

# **SEVERN TRENT WATER; DRAFT DROUGHT PLAN**

## **STATEMENT OF RESPONSE TO CONSULTEES COMMENTS**

Following the publication of our draft Drought Plan on our website on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006, we received from DEFRA letters with comments from 12 consultees. This is our statement of response to these comments. We also explain how we intend to address the issues raised in these comments in our final Drought Plan, which will be available by mid-Summer 2007.

In accordance with the DEFRA Guidance, we have replied to all consultees who commented on our Plan, and we have sent a copy of this statement to DEFRA.

We sent out over 130 letters to Government and NGOs to make them aware of this consultation. The 12 organizations which commented were:-

- Bolsover District Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Anglers Conservation Association
- OFWAT
- Environment Agency
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
- Cherwell District Council
- Herefordshire Council
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Consumer Council for Water Midland
- English Nature

A further 6 letters were received but these did not offer any comments. These were received from:-

- Stafford Borough Council
- South Staffordshire Council
- Erewash Borough Council
- Borough of Telford and Wrekin
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Peak District National Park Authority

There were a number of similar comments covering common issues, and these are dealt with collectively in 15 sections lettered A to O. Where a correspondent made a comment that was specific to their interest, this is dealt with individually.

The 15 Sections are :-

- A. Quality of reproduction of the Plan on our website
- B. Accessibility of the Plan
- C. Leakage
- D. Water metering
- E. Ecological impact
- F. Civil Contingency arrangements
- G. Frequency of drought occurrences
- H. Differentiating between Ordinary Drought Orders and Emergency Drought Orders
- I. Wider liaison during a developing drought
- J. Points raised by the Environment Agency
- K. Range of Consultees
- L. Impact of Climate Change
- M. Impact on biodiversity
- N. Choice of Drought triggers
- O. Relevance to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive

#### **A. Quality of the reproduction of the Plan on our website**

A number of correspondents pointed out that there are some minor points of clarity required, none of which detract from the substance of the Plan. Included in this is the clarity of the control lines shown at the rear of the Plan.

**Our response** is that these issues will be addressed in the reproduction of our final plan.

#### **B Accessibility of the Plan**

**Bolsover DC and OFWAT** pointed out that not all members of the public have access to the internet and hence cannot easily access the Plan.

**Our response** is that the DEFRA Guidance does not specify that members of the public should have access to the water company drought plans.

The guidance specifies a number of representative bodies of councils and associations including the Consumer Council for Water Midlands whose remit is specifically to represent customers. We wrote to all those who operate in our area, alerting them to the existence of our plan. We believe this complied with the intent and spirit of the guidance.

In this context OFWAT also pointed out that they did not receive a copy of our draft plan.

**Our response** is that we wrote to OFWAT on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005 inviting comments on our proposal to revise our plan and asking for any initial views on this. Shortly after (November 11<sup>th</sup>) they replied saying they had no comments. We interpreted this to mean they did not wish to receive a copy of the draft plan. We can only apologise for this misunderstanding and hope that their access to the plan via the website did not hinder their appraisal of its contents.

## **C Leakage**

***Bolsover DC, the Countryside Council for Wales, Herefordshire Council, the Consumer Council for Water Midlands, and the Anglers Association*** pointed out that our level of leakage is unacceptably high when we may ask customers to limit their use of water during rare drought summers.

**Our response** is that leakage reduction is one of a number of key activities that are funded through the Periodic Review of prices made by OFWAT. We have agreed the target economic level of leakage with OFWAT. This ensures that the charges to our customers are balanced between being reasonable yet with an acceptable associated risk of occasional restrictions on supply. In times of drought, we give a very high priority to increasing leakage control in those areas where it is needed most.

## **D Water metering**

***Bolsover DC, the Countryside Council for Wales and Cherwell DC*** all raised points about water metering. They pointed out that metering is the obvious method to regulate demand and promote water conservation. Nevertheless, any metering policy must address customers who are poverty bound and have difficulty in paying for such essential services. A tariff based system was suggested that provides a free basic quantity but yet charges for excessive use.

