

Mr Richard Astle
Natural Cambridgeshire
c/o Athene Communications
25 Priestgate
Peterborough
PE1 1JL

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Email: richard@athene-communications.co.uk

Dear Richard,

Loss of flow on the River Granta

Thank you for your letter of 20 September 2019 regarding the loss of flow on the River Granta.

We are committed at all levels within the Environment Agency to plan for and respond to prolonged low rainfall and drought conditions; from our local staff dealing with catchment response through to our Chief Executive convening the National Drought Group.

After successive drier than average winters, drought conditions are affecting parts of the south east and East Anglia due to lack of groundwater recharge in the chalk aquifers. The cumulative rainfall for the past 16 months is the 8th lowest for East Anglia since records began in 1910.

The Environment Agency is actively monitoring, assessing and reporting the water resources situation across the whole of England. In East Anglia, our operational teams have activated and are following our drought plans. As part of our drought response, Environment Agency staff have increased walk over surveys and engagement with local water users. We are responding to incidents caused by low water levels, including rescuing fish in distress or oxygenating the water to help them.

We continue to work with our partners including water companies, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to coordinate the response to the prolonged dry weather; and with farmers, businesses and others to manage water availability and to ensure that, as far as possible, they get the water they need whilst safeguarding the environment. This wider consultation and engagement helps us to review the best response to manage actions triggered by the current conditions.

Following an extremely dry summer last year, the winter period that followed was also very dry, rainfall was only 70% of the long term average in the Cam catchment. It is the Chalk groundwater which provides the base flow to the river Granta in the summer and this is predominantly why we are currently seeing such low flows. A wet June helped temporarily over the summer but we are unlikely to see any significant recharge to the groundwater until the late autumn and winter.

Abstraction does also exert a pressure on groundwater but it also provides essential water for the public, agriculture and industry. The balance has to be right if we're to ensure there's enough water for everyone and the environment. We are working with South Staffordshire Water to improve flows in the river Granta and to prevent deterioration. We have agreed flow related conditions on the licences held by them at Linton, Rivey Hill and Horseheath which affect the river Granta. These conditions are designed to restrict abstraction in order to protect the flows needed to support the ecology in the river.

We always encourage people to use water wisely and follow advice from their water company about saving water. Using water efficiently will help ensure we all have enough water for our homes, to produce food, products and services, and to protect our valuable natural environment, especially during prolonged periods of low rainfall.

You can find out more ways to save water from our partners at www.waterwise.org.uk/save-water.

Please report any environmental incidents including very low river flows and lake levels to our 24 hour hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

I trust this has answered the matters raised to your satisfaction. If I can be of further help in this, please do contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Hawkins
Area Director
East Anglia Area

Tel: 02030 255472

Email: areamanagercorrespondence.eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk