drought Order for restricting non-essential uses of water

Southern Water Services is submitting an application for a Drought Order to permit the abstraction of water from the River Test in excess of our current licensed limit of 355 megalitres per day (Ml/d).

This application is being made in response to the exceptional and sustained dry weather conditions experienced in 2025, which have resulted in a marked reduction in river flows across Hampshire.

Our hydrological modelling indicates that, should these dry conditions persist, abstraction at our Testwood facility will reach the Hands-Off Flow threshold before the end of August. Based on our current modelling, our current projected date for potentially needing to implement a Drought Order allowing us to continue our abstraction on the River Test below the Hands off Flow (HoF) of 355 Ml/d is 19 August 2025.

While this is based on a Reasonable Worst Case scenario, we are acting now to safeguard the water supply to our customers and to ensure the continued provision of essential services.

We are also submitting alongside the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), a Notice of a proposed HRA derogation. This is because the conclusion of our Stage 2 HRA was that for the River Itchen SAC, it is not possible to conclude that there will be no adverse effect from the proposed River Test Drought Order on site integrity for the River Itchen SAC even with mitigation in place, as the Atlantic Salmon population is linked across the two rivers. In consequence, consistent with the Environment Agency's guidance and advice, it was considered that an application should be made for a Drought Order in relation to the proposed HoF relaxation having considered imperative reasons of overriding public interest and provided compensation. The Notice sets out the suite of mitigation and compensation that will be provided.

The Met Office has described Spring 2025 as "exceptional", noting it as both the warmest and driest on record for the UK. June 2025 has since been confirmed as the hottest June ever recorded in England. These unprecedented conditions have created significant challenges for water resource management across the South East. In recognition of this, the Environment Agency has designated the South Downs and Solent as being in a state of "prolonged dry weather".

Southern Water is committed to protecting and enhancing the unique natural environments of Hampshire, including the internationally recognised chalk streams of the Test and Itchen. As part of our wider mitigation efforts, we are making significant environmental investments, including the proposed acquisition of land adjacent to these rivers, such as Woodmill on the River Itchen.

We have agreed a suite of environmental monitoring, mitigation and compensation measures in consultation with the Environment Agency and Natural England specific to the River Test. However, due to the lead-in times required to implement these schemes effectively, they will not be in place in time to mitigate the potential environmental impacts of the current drought.

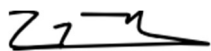
We are therefore applying for a Drought Order, in order to ensure resilience of supply during this period of extreme weather. We are confident that the mitigation and compensation package presented, once in place, will support a more robust, environmentally responsible position in future years and significantly reduce the likelihood of harm being caused by any future drought permits or orders.

Southern Water is also applying for a Drought Order for restricting non-essential uses of water (NEUB). This application is in line with the Environment Agency's national guidance which states that NEUBs must be in place before applying for any further drought permit or order applications that may be more environmentally damaging. We may need to implement a NEUB (if granted) prior to the implementation of any further Drought Orders needed for our abstraction licenses on the Rivers Test and Itchen. This is explained in more detail in the Application documents (namely, document 1.4 (Evidence that Southern Water has followed its' Drought Plan)).

In addition to the localised initiatives that are in place, Southern Water is continuing to invest in long term water security in the Hampshire region. This includes the partnership work with Portsmouth Water to deliver the Havant Thicket reservoir and the Southern Water water-recycling project that partners this. Other investment including the Southampton Link Main and the Andover Link Main will make it easier for us to move water to where it is needed during challenging periods.

We trust that this application, and the supporting evidence provided, will be considered with full regard to the exceptional and urgent nature of the current circumstances. A list of all the documents that form part of this submission is contained in the Executive Summary

Yours sincerely,



Tim McMahon
Managing Director – Water