

Summary of Defra's Water Abstraction Plan 2017

Defra and the Environment Agency have [published plans](#) for implementing changes to the water abstraction system. The plans follow Government's response to its consultation in 2016 and includes a timeline detailing activity over the next five years. The activities that will be undertaken include:

- Reviewing time limited licences
- Adjusting licences shown to be seriously damaging
- Revoking unused licences
- Reducing under-used licences
- Bringing previously exempt abstractions into licensing
- Moving licences into Environmental Permitting Regulations
- Introduce a more modern service, including digital licences

These changes are being introduced in order to end unsustainable abstraction from rivers and groundwater and include all industries, not only agriculture. There will be a stronger emphasis on working at the catchment scale to find solutions at a local level. More detail will follow beginning in 2018. As part of this, it is expected that the following will be introduced:

- Controls to protect the environment at low flows
- Capping licences to prevent increased abstraction damaging the environment
- Support for rapid water trading
- Allowing some winter abstractors to take water at the highest summer flows
- Sharing real-time information on river flows and forecasting changes

What does this mean for farmers and growers?

Those who already have licences may see some changes depending on the local pressures, the impacts of such will be catchment and farm specific. There is already an ongoing process of reviewing licences. Some farmers and growers may already be in discussions with the Environment Agency about those changes in areas where abstraction is causing environmental damage. The result of this process may mean changes to licensed volumes or conditions may be placed on licences to protect the environment.

2018 Activity

Changes to trickle irrigation and other previously exempt abstractors

The process for bringing previously exempt abstractions (including farmers using trickle irrigation) into licensing opened on 1 January 2018. Application forms can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-forms-new-abstraction-licence-for-a-currently-exempt-abstraction.

- Farmers and growers will have until 31 December 2019 to apply for a licence
- Everyone currently operating under an exemption and abstracting more than 20m³/day will need to apply
- Licences will be determined within three years from the end of the application window
- Most licences will be granted based on existing volumes used over the last seven years
- Licences will have conditions to protect the environment during low flows and will initially be issued with time limits
- Abstractors will be able to continue to take existing volumes during this process until a licence is determined
- Evidence of historic abstraction amounts will be needed in order to support applications

Catchment approaches

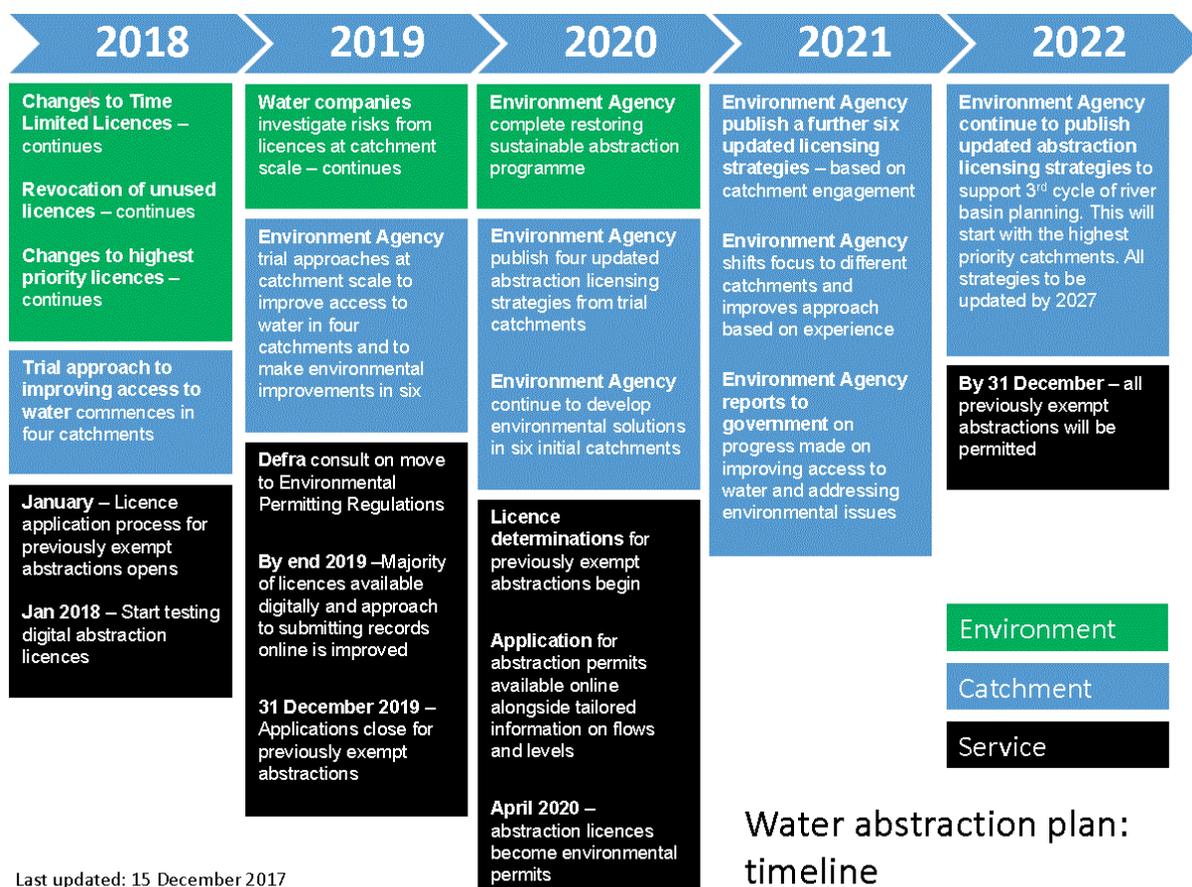
There is a desire to move towards less prescriptive, more catchment-specific solutions. The Water Abstraction Plan sets out a specific role for Catchment Partnerships, initially to trial approaches at the catchment scale to improve access to water and make environmental improvements. The pilot areas are envisaged to be as follows:

- East Suffolk
- Medway
- Black Sluice
- Idle and Torne

Work will begin in April 2018 to trial innovative approaches to abstraction management in the catchments selected.

Timeline 2018-2022

The timeline for these activities is summarised below:



Last updated: 15 December 2017