

WATER ABSTRACTION



With a changing climate, a run of dry winters, changes to rainfall patterns, and increased pressure from development, things are likely to get worse, unless major changes to the way we abstract and use water are made.

ANGLING TRUST
POSITION STATEMENT
Author: Stuart
Singleton-White
Published: 01/03/23
Review date: 01/03/24



Background

Water is the stuff of life. In the UK we drink, wash, flush, and waste more water per head of population than most other European countries. To meet this demand water is taken from our rivers, from reservoirs, and from the ground beneath our feet. In many parts of the country, too much water is taken for the public water supply, for agriculture and for business. Not enough is left in the environment. Not enough is left for fish.

This over abstraction is having a devastating impact. Some of our most important rivers and chalk streams are drying up for much of their length or suffering from chronic low flows at certain times of the year.

Data obtained from the Environment Agency in 2016 showed that 14% of our rivers were classified as being over-abstracted, meaning there was not enough water to support a properly functioning ecosystem. 9% were over-licenced, meaning they would become over-abstracted if all those entitled to take water up to the limit of their licence did so.

With a changing climate, a run of dry winters, changes to rainfall patterns, and increased pressure from development, things are likely to get worse, unless major changes to the way we abstract and use water are made.

We must become less reliant on taking water from aquifers (underground) and more willing to develop our storage capacity – reservoirs. We have to use water more wisely, through greater efficiency and make more use of untreated grey water. And we need to update our infrastructure and reduce leaks and wastage.

Why it matters

Of all the water on earth, only 3% is freshwater, and only 1% is available for our use, the other 2% being locked up in icefields and at the poles. Freshwater habitats – such

as lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and aquifers – house an incredible proportion of the world’s biodiversity: more than 10% of all known animals and about 50% of all known fish species. Yet freshwater species are declining at an alarming rate, for example a 76% decline in migratory freshwater fish – faster than terrestrial or marine species – and freshwater habitats are in a worse condition than those of forests, grassland or coastal systems.

WWF’s 2017 report [Water for Wildlife: tackling drought and unsustainable abstraction](#) brings attention to this crisis: the scale of over-abstraction from rivers, how the current approach to preventing damage by abstraction is taking too long, how wildlife is suffering, and how many people are concerned by the current situation.

The Blueprint for Water Coalition, of which the Angling Trust is a member, published the following figures:

- 24% of rivers in England are at risk from too much water being abstracted.
- Low river flows affect the whole river ecosystem, from the smallest bug to the biggest fish.
- At the current rate of progress, it could be 2050 before today’s damage is addressed.
- 68% of people are worried about the impact on the environment of taking too much water from rivers.
- Over 80% of people agree the Government should do more to encourage homes and businesses to be more water efficient.

Low flows, the over-abstraction of our rivers and low water levels in our lakes have a variety of damaging impacts on fish stocks:

- Pollution is more concentrated.
- Water temperature can increase more rapidly.
- Dissolved oxygen levels decrease.
- There are less wetted areas for invertebrate and other food favoured by fish.
- Fish are more vulnerable to predation.

-
- Fish are less likely to migrate up and down rivers to complete their lifecycle.
 - Fish are at greater risk of disease.

All of which can have a devastating impact on our fishing and the fish we are targeting.

What is the Angling Trust doing?

We continue to push for reform in the way we abstract and use water. Many areas of the country are officially classed as being water stressed. Over development and over consumption is driving demand. While people need water, it is vital there is enough water left for the environment to thrive. That is not only good for fish, for our fishing, it is good for us, too.

Through various laws and regulations there are a range of policies and requirements that govern our water sector, how water is abstracted and how it is use, for example, five-year price reviews, water company business plans, water company environment plans, regional water resource plans, a national framework for water resources. All have plans and targets aimed at managing our water, reducing demand, preventing leaks, and setting prices. Despite this, we are still taking too much water from the environment.

The failure to build in sufficient storage capacity in the form of reservoirs for a growing population has resulted in more and more abstractions from rivers and groundwater sources, all of which contribute to low flows. Climate change means we face more drought and more floods making it even more important that we store surplus water at times of plenty to provide resilience in times of scarcity without unnecessarily damaging the environment through over abstraction.

OFWAT and the Environment Agency need to play a more active role. The EA must do more to review and remove unnecessary abstraction licences. OFWAT, while having a

duty to protect the resilience of water supply, seem to focus solely on keeping prices down. They must fulfil their duty to ensure environmental reliance.

The Angling Trust engages across all the discussions, reviews and plans around the management of our water resources. We push directly for reform, work in partnership through our membership of Blueprint for Water, and in partnership with organisations such as the Rivers Trust, WWF-UK and Salmon and Trout Conservation. We challenge the government, the regulators, and water companies to do better and to do more.

How you can help

You can support the work we do by joining the Angling Trust.

There are many ways you can save water at home, from shorter showers, turning the tap off when brushing your teeth, installing water saving devices, to installing a water butt to collect rainwater for the garden. [Google, how can I save water at home?](#)

Water companies regularly survey customers about the services they provide. If they survey you, tell them you want them to do more to save water.

From time to time, the Angling Trust needs your help, to write to the government, to MPs, to water companies, to the regulators. Keep an eye on our website and social media. Helping us can make all the difference.

Thank You!

TO ALL OUR TRADE
ASSOCIATE PARTNERS
FOR SUPPORTING THE
WORK OF THE
ANGLING TRUST



IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE ANGLING TRADE AND WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK, FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED BY EMAILING JOHN.CHEYNE@ANGLINGTRUST.NET



ANGLING TRUST

We are a not-for-profit organisation representing anglers, fighting for fish, fishing and the environment. We are recognised by the Government as the National Governing Body for angling in England and partner with Visit Wales and Natural Resources Wales to promote Fishing in Wales. We are a member-based organisation made up of anglers of all disciplines providing a united front to represent, grow and protect our sport. By becoming a member of the Angling Trust you are helping to protect the waterways you fish in and the fish which live within them, ensuring their health and protection for future generations.

[Click here for more information about how to join the Angling Trust](#)

Angling Trust Limited is a company limited by guarantee, company number 05320350.

Angling Trust & Fish Legal, Eastwood House, Rainbow Street, Leominster, HR6 8DQ.

Telephone: 01568 620447 Email: admin@anglingtrust.net Website: www.anglingtrust.net