



Representing Drainage  
Water Level & Flood Risk  
Management Authorities

**CIWEM** Chartered Institution of  
Water and Environmental  
Management



## All Party Parliamentary Group *for* Sustainable Flood and Drought Management

Notes of APPG Meeting – 25<sup>th</sup> February 2026

### **Attendees:**

Charlotte Cane MP (Chair)  
The Earl of Caithness (Officer)  
Roz Savage (Officer)  
Ben Marrett ( representing Joy Morrissey MP )  
George Griffiths ( representing Alison Griffiths MP )  
Simi Osimboni ( representing Julia Buckley MP )  
Tim Davies ( representing Simon Opher MP )  
Joe Langham ( assistant to Charlotte Cane MP )

Innes Thomson, ADA ( Joint Secretariat )  
Cat Moncrieff, CIWEM ( Joint Secretariat )  
Alastair Chisholm, CIWEM (Joint Secretariat)

### **Invited Presenters**

Stuart Sampson, Drought Manager, Environment Agency  
Jon Chappell, Head of Water Resources & Planning, Water UK

### **Apologies:**

Lee Pitcher MP  
Blake Stephenson MP  
Lee Dillon MP  
Stuart Anderson MP

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

The purpose of the meeting was to hear from the Environment Agency and Water UK about lessons learnt from the 2025 Drought.

The presentation given by Stuart Sampson will be posted on the APPG page through ADA's website at <https://www.ada.org.uk/about-us/>

## **Presentations – Lessons from the 2025 Drought**

### **Speaker – Stuart Sampson, Drought Manager at the Environment Agency**

Stuart began his presentation by highlighting some definitions, indicators and triggers of drought conditions. There are 4 stages of drought;

- Prolonged dry weather
- Drought
- Severe drought
- Recovery

2025 was classified as Drought with the driest spring since 1897, abstraction restrictions put in place, 20% of England's canals were closed, food crops were impacted and over 9 million people were affected by hosepipe bans.

Stuart went on to say that with the exception of east Anglia, which is still in recovery stage, all other areas in England are back to normal status. The topping up of most on-farm reservoirs is also back to normal but it will be several years until we fully understand any environmental impacts from the drought. Hyper-local comms were found to be useful.

Temperature was a key factor and 2025 was the hottest summer on record with significant stress on the environment and increased water demand.

Stuart reported learning successes in wider collaboration across all involved in managing water, an earlier response to the developing situation, improved communications between partners and externally facing to the public.

There were, however, a number of areas for improvement and additional learning such as;

- Understanding the risks better of higher temperatures
- Using the media more effectively
- Issuing earlier alerts (more intense summers mean quicker response time needed)
- Improved drought planning
- Better use of temporary use bans
- Better sharing of data
- Better flexibility and agility of approach
- Better joined-up planning

Stuart completed his presentation by saying that it would be helpful for a wider cross section of organisations that handle water to be more involved in drought planning. Stuart accepted that the right balance had to be achieved and that, for example, it was not reasonable to expect every farmer to have a drought plan but that local abstractor groups ( and by inference those who help convey water such as CRT and Internal Drainage Boards ) could play their part.

In summary, Stuart concluded that we need to take heed of:

- A changing climate
- Rising temperatures and more intense summers
- How we respond to future droughts
- Longer term considerations for water resources
- More sectors getting involved with drought planning.



Stuart also updated the APPG on the National Framework for Water Resources and made the surprising remark that water companies are abstracting less water now than back in 2000. But there are key pressures which include;

- Environmental considerations
- Increasing population
- Resilience of supply
- Climate change
- Land use pressures

What is at stake includes;

- Food production
- Energy
- Industry
- Water supply
- The state of nature

The framework maps out a road to resilience which Stuart summarised as;

- Water demand reduction
- Catchment based solutions – managing land to retain water
- New storage and transfer options
- Nature-based resilience
- The use of strategic infrastructure

### **Speaker – Jon Chappell, Head of Water Resources and Planning, Water UK**

Jon started by explaining that, basically, it stopped raining in February, leading to the driest spring in England since the nineteenth century.

Jon outlined that Water Companies had consulted on and agreed five year drought plans in 2022. These are detailed plans which set out;

- Trigger points for each of 4 levels of drought based on reservoir, river or groundwater levels which vary by time of year,
- Actions to be taken at each of those trigger points. Typically, this means advanced communications, enhanced leakage teams and moving water around the network (level 1), hose pipe bans and drought permits (level 2) and non-essential use bans and drought orders (level 3). In a worst-case scenario (level 4), companies would be required to impose standpipes in the street.

Water companies followed their drought plans. Four companies implemented hosepipe bans in at least some of their region but only three of fourteen companies remained in business-as-usual mode. The rest deployed enhanced leakage teams, some of whom fixed record number of leaks, issued extensive communications ( eg social media, local music festivals, etc ) and moved water around the network to keep reservoirs topped up (e.g. pumping, tankering).

Three companies entered level 3 but only late in the summer – the Government did not sign off any Non-Essential Use Bans, but drought orders were issued.



Rain returned in the autumn, with 120% of long term average rainfall across the UK in Autumn 2025. In winter 2025-26 the UK has seen rainfall well above average, and in some locations it has rained every day since the start of 2026. January saw 117% of long term average rainfall across the UK, with 150% for England – the area worst affected by drought. This means a full resource recovery is well underway.

### **Lessons for future drought**

Jon continued to run through a series of lessons taken from 2025 as follows;

- **Drought permits and orders:** These are agreed in drought plans and they are continuously monitored. They are essential so companies can respond to the drought as it emerges. However, Natural England (NE) and the EA introduced uncertainty during the drought – NE for example said that a drought permit *might* be a drought order which introduced uncertainty and meant that lead times to obtain orders in the worst case scenario would move from 12 to 84 days. This becomes very hard for water companies to plan – they may even end up taking water from places that are worse for the environment because they can guarantee the permit in that location on time – this should all be agreed up front once every five years in the drought plan to remove any uncertainty.
- **Hierarchy:** Jon went on to say that fortunately, we did not get into a critical position – drought level 4 - but we could have done – and it was not clear to anyone how water use would be prioritised. This has to be a political choice for government, not the water companies, and everyone (providers and consumers ) needs clarity of the position before any drought level 4 situation becomes a reality. This means uncomfortable political choices – they do need to be made – and it will be better for everyone that the water supply hierarchy is known up front. Other democracies have clear hierarchies in place – such as Spain and the Netherlands. For example, in Spain urban water supply is prioritised, followed by irrigation and agricultural users. Defra is developing this – it needs to be comprehensive and delivered in time for Summer 2026.
- **Lessons for Water Resources management:** We have seen three droughts in 7 years – 2018, 2022 and 2025 – and dramatic temperatures not expected in the UK before 2050. We are not very resilient – this is in part (but only in part) a historic problem and we have been working to the wrong drought resilience standard (worst historic drought – 1 in 100 year) meaning that no new reservoirs have been planned or built for thirty years.

However, we are still planning on the basis of ambitious targets in the Environment Act rather than forecasts – and, for some parts of the country, there will be shortages in supply and demand if we do not achieve those targets. We should plan on the basis of forecasts. Jon was concerned that cutting demand and leakage is a convenient argument for politicians and regulators, versus new supply when it comes to managing bill impacts. Jon argued that we need changes to Environment Agency guidance to require adaptive options within Asset Management Plan (AMP) periods if we do not hit targets.

Those plans also rely on government action – 90 million litres of water savings by 2030 is dependent on government-driven savings from water efficiency label and building standards. But Jon believes neither is working – mandatory water efficiency labelling, for example, requires a statutory instrument to be laid and is unlikely to be in place until the end of 2028.



Jon believes we need to be more radical for the long term – to deliver for the environment and for growth – housing and business development are already being held up due to a lack of water. We do not know enough about how much water is abstracted and its impact on river flows – groundwater abstraction does not correspond directly to river flows. Jon suggested that we need to;

- Scrap the de minimis water abstraction threshold of 20,000 litres a day – we have heard of several boreholes each taking 19,999 – this is not uncommon when government sets boundaries,
- Install smart meters on all abstraction points so we know who is taking what when – we are rolling out 10 million domestic smart meters this AMP period – so why can't we have 18,000 fitted on abstraction points ?
- Further into the future, you could then have a cap and trade system for spare capacity – as they do in the Murray-Darling basin in South Australia. Back in the UK, 400 miles of canal were closed last year because we have a clunky system, lacking real-time data – and a market would incentivise reductions and efficiency so spare capacity can be sold on.

Jon completed his presentation by saying that none of the above will be quick, it is always better to have started yesterday, but we should start today.

## Q & A session

Charlotte Cane MP commenced the discussion with an observation that development was happening at pace but before proper regulation was in place to drive water demand down. She also expressed concern about the nation's lack of firm plans regarding a level 4 (severe) drought and suggested that the APPG write to Minister Hardy expressing that concern. Jon Chappell believed that Defra was considering options and that a letter from the APPG could help focus thoughts.

### **Action: Secretariat to prepare a draft letter to Minister Hardy from APPG**

Roz Savage MP added that the lack of resilience was striking and supported the above action.

Charlotte Cane MP continued to point out that there were targets in place but with no meaningful plans to meet them and that there was a distinct lack of planning enforcement to achieve the right outcomes for housing developments.

Roz Savage MP asked if long term weather pattern scenarios are being used in making decisions on actions needing to be taken and Stuart Sampson responded that they were. Jon Chappell added that event return periods were being constantly updated.

Roz Savage MP went on to ask what is going to change to get water companies to do the right thing in the longer term ? Jon Chappell argued that the Regulator has effectively set the standards with water companies arguing for change but having been pushed back. He also said that now new large water resources schemes were being developed outside water companies.

The Earl of Caithness asked if flooding has been considered as part of the drought management process or are the two subjects kept separate ? Stuart Sampson provided assurance that flood and drought were considered together. Alistair Chisholm added that there are also significant water quality issues with sudden downpours which can occur during periods of hot weather.



Jon Chappell said that we don't have enough data to provide a full picture of water resources across catchments, a point supported by Innes Thomson who stated that many Internal Drainage Boards do not have an accurate knowledge of the water coming into their districts and flowing out at the bottom end. Jon also said that abstraction license caps are inflexible, meaning 'available' water can't easily be shared; smart meters are needed on abstractions.

The Earl of Caithness asked how we reduce demand ?

Jon Chappell responded by saying that any messaging on this needs to come from trusted sources and, in present times, that is less likely to be the water companies. He also suggested that a tightening of building regulations would help steer social behaviour.

Roz Savage MP asked how the importance of healthy soils could play a part and what work in that area had gone on. Speakers agreed that soil health is very important and that studies are being undertaken to understand the full impacts of better soil management.

Roz Savage MP went on to ask about how domestic water butts could and should play their part and if water companies are considering offering water butts to consumers? Stuart Sampson said that some water companies have started this, and that a mix of options would be need to address the water scarcity challenge.

Jon Chappell highlighted the White Paper published by Government on 20<sup>th</sup> January and commended MPs to read and review its content. The White Paper can be downloaded at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-new-vision-for-water-white-paper>

Stuart Sampson also highlighted Minister Emma Hardy MP's oral evidence to the House of Lords Drought Preparedness Committee, held on 11<sup>th</sup> February which can be heard at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9406/drought-preparedness/>