



South Staffs Water

South Staffs Water draft drought plan – Statement of Response



September 2021

Statement of Response

On 31st March 2021, we submitted our draft drought plan to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The plan had been updated in line with the latest guidance and to account for any changes since we published the last plan in 2019. On 10th May 2021, the Secretary of State confirmed that our draft drought plan could be published for public consultation. This public consultation ran for a period of eight weeks from 7th June to 2nd August inclusive. We then had seven weeks to produce our statement of response to any responses provided in the consultation, and to make any changes required to our draft drought plan.

On 7th June we published our draft drought plan and all associated appendices, on our website, and also emailed these documents directly to a multitude of key stakeholders. We received responses from these stakeholders through their submission to Defra. In addition, we also shared the documents with our Customer Panel, and sought feedback from our customers through our H2Online virtual platform, who provided more informal feedback via emails and through the H2Online platform itself.

This statement of response documents the feedback and comments that were submitted to the Secretary of state and how we have taken account of the comments in the draft drought plan document.

We received 7 responses covering the following stakeholders:

[Environment Agency](#)

[Natural England](#)

[Historic England](#)

[Canal and Rivers Trust](#)

[Consumer Council for Water](#)

[South Staffs Water Customer Panel](#)

[South Staffs customers via the H2Online forum](#)

We would like to thank all who have contributed to this process and helped us to develop this plan.

Alongside this Statement of Response, we have submitted a revised draft Drought Plan to the Secretary of State. As part of the process, the Secretary of State may direct us to modify the plan, or will provide approval for the final plan to be published. The Final Drought plan will then be issued to our stakeholders and published on our website.

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Canal and Rivers Trust			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	The Trust would expect the Environment Agency and SS to notify us of any proposed changes (to abstraction from the River Severn in drought conditions). The Trust can confirm we would take a very active role in the River Severn Drought Management Group as a key stakeholder during such an event, to ensure the impact of drought restrictions is carefully managed and minimised where possible.	We welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively to ensure that any proposed actions are aligned to deliver the required outputs and manage the potential impacts.	None
2	There is a SS abstraction on the River Trent, upstream of the confluence with the River Blithe, that supports the Blithfield Reservoir if drought triggers are crossed. Although this abstraction is approximately 9km upstream of the Trust's managed abstraction from the River Trent at Wychnor, the Trust would value notification of any changes to the River Trent.	We will look to inform the Canal and Rivers Trust should there be any changes to the River Trent flow as a result of utilisation of the Nethertown pumpback scheme.	None
3	The Trust values the dialogue between our technical teams when SS are considering the application for Drought Permits and Drought Orders, and the Trust would expect the Environment Agency and SS to notify us of any proposed changes.	If CRT are identified as an interested party for a particular drought permit/order then we will discuss the application together prior to application. If CRT are identified as a statutory consultee then we will send you legal notice of our application and in other cases, we would notify you out of courtesy if we feel you would have an interest in the specific application.	None

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Consumer Council for Water			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	There is reference to customer engagement carried out during 2017 for the current Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). However, there is little evidence in the summary or other documents about the extent to which the company has engaged with its customers on its strategy for managing a drought. We want to see clear evidence of how customers' views and priorities are reflected in the plans.	Customers have been consulted as part of this process, and their comments can be seen in the customer sections below. In addition, SST are carrying out extensive customer engagement over the summer of 2021 and the drought plan has been a clear element of that, and will be followed by a deep dive into restrictions and drought actions in October. These results will then also be used to inform the WRMPs in addition to the drought plan.	None
2	The table informing about the actions to be taken at each drought trigger level is useful. However, we would like to see more detail in order to provide a clear and concise descriptor of each trigger level.	We have added some further detail to Table 1 and Figure 2 within the document to reflect these comments and comments from the Environment Agency	Updates to Table 2 and Figure 4 to reflect comments
3	In the section on 'What activities are covered by a temporary use ban?' it would be helpful to add a short paragraph, similar to that on page 12 of the summary, that adds context by explaining how much water is used by the average hosepipe.	<p>In following the guidelines for developing the draft drought plan, we have streamlined the core plan to make it a tactical and operational document. As part of this, we have removed some areas of detail to appendices and have moved some of the more customer facing information to the "Non-technical Summary" document, which is designed to provide a quick and easy to read and digest overview of the key points of our draft drought plan for our customers.</p> <p>South Staffs believe that this information sits best in this "Non-technical summary" rather than the drought plan as this detail forms part of our customer engagement and will feature in our comms plan messaging.</p>	None

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4	<p>The use of temporary use restrictions and the process is explained well and we welcome customers being encouraged to sign up to the company's Priority Service Register (PSR) so they receive the important support they need. However, there appears to be limited reference to Ordinary Drought Orders (NEUBs) or Emergency Drought Orders. We would like to see these clearly explained, along with the potential impact on consumers of these orders.</p>	<p>We have added some further detail to section 3.2.7 to explain the following:</p> <p>If we need to impose restrictions like TUBs or NEUBs, customers can contact us to ask for exemptions or for more information. After we receive these representations, we will consider these and whether it is appropriate for us to vary our policy to discretionary exceptions. If we impose restrictions and we become aware that some customers are not complying, we will try to work with them to understand why this is. We aim to work with our customers, through our ongoing education and customer engagement programmes, to create a sense of community and the feeling that we must all do our part in the preservation of water. This means we must focus our efforts into elements such as leakage reduction to ensure customers feel that we are doing everything we can, and thus encourage them to support.</p> <p>Our levels of service mean that we would look to apply at TUB at level 2 and that we would not look to implement these restrictions more than once in every 40 years. For NEUBs, we would not expect to initiate this level in restriction more than once in every 80 years. This means that we will not impose a NEUB unless we have already imposed a TUB.</p>	<p>Section 3.2.7 updated to provide additional detail</p>
5	<p>In the section on 'Keeping you informed' it states that the company will co-ordinate its communication with the Environment Agency, Water UK and other water companies. We would welcome CCW being added, with an explanation of</p>	<p>Thank you for identifying this – we believe that it will indeed be beneficial to add in some additional detail to this section regarding CCW and how we will work together to communicate to our customers. This will provide further</p>	<p>Non-technical document updated to include</p>

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	our role, and how we will work with the company to ensure the delivery of clear messages to customers. This will provide consistency with the process set out in Appendix B 'Drought Management communication plans' and in parts of the plans.	clarity and align with our "Drought Communications Plan" in Appendix B.	reference to CCW
6	Although there is reference to the incidents of dry/hot weather encountered since 2018, it is unclear that the lessons learned have been taken into account and reflected in the plans for each region. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on water usage (per capita consumption). As this is likely to continue in the short to medium term, it is unclear if this has been factored into the plans. With the current dry weather combined with increased water demand, we want to see clear evidence of this in the plans.	<p>The COVID-19 situation led to a general demand increase in 2020. During the first lockdown, there was a period of warm weather and we observed increased usage as a result of many more people being at home and enjoying their gardens as they were furloughed or schools were closed. Since lockdowns have eased, we have not seen a repeat of the demand profiles this summer that we saw in 2020, even when factoring in that most people are having "staycations" and less people are holidaying abroad. As restrictions have relaxed and schools are returning, we are seeing more "normal" (i.e. pre-2020) demand profiles.</p> <p>As part of our annual review of our Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP), we have assessed the impact of the additional demand in 2020/21 and any potential risks posed to supply as a result. As a result, we have not included COVID-19 assumptions explicitly within the drought plan. However, South Staffs is undertaking industry wide research to understand the continuing impacts of COVID-19 and any potential impacts, and should we determine any information through that process that we believe would have a material impact on our drought management, we will update the plan at that time to reflect this.</p>	None