**Our response** is that we are aware of potential hardships which some tariffs might introduce. The question about which tariffs are fairest is still up for debate, and there is also the wider uncertainty about how much water, if any, might sustainably be saved in future droughts with different metering policies and tariffs. We will be reviewing our domestic metering strategy before our next Business Plan due in 2009.

## **E Ecological impact**

**Bolsover DC, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), English Nature and the Anglers Association** pointed out that we should assess the ecological impact of each drought provision on the ecology of the rivers and specifically the fisheries.

**Our response** is that impact assessments are being completed to the Environment Agency's requirements for each site where we have identified the need for a drought permit. These will be available by the time the final Plan is published in mid-2007. Once these are available we will discuss the findings with the Environment Agency and English Nature and refer to any specific points raised by these correspondents.

**CCW** also warned against assuming that a hosepipe ban would ensure the granting of a drought permit.

**Our response** is that we do not, and will not, assume this. We will apply for the drought permits as the situation requires, whilst recognising that the decision to grant such powers rests with the Environment Agency.

## **F Civil Contingency Arrangements**

**Derbyshire CC** pointed out that during severe and protracted drought situations there will be the need for us to engage with Regional Civil Contingencies Groups to ensure full awareness of the situation exists at all appropriate levels of local and regional government. This will ensure that unnecessary water consumption is reduced and the public's response to the situation is appropriate.

**Our response** is that this is reasonable and correct, and we are fully engaged with such groups in this respect.

## **G Frequency of Drought occurrences**

**Forest of Dean DC and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)** questioned whether our estimation of the frequency of requiring demand reductions (one year in 30) is realistic.

**Our response** is that we have used our regional resource model to simulate the operation of our system. This draws on a rainfall and river flow database covering the 80 years since 1920. Through this we have simulated how we will manage current levels of demand over this 80 year period. This has demonstrated that, on average, we meet all demand in all summers in this period on all but 3 occasions. Hence, we have confidence that on average we will only require

significant demand reductions (hosepipe bans) during three summers in this 80 years period (or approximately 3 summers per century).

**CCW** suggested that we use a predictive method to assess when future droughts would occur that would have an adverse impact on riverine ecology. This should be the base of our frequency of hosepipe bans.

**Our response** is that we know of no scientific process that can predict when future droughts will occur. Our estimation is based on statistical likelihood estimation that draws on historic records of observed drought sequences. We will be happy to explain this process to CCW if required.

## **H Differentiating between Ordinary Drought Orders and Emergency Drought Orders**

**OFWAT** pointed out that we do not differentiate between ordinary drought orders and emergency drought orders.

**Our response** is that in our plan, we have not identified the need for any form of Drought Order, other than for the banning of non-essential uses, so a differentiation was not considered necessary. However, other consultees have raised this point, and we will add this clarification to our Plan.

## **I Wider liaison during a developing drought**

**OFWAT, English Nature and the Consumer Council for Water Midland (CCWM)** asked that they be appraised earlier during a developing drought period. CCWM also recommended that we should explain how we will prioritise customers and businesses with special needs or high dependency on water once drought restrictions develop. CCWM also pointed out that we have no formal procedures that recognise the effort made by customers to reduce demand during drought periods. **The Environment Agency** also commented that we should ensure full liaison with English Nature (Natural England) and the Countryside Council for Wales as a drought develops.

**Our response** is that, firstly, we shall ensure that we have procedures in place to appraise these consultees during the early stages of a drought. Secondly, we will review our communications plan to address the specific points raised by CCWM, and we have written separately to CCWM with more a more detailed response to the comments they have raised.

## **J**     ***Points raised by The Environment Agency***

1. The Water Resources Zones used in the company's Water Resources Plan differ from the Drought Planning Zones used in this Plan. The Agency's fear is that this difference may hide risks to public water supply during droughts. **Our response** is that we are reviewing our Water Resources Zones in preparation for the next Water Resources Plan and this will take on board any problems with meeting supplies during drought periods. We will expand the text in the Plan to reflect this.
  
2. (The following point was also raised by the ***Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust***). The point is that the Plan, as it stands, contains little information on environmental assessment and monitoring. The final document must contain an analysis of gaps in information and what monitoring will be undertaken to close these gaps. It must also identify any mitigating actions and demonstrate that the drought actions will not damage Habitats Directive sites. **Our response** is that we are completing impact assessments with the help of environmental consultants. These assessments cover all issues raised above, and the reports will be made available over the next 6 months. We will discuss these fully with the Agency and take further guidance from them as is necessary.
  
3. The Agency has expressed concern that our action trigger lines do not allow enough time to promote sufficient demand reduction measures between the initial crossing of a drought warning trigger and the point when we apply for drought permit powers. Furthermore, the Agency expects our demand reduction measures to include the banning of non-essential uses of mains water, for which we will require a drought order. **Our response** to this is that we believe that we have modelled the operation of our system adequately and we have satisfied ourselves that we can implement hosepipe bans and other demand reduction measures in the time we have allowed between the relevant trigger and application lines on our control graphs. However, our planning has not necessarily included the application of a drought order to stop non-essential use of water. As a water utility we regard this measure as a last resort for use in the most severe droughts when even drought permits cannot provide sufficient extra resource to sustain demand. We nevertheless do not rule out these measures if the alternative is a drought permit that will cause serious environmental damage. We have agreed to talk further with the Agency on this to explore a solution that is acceptable to all that retains our flexibility to deal with any drought as it develops.

4. The Agency also expressed concern that we do not have a clear plan of action to return to normal once we feel that storage in our reservoirs has recovered from the drought period. **Our response** is that we will ensure that once the trigger to stand-down all drought actions has been reached, then all extraordinary drought actions will be terminated immediately. We will ensure our final plan states this very clearly.
5. The Agency also expressed concern that it is unclear how we will manage the process for applying for summer and winter drought permits across a combined summer and winter season. **Our response** is that we will review the control curves around the switch between summer and winter drought permit applications to make the transition clearer and add explanatory text to our Plan.
6. The Agency also commented that four of our drought zones have triggers related to reservoirs outside the zonal boundaries. The expectation is that we must demonstrate that drought management actions can be deployed effectively in these zones. **Our response** is that we believe that drought actions can be deployed effectively in zones where there are no controlling reservoirs. Nevertheless, we will explain the way this will be deployed more clearly in our Plan.
7. The Agency also commented that we have not discussed the issues associated with the drought options we have given. **Our response** is that we believe that we have given this detail in Section B of our Plan. Nevertheless, we will expand the section in our Plan to better describe the sequencing of drought actions across the drought zones, and any issues that are involved in this action.
8. The Agency expressed the view that our Plan suggests that any hosepipe bans we impose would only apply to the zone in which the sources the ban was protecting were operating. Their view was that we should apply bans over a wider area if necessary. **Our response** is that we would do that in a drought, thereby maintaining flexibility in our drought management actions. We will ensure that this is made more explicit in our final Plan.
9. The Agency has proposed that we consider winter hosepipe bans as well as summer bans. **Our response** is that we believe that a winter hose pipe ban yields little or no demand saving, and our customers are likely to see this as silly unless it is part of a sensible overall programme of measures. We will, nevertheless, not rule out such a demand restriction where a significant saving can be expected. We will reflect this in the text of our Plan.

