

Abstraction Plan priority catchment update

August 2021

For the duration of the pandemic the Environment Agency's 3 strategic priorities remain in place:

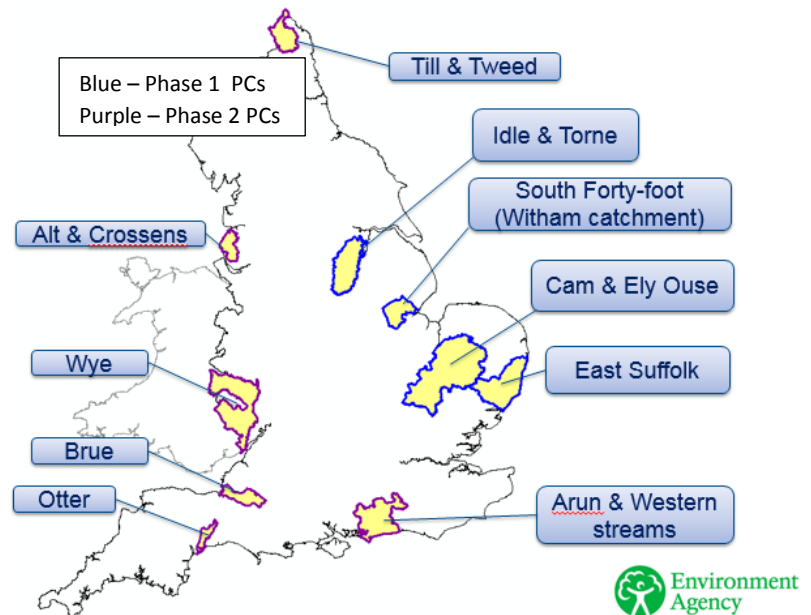
- protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all our people
- protecting lives
- preventing serious harm to the environment

We remain committed to the Abstraction Plan objective of developing a stronger catchment focus and modernising abstraction management through working with partners.

We are continuing priority catchment (PC) work where it is safe to do so under government guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>). We have resumed engagement activities in several catchments and are pleased to report on progress in several areas.

Funding

We have secured funding for our remaining 6PCs until March 2022. Each of these PC has a project manager.



Abstraction Licensing Strategy (ALS) updates for phase 1 PCs

We have reached a major milestone in the the Abstraction Plan by publishing updated ALS documents for the phase 1 PCs (see map) at the end of 2020. The new ALS format is a more user-friendly version and has been well received by many of our customers in the [Witham](#), [Idle and Torne](#), [East Suffolk](#) and [Cam and Ely Ouse](#) PC areas. There is a greater focus on local water resources challenges in the catchment as well as updates on the PC work and what it means for local abstractors and other catchment stakeholders. The phase 1 PCs have now closed. Each project manager has documented progress and created action plans which can be used by catchment groups who want to continue the work. The East Suffolk PC group will continue and be led by Suffolk County Council. Other groups may continue on an adhoc basis.

Phase 2 PCs

During 2020, engagement activities in the final six priority catchments reduced on account of the lock down. A request to extend the completion date for these catchments by six months to June 2022 has just been approved by government. The updates will present progress on the broadening of the catchment based approach to strongly include water resources. We have project managers in place for the six phase 2 PCs. Learning from the first 4 PCs is being incorporated.

Alt and Crossens: The Water Friendly Farming Group including EA, NFU, United Utilities continues to progress novel ideas to help the farming sector. The PC is delivering a £25K project on water efficiency measures for agriculture.

Wye: Trialling the notification of abstraction availability alerts by email. Investigating ways of improving the processes for developing on-farm reservoirs.

Brue: Engaging with local stakeholders to understand issues and identify opportunities in a level dependant environment. Implementing a flow monitoring programme across catchment to understand hydrology to enable better decisions to be made.

Otter: Developing a strong catchment wide partnership with South West Water, Wessex Water and other stakeholders. Testing of solutions to reduce surface water deficit, using Otter Groundwater Model.

Arun and Western Streams. Linking the Priority Catchment work to the wider multi sector work of Water Resources South East to explore ways to facilitate development of more resilient and sustainable abstractions. A particular focus is appropriate development of storage facilities to capture high flows.

Till and Tweed: Engagement with partners (Natural England, Catchment Sensitive farming groups (CSF), Northumbria Water, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Tweed Forum) to look for opportunities to manage water more collaboratively. Working with new, previously exempt, abstraction licence holders to better understand their approaches to flexible water management.

As well as some of the approaches identified above we are also seeking to work with farmers who would like to demonstrate new and more efficient irrigation practices.

For more information you can contact your Environment Agency PC lead via Abstraction_Reform@environment-agency.gov.uk. Or see our [PC Citizen space page](#) for further information and links to PC leads.

The EU part-funded Interreg Water for Tomorrow project has started. More information is available on the project website www.water-for-tomorrow.com.

As one of five partners, the Environment Agency has created a website to share information about its participation in the project.

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/east-anglia-c-e/water-for-tomorrow-information-page>



Update on the move to environmental permitting

Following delays due to the reprioritisation of work and resources as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are pleased to confirm that the public consultation on moving the abstraction and impounding licensing regime into the Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) will be launched in **September 2021**.

Defra, supported by the Environment Agency, will be running consultation events with sector groups during the consultation period which we will be in contact about closer to the time. If you would like to hold a pre consultation meeting with Defra and the Environment Agency then please respond by emailing Water.resources@defra.gov.uk. Depending on demand we may organise by sector.

Update on the Digital Service

We continue to develop the digital improvements to the service. We are exploring the use of email alerts as a much quicker means of communicating to licence holders about hands off flow or level conditions, for example.

If you hold an abstraction licence and haven't already created an account to register your licence(s), please visit www.gov.uk/manage-water-abstraction. You can then use the service to view your abstraction licences and submit your returns online, as well as taking advantage of future improvements.

Would you be interested in helping us with user research for future features of the service?

If so, or for any queries about the service, please contact water_abstractiondigital@environment-agency.gov.uk