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7	The activities covered by restrictions are explained in greater detail in the Cambridge Water Plan. We would welcome clarity on the reasons for the difference compared to the South Staffs plan and a clear description about the activities covered and exemptions from restrictions. We acknowledge reference is made to Appendix D 'Consistent notice for Temporary Use bans' but we would like to see more information in the body of the plan.	Thank you for identifying this discrepancy between the two plans. We support aligning the two Company Plans and will include the additional information provided in the Cambridge Water plan in the revised draft South Staffs Water drought plan.	Section 3.2.9 updated to reflect additional detail included in Cambridge Water plan
8	Effective communications with all customers and stakeholders is an essential part of drought management. We are concerned that the customer and stakeholder plans have minimal reference to how the company is working with Retailers to ensure effective communication with business customers in order to deliver water efficiency and reduced demand during drought and communicate the impact of drought restrictions. We urge greater consideration of how the company will work with Retailers and their customers to deliver these important messages and ask that this is made clear in the plans.	We have undertaken a full update of our "Drought Communications Plan" following this feedback and that from other stakeholders regarding this element of the plan, and this can be found in Appendix B.	None – Appendix B update
9	Table 8 sets out the Communication Plan triggers. We suggest this table includes triggers for promoting PSR and communicating with those on the company's PSR. We acknowledge this is covered in Appendix B but it would be helpful to include it within the body of the plans too.	We are very committed to promoting our PSR and supporting those customers on it. Due to the importance of this element of our communications, we have now updated the table (which is now table 10 due to other changes within the plan) to reflect the triggers relating to PSR.	Table 10 updated to reflect PSR triggers
10	With regards to communication plans, it would be helpful for the company to show examples of the campaign communications, as well as the type of messages, that customers can expect to see and receive. For example, a copy of the infographic showing what is covered under the	We have updated Appendix B – Drought Communications Plan, and included some examples of the customer infographics we share with customers.	None – Appendix B updated

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	temporary use ban. Some other companies have included this information within their plans, which we welcome.		
11	We welcome the early and regular direct personal contact with those on PSR. However, we would encourage additional early communication with customers to encourage those who meet the qualifying criteria to join PSR.	We undertake regular campaigns throughout the year to raise customer awareness of our Priority Services Register (PSR). We absolutely recognise that drought situations mean it is more important than ever to identify those who qualify for the PSR, and we have included the trigger points for raising awareness in Appendix B – Drought Communications Plan. We would look to start this communication as the earliest possible stage in our drought communications.	None – Appendix B updated
12	We are concerned that the company’s communication plans do not explicitly acknowledge Retailers as a key stakeholder. However, we note that ‘commercial (retailers)’ are listed as a customer in the table of audience. It is important that the role of Retailers, and how the company communicate with them, is made clear to ensure business customers are properly informed and advised of any water use restriction, and the support available to them in the event of restrictions.	We have undertaken a full update of our “Drought Communications Plan” following this feedback and that from other stakeholders regarding this element of the plan, and this can be found in Appendix B.	None – appendix B updated
13	This appendix (pre-draft Drought Plan consultation) provides a useful summary of the responses to consultation from various stakeholders on the pre-draft Drought Plans. However, it would have been helpful to include a column that informed how the responses had been taken into account in developing the draft plans	Thank you for the constructive build on our table. We agree that including the detail of how the responses were incorporated into the planning would make it clearer to see the links. We will endeavour to ensure that all future pre-consultations and consultations are developed in the same format as a statement of response to that it is clear how the feedback has been taken into account.	None

