

draft Drought Plan 2027
**Appendix 2: Regional Water
Resources Drought Groups**

May 2026

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1. Introduction

Regional water resources groups are alliances made up of water companies, key water users and stakeholders. These groups produce strategic plans to cover the future water resources needs for their region. These plans cross water company boundaries within the region and address the future needs for public water supply and other sectors, such as agriculture, energy production and industry. The plans are developed to identify coordinated and best value solutions to secure future water supplies and environmental resilience at a regional level, and together, at a national level.

Regional water resources groups don't have Drought Plans but are uniquely placed to support collaboration across sectors during a drought. As such, each group has set up regular drought meetings to share information and support stakeholders. Due to the region that Anglian Water covers we are an active participant in three regional water resources drought groups - Water Resources East (WRE), Water Resources South East (WRSE) and Water Resources North (WRnN).

Each of these groups has created a statement of intent in collaboration with its members, clearly setting out the role they will take in drought. The statement of intents are displayed in the sections below and further information is available on the website of each regional group.

2. Water Resources East statement of intent

2.1 Introduction

WRE Drought Group

Formed in response to the 2022 drought, the WRE Drought Group was established to facilitate opportunities for improved communication and drought management across sectors, seeking to provide support for abstractors and protect the environment during periods of dry weather across the region. The Group supports WRE's vision 'for Eastern England to have sufficient water resources to support a flourishing economy, a thriving environment, the needs of its population, and for the region to be seen as an international exemplar for collaborative integrated water resource management'.

Drought Statement of Intent

The Environment Agency's Water Resources National Framework (WRNF25) published in June 2025 sets out an expectation for regional groups to:

"...develop a drought statement of intent. This statement will clearly explain the role each regional group will take in both drought planning and management. It will set out:

- the activities the regional group will undertake and collaborate on;
- what it won't do;
- how the regional group will work with member organisations and neighbouring organisations or regional groups;
- how it will link with existing drought governance and drought plans; and
- its role with other sectors."

"Initially, regional water resources groups should focus on building collaboration and alignment in how droughts are planned for and managed in their region. In the future, this may lead towards regional groups being encouraged to develop a drought plan."

"The key benefits of improved regional collaboration are:

- coordinating interaction and communication across the region, and across sectors;

- facilitating discussion and exploration of collaborative opportunities to share resources; and
- developing a consistent approach for implementing water use restrictions (by water companies)."

WRE's Statement of Intent, as set out in this document:

- Outlines the Terms of Reference of the WRE Drought Group.
- Sets out the actions the WRE Drought Group will take in a drought, and what falls outside its role.
- Demonstrates a commitment to ensure a good representation of all sectors alongside wider catchment needs in a drought scenario.
- Aligns with other regional groups, existing drought governance and plans.
- Will be reviewed and signed off annually by the WRE Drought Group.

2.2 WRE Drought Group: Terms of Reference

Purpose

- The extended period of dry weather in summer 2022 led to an environmental drought being declared in parts of Eastern England and severe water shortages for some farmers as their abstraction was curtailed. It did not result in a water supply drought as past investment in resilience by member water companies meant thresholds in water company Drought Plans to trigger temporary and non-essential use bans were not met. The drought highlighted the gap in resilience for some sectors, as well as gaps in understanding between sectors. It also highlighted a need for increased transparency in drought decision making.
- WRE's Drought Group was established to facilitate opportunities for improved drought management and communication across sectors, seeking to both provide support for abstractors and protect the environment during periods of dry weather across the region.
- The Drought Group aims to improve resilience to drought across all sectors in East Anglia. It seeks to facilitate knowledge sharing and improve understanding of water and drought management across WRE's membership. It supports its members to plan for drought, and encourages alignment of drought response and communication.

Geographic scope

- The Drought Group in WRE focuses on the catchments within the Environment Agency's East Anglia Area (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire) and the Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Area.

Invited representatives

- The core invited representatives are water abstractors. These currently include: Water companies (Anglian Water, Essex & Suffolk Water, Cambridge Water, Affinity Water), sector representatives (energy, agriculture, manufacturing, navigation, leisure, horticulture), Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) and relevant Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), Defra, Environment Agency, Natural England and the Consumer Council for Water (CCW).

Meetings

Virtual meetings will be organised:

- Every other month between April and September during non-dry weather conditions, increasing to
- Monthly once a period of prolonged dry weather has been declared in the region if the situation requires it, together with an
- Early season planning meeting in late winter /early spring to review any needs and concerns for the year ahead, and agree on the WRE Drought Group's activities.

Standing agenda items:

- Update on current water situation, latest projections, potential for abstraction restrictions.
- Update on sectoral water availability and drought related activities.
- Knowledge sharing of relevant projects incl. short-term / small scale water sharing options.

2.3 Drought Activities

Key responsibilities

The WRE Drought Group will:

- Have a pan-sectoral focus across the key abstracting sectors represented in the region.
- Enable increased visibility of areas of water stress across the region and members' dry weather / drought activities.
- Support and encourage all sectors to plan for drought, considering their risks, needs and actions before, during and after a developing drought situation.
- Support alignment on members' drought plans and drought-related communications across the region.
- Facilitate collaborative discussion within and between sectors to promote regional alignment on sharing water resources and implementing water use restrictions during drought.
- Identify and champion opportunities for improved water resources allocation and management across sectors, to explore ways to improve drought resilience and reduce the impact of drought conditions on key abstractors and the environment.
- Support WRE's wider efforts to help the agricultural sector to develop local resilience options.
- Promote drought knowledge sharing through the WRE Drought Group meetings, drought webpage and other channels as appropriate.
- Consider the needs of the environment, including water-dependent habitats and other sensitive environmental sites, in all drought management activities. The group commits to pursuing drought management options that protect and enhance the natural environment.
- Coordinate regional drought activities as outlined in the drought response framework below.

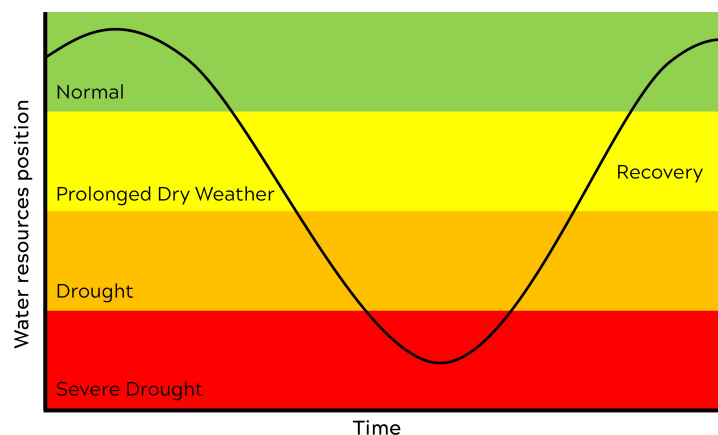
Drought Response Framework

[Table 2.1](#) presents a proposed Drought Response Framework outlining high level actions to be undertaken by the WRE Drought Group (WRE and group members) from normal to recovery water resource position, aligned with EA drought status ([Figure 2.1](#)).

Environment Agency drought status

The Environment Agency drought status is determined by water resources position as displayed in [Figure 2.1](#). This is driven by a range of dry weather indicators including rainfall totals, soil moisture deficit, river, groundwater and reservoir levels.

Figure 2.1 Typical water resources hydrograph during a drought plotted against the Environment Agency's drought status bands



Regional drought communication

WRE Drought Group should act as an independent voice to help provide background information on the scale of the challenge, educate stakeholders on what drought is, and share specific information on regional challenges. This can be done through:

- Webpages, factsheets, webinars, sector specific training, stakeholder events.
- Amplifying and coordinating member content and drought communication activities.

It is important the group complements not duplicates individual member activity, and WRE does not speak on behalf of any organisation. At the request of Drought Group members, WRE will encourage a narrative of positive action including:

- Sharing stories about resilience and demonstrating how member organisations are preparing for drought.
- Sharing early drought/dry weather warnings.
- Sharing drought planning knowledge between sectors.
- Coordinating and sharing communications for the public and media to encourage efficient use of water.

Over winter, the group could explore a wider non-drought educational role to increase water literacy and support landing of water efficiency messaging.

A drought comms working group would be initiated as prolonged dry weather develops into drought. Core responsibilities include:

- To report back to and take strategic steer from WRE Drought Group.
- Aligning messages, sharing activities, agreeing priorities for WRE's own media and public engagement.
- Identification of appropriate communications leads from member organisations to enable a comms group to be quickly established if drought status is declared in the region.

Links with existing drought governance and Drought Plans

This group adds to and complements other forums and processes including:

- Defra's National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by ministers and senior officials to coordinate drought management action across sectors. WRE is an NDG member.
- The Environment Agency's drought response (Drought: how it is managed in England).
- The Environment Agency's monthly water situation reports and regular stakeholder engagement activity.
- Sectoral drought planning processes including water company Drought Plans and Water Resources Management Plans. Note, this Sol has been referenced in water company 2027 Drought Plans.
- Water Resources South East's Dry Weather Group.
- WRE's Board, should any issues need escalating for discussion to National Drought Group.

What sits outside of WRE's remit

- The Drought Group does not have a formal decision-making role nor is accountable for how water supplies and drought options are managed.
- WRE does not intend to develop a regional Drought Plan, nor does it aim to override an organisation's own Drought Plans.
- The WRE Drought Group will not require members to fully align on activities. It will not require members to share information beyond a level they feel is appropriate for their organisation.
- WRE may develop a drought communications plan but this will be focused on federating and amplifying members' own communications plans. WRE will not proactively engage in drought-related communications unless requested by one or more Drought Group members.

Table 2.1 Proposed WRE Drought Response Framework aligned with EA drought status (Figure 2.1)

Environment Agency drought status	Preparedness Phase	Response Phase		Recovery Phase
	Normal (Before Drought)	Prolonged Dry Weather	Drought (including Severe Drought)	Recovery (Post Drought)
Monitoring frequency	Drought Group to meet every other month including a winter/spring planning session	Drought Group to meet monthly	Drought Group to meet fortnightly (likely with a reduced meeting duration)	Drought Group to meet as required
Drought response	Encourage all sectors to understand the risks of dry weather to their activities and plan their drought response	Encourage all sectors to review dry weather / drought risk and identify key drought actions each sector should consider	Support members to enact their drought response in a consistent and coordinated way	Incorporate drought learning into medium and long-term water management planning across sectors
Resource situation	Monitor and share sector information on the current and forecast water situation	Identify emerging concerns over vulnerable abstractions, operational activities and areas at high risk of drought	Identify and track areas of low water availability and stress across the region during drought	Update on recovery position, outstanding risks, identify key vulnerabilities, and consider lessons learned
Drought options	Facilitate discussion to identify opportunities for water trading / sharing between abstractors in order to mitigate drought impacts		Support and facilitate member water sharing activities / drought response measures	Evaluate effectiveness of drought response measures and consider lessons learned
Communications	Identify key drought communication channels / contacts Share relevant drought and water management material through existing channels	Amplify members' messages Review comms contacts are up to date and channels are appropriate	Initiate a comms subgroup to align communications and messaging between sectors, agree core messages, a strategic comms plan and WRE's role within it	Share comms lessons learned across sectors

3. Water Resources South East statement of intent

3.1 Introduction

This Statement of Intent is provided as an appendix to Drought Plans for member water companies in the WRSE region.

It summarises how WRSE will support member water companies with drought planning, coordinating drought actions, and support joint working with other stakeholders during prolonged dry weather and drought events.

WRSE has a long-established Dry Weather Working Group that brings greater consistency to the way in which water companies in the region have produced their Drought Plans, prepare for droughts and coordinate drought actions in the interests of customers and the environment.

The ambition of WRSE and the Dry Weather Working Group continues to be aligning approaches to drought actions; progressing with a joint drought communication plan and triggers. WRSE will continue to provide a coordinating role to support companies during dry weather and drought events.

Its work goes further than the minimum requirement set out in the Drought Plan guideline, but by design remains short of a single Regional Drought Plan. This may become an aspiration in future reviews.

Some of the water companies and stakeholders covered by WRSE's Dry Weather Working Group also operate across areas covered by Water Resources East (WRE) regional group.

WRSE and WRE will work closely to ensure their respective groups for managing dry weather and drought are closely aligned, while taking account of the different characteristic and needs between the two regions.

3.2 WRSE Dry Weather Working Group

The purpose of the WRSE Dry Weather Working Group is to support close collaboration, understanding and pre-planning for drought, dry weather and high demand events, or other issues, which threaten the resilience of the supply demand position of member companies.

The WRSE Group provides a forum for members to discuss, update and share information and undertake scenario testing, to progress planning for co-ordinated regional management of events.

Through exception reporting, it monitors and alerts water company members when the region is operating at heightened levels of risk and advises when increasing levels of regional coordination of joint actions and preparedness is desirable.

It draws information from national, regional and local assessments, and provides updates to help inform regional and national awareness and early preparedness. This involves, but is not limited to:

- Assessing the supply/demand position - through standardised exception reporting.
- Monitoring pre-set triggers to determine when to convene a regional comms team - to manage and co-ordinate regional communication activities and messaging.
- Supporting water companies with regional engagement with other sectors and stakeholders.
- Overseeing collaboration - coordinating planning, information and consistency of approaches across plans and at a regional level, so that when required, triggers and actions work effectively and as desired.

3.3 Working arrangements

Under normal conditions, the Dry Weather Working Groups meets bi-monthly and retain a focus on progressing joint work with water companies to improve the consistency of data and actions included in their drought plans; share best practice; and promote regionally consistent approaches to drought actions for adoption during future drought events.

During dry weather and drought events, the frequency of meetings will increase and become more tactical focused; helping the group to effectively support a coordinated regional response.

The work undertaken by the group during dry weather and drought events will be aligned to complement work that will be undertaken by other important drought management groups and subgroups - including those linked with the National Drought Group and Water UK.

The group will be responsible for capturing and reviewing learnings and recommendations during and following a regionally extensive event. Ensuring all parties remain confident that coordinated planning and preparedness for future events across the region remains fit for purpose.

3.4 Key Objectives

The WRSE Dry Weather Working Group will:

- 1 Provide a coordinated regional approach to drought and dry weather event management planning, preparedness.
- 2 Support collective learning and discussion, working as a forum for technical and senior representatives of the member organisations including but not limited to regulators, Anglian Water and the SE water companies.
- 3 Expand membership of the group as and when required to allow effective participation of other sectors and stakeholders.
- 4 Share information on best practice and increase awareness and preparedness during times of increasing drought, high demand, adverse weather conditions or other agreed issues which could threaten the supply demand balances of companies.
- 5 Collate and act on data and lessons learnt in order to improve effectiveness of planning for events.

3.5 Membership

The working group comprises technical and senior representatives with appropriate knowledge and skills, from:

- Government - Defra
- Regulators - EA, DWI, Natural England (when required), Ofwat (when required)
- CCW
- SE Water Companies & Anglian Water
- Water UK
- WRSE
- Other sectors - as required

3.6 Communication Plan

The Dry Weather Working Group has developed triggers and actions setting out how and when joint drought communications will be considered and progressed regionally during dry weather and drought events. Further work is underway to formalise those arrangements with water companies in their Drought Plans.

3.7 Monitoring and Review

The Dry Weather Working Group will:

- 1 Review the effectiveness of its activities on an annual basis.
- 2 Periodically, it will run regional drought scenario exercises to test and improve drought planning preparedness.
- 3 Participate in lessons learned exercises and reflect lessons accordingly in its future plans and activities.

4. Water Resources North statement of intent

Our changing climate means more frequent and more severe droughts are likely to be experienced in the coming years. As a regional multi-sector group, the role of Water Resources North (WReN) during drought is therefore becoming even more important, as collaboration between and within sectors is critical to successfully reduce the impacts on the environment and on society.

Water Resources North (WReN) is committed to promoting collaborative and proactive drought management across a diverse region from the Peak District to the Scottish border. It is recognised that effective drought management requires coordinated communications and action across all sectors that depend on water resources. This statement of intent outlines WReN's approach to regional drought management, collaboration and planning.

4.1 WReN's Intent

WReN have launched a multi-sector Drought Group which serves as a regional forum that facilitates collaboration between sector groups (i.e. public water supply, agriculture, energy and navigation), regulators and wider stakeholders to enhance regional preparedness for periods of prolonged dry weather and drought events.

The group aims and operations will change before, during and after drought as summarised in [Table 4.1](#)

WReN will work with other regional groups to share best practice and lessons learnt recognising that other regions may be in drought while WReN is not and vice versa.

It is important to note that the role of WReN does not include the development of a regional Drought Plan, nor does it aim to override an organisation's own Drought Plans. It seeks to support in the facilitation of collaborative discussion within and between sectors where this helps the overall outcomes of managing drought response for society and the environment.

Table 4.1 WreN drought group aims and operations during different levels of drought

Before Drought (Preparedness Phase)	During Drought (Response Phase)	After Drought (Recovery Phase)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and share sector information on the current and forecast water situation Where beneficial to do so, align communications and messaging between sector groups, stakeholders and the public during drought In the development of water management plans, actively seek drought management options that provide wider benefits including resilience to both floods and droughts, improvements to water quality; and enhanced resilience of drainage and wastewater systems 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the development of sector Drought Plans with monitoring plans and early warning indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify areas of water availability and stress across the region during drought Facilitate discussion to identify opportunities for water rights trading and sharing between abstractors to manage drought response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate drought learning into medium and long-term water resource planning Evaluating the effectiveness of drought response measures

4.2 Group Membership and Cadence

WReN's programme manager will organise meetings and provide secretariat services for the group, with additional activities funded by separate agreement as needed.

The drought group will:

- 1 Complement, not replace, existing drought management structures and authorities
- 2 Meet on Microsoft Teams (twice yearly (April and September) during non-dry weather conditions; and monthly once a period of prolonged dry weather or an environmental drought has been declared by the Environment Agency
- 3 Maintain a rotating chair structure across different sectors

The group will include representatives from:

- Water companies serving the region
- Key water-dependent sectors (agriculture, energy, navigation, tourism, etc.)
- Regulatory bodies (Environment Agency, Natural England, CCW)
- Abstraction groups and other relevant stakeholders

It is intended that the WReN drought group will report its regional position to the WReN Board and National Drought Group.

4.3 Environmental and Social Commitment

In all drought management activities, the needs of the environment, including water-dependent habitats and other sensitive environmental sites, will be a key consideration. Working with the Environment Agency and Natural England representatives (whose principal role is to protect and improve the environment), the group commits to pursuing drought management solutions that protect and enhance the natural environment.

Social needs will also be a key consideration in all drought management activities. Working with CCW and the water-dependent sectors alongside the water companies (who bring knowledge of their customers e.g. through significant customer research), the group commits to pursuing drought management solutions that protect social needs.

Following adoption, this statement of intent and the WReN Drought Group Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually to ensure they remains fit for purpose and aligned with regulatory expectations.



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