

SEPA warns of water shortage

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) warns of potential problems as groundwater levels are lowest since 2009.

- Businesses asked to reduce water use as nearly all of east and south Scotland is experiencing the impacts of water scarcity.
- SEPA may have to impose restrictions on abstractions
- Mid and north Fife are expected to reach Significant Scarcity in the next week.
- The Tweed catchment in the Borders is at Moderate Scarcity.

Businesses in Scotland could soon be required to stop abstracting water, with 2022 seeing the driest January in the east since 1940. Groundwater and river levels are also severely impacted by a lack of rainfall in the east and other parts of the country are being warned to brace for similar conditions.

SEPA is responsible for managing Scotland's natural water resources and issues licenses to businesses abstracting large amounts for agriculture and other industrial uses.

The latest water scarcity [report](#), published by SEPA on Thursday reveals areas in mid and north Fife are likely to reach Significant Scarcity within the next week, meaning SEPA has the power to suspend abstraction licences. Businesses affected are already being contacted to discuss what this will mean for them and to offer support. There is also reassurance that, if suspension is required, it would only be for the

minimum length of time necessary.

Elsewhere the Borders saw less rainfall than most of the country last week with the Tweed catchment at Moderate Scarcity, the second highest level. Areas around River Ythan, Dee, Don, Almond, Tyne as well as the Firth of Forth and Firth of Tay also remain at Moderate Scarcity.

Head of Water and Planning at SEPA, Nathan Critchlow-Watton, said: "Water resources are critical in the east, with groundwater levels the lowest they have been since records began in 2009 and conditions not expected to improve in the short term. Even in parts where there has been some rainfall and an immediate increase in river flows, the areas still remain vulnerable due to longer term rainfall deficits and very dry ground conditions.

"That is why it is important for businesses that abstract water to take action and reduce their current usage, minimising the effects on the environment. SEPA is here to offer support and guidance, and each week we set out the key measures abstractors should be taking to conserve water.

"Climate change means water scarcity will become even more frequent. We want to work with businesses to plan their water usage long-term, so that we can preserve this vital resource as effectively as possible. Not only will that protect Scotland's rivers and lochs, but it will minimise business risks as well."

Water is a resource that underpins key sectors across Scotland including hydropower, golf, whisky production and farming. SEPA works with a number of industry bodies to help businesses manage the range of conditions they may face throughout the year.

NFU Scotland's Environmental Resources Policy Manager Sarah Cowie said:

“Water is a vital resource for the agriculture sector as we cannot produce food without a consistent and plentiful water supply. With significant areas of Scotland experiencing a prolonged dry spell, it’s important farmers take steps to ensure the continued supply of water and avoid disruption.

“Farmers are encouraged to irrigate when, and only as much as, absolutely necessary. When irrigating land, they should check equipment isn’t leaking, don’t over spray, and use trickle irrigation where appropriate. We also encourage irrigators to stagger abstractions with other operators in their catchment area, reduce the volume used, and irrigate at night where possible. They should consider whether they could switch to using groundwater rather than river water in times of water scarcity. Looking at longer term resilience, if a new borehole is needed to do this, then contact SEPA.”

Water abstractors concerned about meeting licence conditions or wishing to discuss contingency measures are encouraged to contact SEPA by emailing waterscarcity@sepa.org.uk.

For more information on water scarcity and to view the latest report, visit www.sepa.org.uk/waterscarcity