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Historic England			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	Historic England recommends the collection and assessment of specific baseline information which could include identifying the potential for buried, waterlogged archaeological and palaeoenvironmental remains of significant interest and fragility that can be associated with river valleys, floodplains, estuaries, coastal and wetland areas, including mires, bogs, peatland and water meadows.	As the drought plan looks to utilise existing assets, we would not look to undertake additional surveys to those already completed during construction or during any refurbishment works. However, these surveys will be required should any future works happen on site and will form part of our delivery programme.	None
2	The strategy/plan should identify the need for a deposit model, based on existing borehole and other information, as well as a preliminary assessment of the likely state of preservation of any buried archaeological remains, based on previous archaeological work in the locality.	As the drought plan looks to utilise existing assets, we would not look to undertake additional modelling to that already completed during construction or during any refurbishment works. However, should any future works happen on site we would look at the appropriate level of investigation and modelling required.	None
3	When reading through the document presented to us for consultation, we note that heritage is only referenced once on page 35, which states that there will be no impact for the historic environment. We are not clear from the information presented, or the bibliography contained within the report, what this assessment is and how a decision was reached that there will be no impact for the historic environment.	This statement is based on the known level of information we have of any heritage assets in our region. Surveys completed upon installation or refurbishment of assets ensured that any historic elements identified were managed accordingly at the time. As our drought plan looks at utilising our existing assets, and any supply options look at temporary changes to the operation of those within recent historical variation, we do not believe this would have any impacts on the historic environments we are aware of.	None

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Natural England			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	Natural England advise that an updated HRA is undertaken and submitted before publishing the final plan that the EARS are updated to reflect the mitigation requirements of recent caselaw.	We have commissioned an updated HRA and updated EAR's which will be published prior to final submission	None
2	Natural England advise that the dDP is re-written and developed through the SEA decision support process (Figure 3-1; UKWISER Report 21/WR/02/15) to embed a high level of environmental aspiration, ensuring that sustainability (environmental, social & economic) are considered effectively in the plan making process. Resilience measures should be included within the plan to mitigate the impact of any adverse effect caused by implementing the supply side options.	As a result of the conclusions of our revised HRA screening and assessment of no likely significant effects, there has been no requirement to further assess the plan for SEA.	None
3	Natural England advise that an updated HRA and SEA are undertaken, in order to facilitate the ordering of options in the dDP. Natural England require greater clarity around the 'flexible approach' to interpreting drought triggers, and request that the plan includes a clear sequencing & timing of actions under different potential scenarios. Options ordering should be evidenced and include a strategy on how the impact of TUBS will be monitored and assessed.	<p>We have added an annotated copy of our control rules to demonstrate when we would could deploy our drought options</p> <p>We have included a table showing our drought indicators and the associated actions they trigger.</p> <p>We have reviewed our HRA screening and commissioned a further independent HRA screening exercise which has expanded the area of assessment based on the advice provided. The revised HRA screening has concluded No likely significant effect, and that as a result progression to Stage 2 appropriate assessment is not required.</p>	Changes to Table 2 and figure 4

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4	<p>Natural England advise that an updated HRA and SEA are undertaken, in order to identify the adverse impacts of the plan on all protected sites, where significant impacts are recognised these must be appropriately mitigated.</p>	<p>We have reviewed our HRA screening and commissioned a further independent HRA screening exercise which has expanded the area of assessment based on the advice provided. The revised HRA screening has concluded No likely significant effect, and that as a result progression to Stage 2 appropriate assessment is not required.</p>	None
5	<p>Natural England recommend that the monitoring includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of any residual adverse significant effects identified on designated sites (identified during the HRA & SEA process), in line with the requirements of the relevant common standards monitoring guidance parameters for those features identified. This should include monitoring of all notified features of the site, where there is a potential pathway for impact. • Monitoring of any residual impacts on priority habitats and species (identified during the SEA process). • Monitoring features of designated sites and priority habitats and species which would have been significantly affected prior to mitigation (identified during the SEA process), to ensure the efficacy of mitigation measures is assessed. • Monitoring of recovery of designated and priority habitats and species where no significant effect was assumed to occur due to recoverability of a species or habitat. This is to confirm assumptions on recoverability. 	<p>We are updating our EARs to reflect changes to our changes to when deploy our supply options. These are currently in progress and will be published prior to final submission.</p>	None
6	<p>Natural England advise that measures are included within the dDP to improve the (drought) resilience of sites which will be</p>	<p>Impacts from our drought options requiring an EAR have been assessed to cause minor or negligible impacts. Note</p>	None

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	adversely affected by the supply side options included in the dDP.	also that we anticipate very infrequent deployment of these options, accordingly we do not propose to change our mitigation strategy	
7	Natural England recommends that pre-drought awareness work should be an integral part of the drought plan and we would encourage and support proactive engagement with local communities. The communication plan of pro-active measures to reduce demand during the pre-drought and dry weather periods should be improved to provide sufficient detail to demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategy.	We have undertaken a full update of our "Drought Communications Plan" following this feedback and that from other stakeholders regarding this element of the plan, and this can be found in Appendix B.	None – appendix update
South Staffs Customer Panel			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	All statements referred to customer facing summary, providing advice on wording and format to ensure it is clear and concise for our customers to read and interpret	We have updated our customer facing summary accordingly to reflect the constructive feedback from our customer panel	None
South Staffs customers via H2Online portal			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	All comments referred to customer facing summary, and suggested production of a video and infographic to share the information in an easily digestible format that can be readily accessed and quickly understood	We are currently developing the video and infographic and these will also be used as part of our drought plan communications with our customers	None

Environment Agency			
Issue #	Feedback	Our response	Change to Plan
1	<p>Recommendation 1 – provide further detail on the timing and sequencing of drought actions</p> <p>We recommend the company make improvements to its drought actions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing evidence to justify the sequencing of drought actions and any circumstances where a flexible approach may be required and the impact of this • clearly identifying the timing and sequencing of drought actions in its chosen scenarios by annotating the control curve diagrams, as set out in the water company drought planning guideline • demonstrating the prioritisation of the least environmentally damaging supply actions by including information on the impacts of each 	<p>We have now included a statement to state explicitly that we intend to deploy our least environmentally damaging supply side options first.</p> <p>Appendix C clearly sets out a range of key drought periods and circumstances that require a range of options to meet demand and we believe the modelling described in the appendix sets out sufficient justification for our current suite of drought options and the time line for their deployment. This includes the 2018 dry period.</p> <p>Our level 1 options principally involve maximising our licences and deployable output and as such no further environmental assessment is provided. For our proposed drought permits we have completed EAR's which are held by the Environment Agency or available on request. We are making some minor changes to the EAR that involve removal of assessment of the potable infusion to Blithfield. This will be available in time for the final submission. We do not expect any material changes to the severity of impacts already described in the existing EAR's .</p> <p>We have added an annotated copy of our control rules to demonstrate when we would could deploy our drought options .</p>	<p>Inclusion of statements to provide clarity.</p> <p>Addition of new figure 4 to show additional detail.</p>

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2	Recommendation 2 – detail lessons learnt from the 2018-20 dry period and incorporate these into the plan	We have now included a section in Appendix C – “Drought Triggers: Development and Scenario Testing” that details the 2018-20 dry period, the impact on our operation and our lessons learned. This can be found in section 2.2.4 of the appendix.	None – appendix C updated
3	Recommendation 3 – clarify the explanation of drought triggers and indicators	We have included a table showing our drought indicators and the associated actions they trigger. This is table 2 found in section 2.2. We have also included additional information regarding our groundwater triggers in Section 2.2.3.	Sections 2.2 and 2.2.3 updated to provide further clarity
4	Recommendation 4 – clarify and add detail to the communications plan, including pro-active water efficiency messages	We have undertaken a full update of our “Drought Communications Plan” following this feedback and that from other stakeholders regarding this element of the plan, and this can be found in Appendix B.	None – appendix B updated
5	Recommendation 5 – include estimated quantities and additional information for all supply side actions (linked to Direction 3(e) and (f))	We have reviewed Table 7 within the document and have updated the quantities column for those that state “maximise available yield” to show the estimated yield as a numerical figure.	Table 7 has been updated to ensure all quantities are listed
6	Recommendation 6 – clarify bulk supply arrangements with Severn Trent Water	We have included a table within section 3.3.4 which shows the details of our bulk supply agreements with Severn Trent Water, and the implication on these in the case of reaching level 2.	Section 3.3.4 updated to include table 5
7	Recommendation 7 – include details of compensation requirements to parties affected by a drought management measure (linked to Direction 3(h))	We have reviewed section 8.4 regarding compensation arrangements. We have added a further section for clarity, which details the following:	Section 8.4 of plan updated to reflect comments

