

River Test Drought Permit Application

4.0 General Summary

19 July 2022

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Summary

Southern Water is applying for a drought permit under Section 79A the Water Resources Act (WRA) 1991 to make temporary amendments to abstraction licence 11/42/18.16/546 to abstract water from the River Test.

The suite of documents which form the application for the drought permit follows the requirements set out in **Appendix E** of the **EA guidance on drought permit and drought orders**, which was issued in 2019 and revised in 2021 (Environment Agency, 2021).

The proposed drought permit, sought for a period of six months from the date of issue, will involve an amendment to one condition of the abstraction licence, to:

- Reduce the River Test 'hands-off' flow condition (Condition 9.1) from 355 000 cubic metres per day to 265 000 cubic metres per day.

In making this application the company has: -

- Followed its drought plan, including its triggers and expected actions.
- Engaged customers and enhanced water efficiency promotion.
- Enhanced leakage reduction activity.
- Effectively managed outage.
- Considered other options and risks.
- Considered, prepared and appropriately implemented water use restrictions, with respect to the Hampshire Section 20 (S 20) Operating Agreement with the Environment Agency.

The application addresses the two 'tests' that there has been an 'exceptional shortage of rain' and that there is a 'threat to supplies'.

Our analyses of antecedent rainfall data finds that there has been an exceptional shortage of rain, especially from September 2021 through to July 2022. (With July also likely to be of very low total rainfall). We also note the provision to include forecast rainfall in the case for this permit. Further dry weather will clearly make the case yet stronger.

We also demonstrate the threat to supplies. This relates straightforwardly to the river flow recession of River Test. There is a credible risk the river flow could recede to the flow of 355 MI/d (Total Test Flow) at which, with no drought permit in place, the abstraction licence requires abstraction to stop. That poses a threat to supplies despite all the measures we can reasonably apply to manage our customers' demands and our need for abstraction from the river. The threat to supply is characterised by some key factors:-

- The River Test abstraction is the only source of water that Southern Water has supplying Southampton West supply area. The company has no current material means to support this supply area from neighbouring supply areas and their sources.
- The company needs to continue sufficient abstraction from the River Test to maintain supplies to meet customer demand of Southampton West supply area and, the bulk transfer required to support (dependency) of supply on the Isle Wight.
- An abstraction of 55 MI/d is considered necessary from the River Test under the drought permit but, reserving the need to take higher volumes, up to 80 MI/d (as allowed on the normal abstraction licence) during periods of high demand, such as experienced in the very hot dry weather from 7th July to 19th July
- Without the drought permit, reduction of the desired abstraction will translate directly to difficulty maintaining supply to customers. Initially this will be noticed only marginally, in that service reservoir drawdown may cover it for a day or two but, gradually service pressure and water quality problems will grow, and parts of the network will experience direct problems maintaining supply to local customers. The whole household 168,000 population of Southampton West supply area could become significantly affected by restricted water supply within a week.

In recognition of the risk of environmental impact of the abstraction under the drought permit, a range of environmental monitoring and permanent mitigation (river and riparian habitat and, ecological drought resilience) measures are being put in place, with the committed programme started in 2018. Additional reactive monitoring and mitigation is put forward within the Monitoring and Mitigation Plan supporting the permit application.

We apply for the drought permit due to threat to public water supply but, with reassurance that the permit will be operated in the context of careful monitoring and mitigation of any environmental impacts.