

# Advice note to Fishery Managers

## Act now to protect your fishery in dry weather and the drought

### Water situation update

Droughts are natural events; a period of low rainfall creates a shortage of water for people, the environment, agriculture or industry. Some droughts are short and intense, for example a hot, dry summer, while others are long and take time to develop.

Anglian Region is officially in 'Drought Status', the last 18 months have been some of the driest since records began in 1910. In particular the lack of rainfall during the winter period has meant that groundwater storage has not been recharged and river flows have remained low. The risk to public water supplies resulted in Anglian Water applying for an emergency drought permit in order to try and increase levels in both Rutland and Pitsford Reservoirs. The latest water situation report for Anglian can be found on our website:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/publications/104036.aspx>

In order to minimise the risk of fish deaths associated with reduced water levels and over crowding in stillwaters, we are advising all fishery owners and angling clubs to take action now.

### Potential problems for fisheries

- The water source supplying stillwaters (springs, groundwater, feeder streams or piped supplies) may be reduced or become unavailable.
- Lower flows in rivers, coupled with rising temperatures and weed growth are likely to cause a reduction in dissolved oxygen levels. Lowest levels are usually experienced first thing in the morning.
- Reduced water levels caused by the drought may lead to competition for habitat, food and spawning substrates within the resident fish populations.
- Fish will become more vulnerable to predation and poaching.
- In the worst case fish may become stranded as the water level recedes.
- Release of organic material from the bed of the water body may lead to de-oxygenation through the actions of bacteria and algae, especially where waters are becoming shallower.
- Fisheries containing unnaturally large populations of fish are particularly vulnerable.
- Poor water quality will cause stress to the fish making them more prone to infections and disease that can ultimately result in a fish kill.

## Suggested actions fisheries owners can take

With the potential of low water levels and high temperatures during the coming months, we are advocating you think about 'self-help'; you are responsible for managing your fishery. We recommend that you consider the following actions in order to minimise the risk of fish mortalities:

- Keep a close watch on water levels and look for any signs of fish in distress. Help preserve valuable water resources by repairing any leaking sluices or control structures.
- Visiting the water early in the morning will allow you to observe your fishery when dissolved oxygen levels are at their lowest. Consider acquiring an oxygen meter<sup>1</sup>, learn how to use it and record levels regularly. A simple meter may seem expensive to start with but will pay for itself over a period of time.
- Consider restricting the use of bait and ground bait to avoid unnecessary pressure on water quality.
- Minimise the use of keep nets. If a match is planned consider using multiple weigh-ins to avoid unnecessary stress to fish stocks.
- Avoid stocking further fish.
- Think carefully before cutting weed as it helps to hold up water levels and avoids disturbing quantities of silt, which can compromise water quality.
- Low flows and reduced water levels can increase the risk of predation. To reduce this pressure, maintain as much rough and overhanging marginal cover as possible.
- Consider reducing fish stock densities<sup>2</sup> to avoid problems later with reducing water levels and low dissolved oxygen levels. Prior to moving any fish, a consent is required from the Environment Agency. This is designed to reduce both the spread of fish disease and non-native species.
- If you believe your fishery may be at risk from low dissolved oxygen levels due to algal growth, low water levels, elevated temperatures or over-crowding - be prepared - and check that you have access to water pumps, aeration equipment<sup>3</sup> and generators.
- Observe your fishery regularly, taking note of any changes in water levels, water quality, fish behaviour and catches. If there are any problems then report them to the Environment Agency as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> You can get a meter from companies listed online.

<sup>2</sup> A list of contractors who can undertake fish movements is available from us.

<sup>3</sup> You can get aeration equipment locally from companies listed in the Yellow Pages or online.

- For further practical self-help advice call us on our general enquires number 03708 506 506 (charged at the normal national rate) during office hours and ask for you local fisheries office or visit the Environment Agency website [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) on search our 'fisheries pages' and 'fisheries advisory publications'.

**We hope that by some sensible precautions that you avoid unnecessary fish losses, but in the event of an emergency call our National Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60**

## What to expect from the Environment Agency

- Our priority will be to save fish where rivers are drying out, it is unlikely we will be able to rescue fish from commercial fisheries.
- In exceptional circumstances we may get involved in an emergency fish rescue in a stillwater; we will need to agree somewhere safe to move them to and the fish must have been health screened from the last six months.
- Talk to us before you relocate fish, as our written consent is required. This is designed to reduce the spread of both fish diseases and non-native fish species.
- Please report any dead fish to us immediately as this may be due to a disease outbreak.
- As part of our drought planning, our staff will be visiting rivers across the region monitoring the impact and managing any potential affects on the wild fish stocks.
- We will also be working closely with our own river maintenance staff to ensure our own work does not pose any unnecessary risk to fish.
- We may need to prioritise our resources if we are faced with many incidents, please be patient, we will always try and respond to your call.

We have included a poster with this advice note, which you may wish to put up in an appropriate location at your fishery.

Thank you for your support in helping us minimise the impacts of the dry weather. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and keep you updated. For further assistance or advice, please contact us.

Our role during the drought is to balance the water needs of people, business and the environment, working with all water users to ensure we make best use of what is currently a scarce resource. We will follow our drought plans helping us make the right decision at the right time. These plans and much more advice and general information can be found on the Drought Pages of our website:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/drought/default.aspx>

customer service line  
08708 506 506

incident hotline  
0800 80 70 60

floodline  
0845 988 1188

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)