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abstractors or occupiers/owners of land who suffer adverse impacts, damages and losses through our drought management actions from a drought permit or order are entitled to claim for compensation under the Water Resources Act (WRA) 1991. These rules are set out under Schedule 9 of the WRA, where abstractors must submit a claim within six months of the expiry date of the permit or order. We would always follow the appropriate regulations and standards in relation to compensating customers or other organisations potentially affected by our actions. - South Staffs Water follows the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) set out by Ofwat which determines whether we may be required to pay compensation to a household or business customer. - We do not believe any of our supply options would give rise to the need for compensation; however, we are open to discussions on this topic during or after a drought because every drought is different and we would want to account for the specific circumstances of each case. We will ensure that there is a clear link on the drought management page of our website for any customers or organisations to contact us in these situations. 	
8	Improvement 1 – describe how the effectiveness of Temporary Use Bans would be assessed	We have added some additional detail into section 3.2.5 that details that we would review the Distribution Input before and after implementation of a TUB to assess and quantify the impact.	Section 3.2.5 updated to reflect comments

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9	Improvement 2 – include information on mitigation of environmental drought and supporting other sectors	<p>Section 6.8 of our plan details our approach to environmental mitigation. We had enhanced this section by including our approach to mitigation if we needed to implement any extreme drought measures: In the unlikely event that we need to use any of the actions described in Section 4 – Extreme Drought Measures - the long lead in time will allow time to carry out a hydrological and environmental assessment. We will consider what, if any, mitigation is necessary as part of these environmental assessments in conjunction with the EA.</p> <p>In addition, since the publishing of the draft drought plan, we have undertaken some work to further update some of our Environmental Assessment Reports, which are available on request, and these will now ensure the most recent view of any mitigation measures required.</p> <p>With regards to supporting other sectors, we have also added further information to the plan through creation of Section 8.5 regarding how we will work with other sectors in the case of a drought e.g. fire service, farmers, private water supplies and businesses. Section 8.5 is entitled Supporting Other Sectors.</p>	<p>Section 6.8 updated to reflect comments</p> <p>Section 8.5 added to provide clarity on supporting other sectors</p>
10	Improvement 3 – clarify the drought management actions at the end of a drought	<p>We have updated Section 7.1 to include the following indicators marking the end of a drought period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Groundwater levels have returned to the normal range - River flows have returned to normal 	<p>Sections 7.1 and 7.2 updated to provide additional detail</p>

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		<p>We have also included some additional detail in Section 7.2 to provide more clarity on the elements that will be reviewed as part of the post drought review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectiveness of key elements of our plan i.e. drought planning and management, communications (including the plan, the delivery of it and the messaging within in) and environmental management - Impacts of implementation of demand measures used e.g. savings generated, impacts on vulnerable customers - Impacts of implementation of any supply measures implemented e.g. environmental monitoring, operational issues - Any updates required to plans as a result e.g. WRMP 	
11	Improvement 4 – ensure consistency in the naming and descriptions of drought actions	Thank you for highlighting these inconsistencies. We have reviewed the document and believe these have all now been corrected and aligned.	None