

River Test Stage 0.1 Drought Order Application

Executive Summary

17th July 2025



from
**Southern
Water** 

Executive Summary

Southern Water are applying for a Stage 0.1 Drought Order to make temporary amendments to the abstraction licence 11/42/18.16/546 to abstract water from the River Test.

The suite of documents which form the application for the Stage 0.1 Drought Order are set out in Table 1. The structure and contents of the documents 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), with some adjustments to the sequence of documents/sections.

Table 1: Document structure for the Stage 0.1 Drought Order application.

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The proposed Stage 0.1 Drought Order 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 megalitres per day (MI/d) to 265 MI/d.

In making this application, Southern Water has:

- Followed its drought plan, including its triggers and expected actions.
- Engaged customers and through 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 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'.

The exceptional shortage of rain assessment concluded that the significant shortage of rainfall across the South East between February and June 2025 has led to an increased strain on water resources. This has resulted in drier than average conditions, significantly impacting the recharge and recovery of the River Test. Further dry weather into the summer and autumn of 2025 will make this case even stronger.

The assessment also demonstrated a clear threat to supplies within the Hampshire Southampton West water resource zone, as well as the Isle of Wight due to its reliance on transfers within the water network from the Hampshire Southampton West area. This threat to supplies relates to the river flow recession of River Test. There is a credible risk that the river could fall below the license condition flow of 355 MI/d (Total Test Flow) at which, with no Drought Order in place, the abstraction licence requires abstraction to stop. That poses a significant threat supplies despite all the measures that can reasonably be applied to manage factors such as customer demands, leakage, and the need for abstraction from the River Test. 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 the Hampshire Southampton West water resource zone. 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 in the Hampshire Southampton West water resource zone and the bulk transfer required to support (dependency) of supply on the Isle of Wight.
- An abstraction of up to typically 55 MI/d is considered necessary. But, reserving the need to take up to 80 MI/d (as allowed on the normal abstraction licence).

Without the Stage 0.1 Drought Order, the reduction in the volume of water that Southern Water can abstract from the River Test will directly impact its ability to meet customer demand. Initially, this will be noticed only marginally; 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 approximate 165,000 population of the Southampton West supply area could soon be significantly affected by restricted water supply.

In recognition of the risk of environmental impact of the abstraction under the Stage 0.1 Drought Order, 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, mitigation, and compensation has been put forward within the Monitoring, Mitigation, and Compensation Plan supporting the Stage 0.1 Drought Order application.

Southern Water are applying for the Stage 0.1 Drought Permit due to threat to public water supply, but with reassurance that the Drought Order will be operated in the context of careful monitoring and mitigation of any impacts.