

Risk

Businesses urged to save water after driest winter in 20 years



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Recent dry weather has prompted fears over water restrictions this summer

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Water companies and the NFU in the south of England report lower than average ground **water** levels, prompting green groups to warn of threat to rivers and wildlife

England to take steps to curb their **water** use after what has reportedly been the driest winter in 20 years.

Affinity **Water**, which provides **water** to more than 3.6 million people in the south and south east, said rainfall was 50-70 per cent below average from January to March 2017, which means the area has "not seen the usual rise in groundwater levels that we would usually expect".

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As a result, **Affinity said** the amount of **water** in its underground supply reservoirs has dropped below average, prompting fears from green groups that rivers could dry out and threaten wildlife.

With long-term forecasts also predicting above average temperatures and below average rainfall over the coming months, Affinity has urged customers to help save **water** and preserve supplies "to minimise restrictions on household use this summer".

Southern **Water**, which supplies 524 million litres of drinking **water** each day in the south of England, **stopped short of issuing a warning**, but said it was "continuing to monitor the situation closely".

It added that it was "fully prepared, should the relatively dry weather continue in the months ahead".

Meanwhile, the National Farmers Union (NFU) warned there was "a risk that groundwater in the south and east may not have recovered sufficiently to avoid the imposition of some drought management actions in later summer".

It added in a statement that rain-fed crops such as cereals "are beginning to suffer from low moisture" and that farmers "are aware of but calm about the current situation".

The union said the low flow conditions were "not currently having any particular impact on the environment, but we continue to monitor developments".

However, WWF **water** policy manager, Rose O'Neill, warned the latest **water** warning showed that the health of UK rivers were "on a knife edge", with rivers under threat of running dry and making it harder for wildlife such as trout and **water** voles to survive.

"We need to do all we can to reduce **water** wastage," she said. "In 2011, the government promised a reform of the abstraction regime to ensure that it protects wildlife and delivers fair and resilient **water** supplies. For the last six years, WWF and others have been working with government to develop new legislation - a **Water** Bill which was pencilled in for this year. It's vital that the next UK government brings forward legislation to maintain **water** supply and ensure the nation's rivers and wetlands are in good ecological health."

The warnings follow a report from ING Bank **in March** which argued building more closed-loop processes into regional **water** supply systems around the world could save more than 400 billion cubic metres of **water** each year.



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