



Draft Drought Plan

Appendix 10: Learning from the 2025 drought



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Our Drought Plan must effectively manage dry weather and drought over the next 5 years. This is a complex challenge due to an ever-changing population, customer water use, and environmental considerations.

Until 2022, our approach delivered 26 years without restrictions on use, and met the challenges of increased COVID-19 demands and demand spikes produced by extreme heat and extreme cold. Whilst Appendix 9 of our Draft WRMP 24 addresses the lessons learned from 2022, the Draft Drought Plan 2027 provides a chance to reflect on further learning from the 2025 drought in England.

Whilst our regions did not experience as severe droughts as other parts of the country, we did enter drought level 1 in our Colliford Water Resource Zone (WRZ) and drought level 2 in our Bristol WRZ.

The paragraphs below outline some key water resources learnings from the 2025 drought across the South West Water, Bristol Water and Bournemouth Water supply zones.

In Bristol, our dry weather operating model, prioritising the use of water from the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, was successful despite a hot, dry spring. An outage at a treatment works abstracting from this source meant we drew down our reservoir storage more than anticipated in early summer. However, once this treatment works returned to service, we maximised use of the canal source alongside our groundwater supplies, re-evaluating our source strategy as conditions evolved, to maintain optimal performance. By achieving a split of 70% of abstraction from canal and groundwater sources, and 30% from reservoirs, we preserved reservoir storage through summer and autumn. This approach proved effective, demonstrating the resilience of our dry weather operating model in Bristol.

The dry weather in Bristol demonstrated that robust modelling is essential to support our decision-making. Any gaps in knowledge and understanding of our models have been addressed through recruitment, training and new processes in our modelling team. We noted deficiencies in our Bristol drought curves, as noted in Section 2.2.2 and are in the process of reviewing the aggregate reservoir storage drought triggers. The updates will feed into the Revised Draft Drought Plan.

Our drought management structure in 2022 was complex and over-populated. In managing the 2025 drought across our regions, we had a clearer structure that more effectively monitored risks, actions, issues, and decisions. We have incorporated these learnings into the drought management structure shown in this Drought Plan (Section 9.1).

In the South West, in response to the drought in 2022 a number of improvements were made to our water resources systems. For example, delivery of Blackpool Pit has improved resilience in our Colliford WRZ, helping to support winter recovery and reduce summer drawdown of Colliford reservoirs. We have also updated the Wimbleball reservoir drought triggers curves, which have been completed through the Drought Plan development and included in Section 2.2.5.

Multi-season risks still remain in the Colliford and Roadford WRZs, despite improved resilience since 2022. These risks are mitigated through the actions outlined in this Drought Plan and will be assessed further in the development of WRMP29.