10. The Agency advised that a demonstration of leakage reduction at zonal level will be required for any drought permit application. **Our response** is that we recognise this as a requirement that has existed for a number of years and we will provide all necessary information if the occasion arises.
11. The Agency has asked for clarity on the circumstances under which we would apply for a drought permit at Trimpley. **Our response** is that we will review how our Plan explains these circumstances, and liaise further with the Agency to clarify the situation to their satisfaction. We have already opened discussions with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water on the interaction between the Trimpley Permit and any Drought Permit or Drought Order that they might promote at the Elan Valley.
12. The Agency expressed the view that we should not rely on Dwr Cymru Welsh Water to promote any drought powers at the Elan Valley. **Our response** is that we will always endeavour to work with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water as we have done in previous years. However, if agreement was not reached we would, of course, take all steps we felt necessary to protect supplies to our customers.
13. The Agency asks for clarity on how the Elan Valley Reservoirs control curves triggers a particular drought permit. **Our response** is that we will clarify this in the final plan.
14. The Agency has suggested that for the Vale of Powys Zone we promote a drought permit to increase the annual licence at Llandinam. **Our response** is that we will discuss this with the Agency. Our view is that we need to explore all options within this zone to maximise the resources under the normal licensing arrangements before such a drought permit is considered. For example, the recent conclusion of the Merrionedd CAMS leads us to believe that our source at Llanwrin might well provide adequate supporting resources for the foreseeable future. This will be part of our discussion with the Agency.
15. The Agency suggests that we clarify our intentions for a number of abandoned or closed sources that we still own. **Our response** is that we believe our plan lists all sources that we would use, and we give details of why any other sources cannot be deployed. Nevertheless, we will ensure that the situation is made clear in our final plan.
16. The Agency asks for details of how we will share our licence at Hampton Loade with South Staffordshire Water Plc. **Our response** is that we will follow the agreement between our two companies as is given in the licence for this source. We see no reason to change this in a drought

period situation but, nevertheless, accept that a flexible approach is essential to maximise reducing resources in times of drought.

## **K Range of Consultees**

**Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** commented that English Nature have not been consulted on this Plan. **Our response** is that we followed the Guidance issued by DEFRA on who to contact when we published our Plan. English Nature was contacted by letter at the time the Plan was entered on to our website, and has subsequently sent us comments. We will liaise fully with English Nature on the points raised before we publish our final Drought Plan.

## **L Impact of Climate Change**

**Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** expressed concern that we have not allowed for climate change in our Plan.

**Our response** is that current research in to climate change suggests that it is expected to take place slowly over several decades, whereas our Plan will be updated every three years. Therefore, any perceived changes to our water resources caused by any change to our climate will be adjusted for on a three year cycle.

## **M Impact on Biodiversity**

**Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** made the assertion that whilst our company professes a biodiversity action plan, no mention of this is made in our Drought Plan.

**Our response** is that we are undertaking environmental impact assessments at all sites where we may ask for drought permit powers. These reports will address any impacts these actions may have at the particular sites. However, in terms of supporting our BAP, we suggest that it is our Business Plan that reflects our longer term intentions to develop our water resources with biodiversity in mind, rather than the Drought Plan. Furthermore, the Drought Plan is a contingency plan, not a development plan. As such it will only be used should drought conditions develop. (We would also like to point out that none of our potential drought permit sites lie within Nottinghamshire).

## **N Choice of Drought Triggers**

**The Countryside Council for Wales** questioned our sole choice of reservoir storage as a trigger for drought actions.

**Our response** is that whilst we accept that there are a number of indications of drought conditions, we use only reservoir storage as it is this that forms the basis of our water resource system. As such it must be protected against failure, and this is what the drought plan aims to achieve. We do not favour using such as rainfall deficit as an indication of drought as situations can arise when a long term rainfall deficit exists but yet reservoir storage can be normal. We would not (and could not) set drought actions in motion just because a long term rainfall deficit existed when our reservoirs were full.

**O      Relevance to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive**

*The Countryside Council for Wales* warned that the Plan may come under the SEA Directive.

**Our response** is that we considered this in some detail when the Plan was compiled, and our reasoning why we do not think the Directive applies is discussed in Appendix C of the Plan. We recognise the concern CCW shows but stand by our decision. The environmental impact assessments will be available by Spring 2007 which we believe will be adequate in this respect.