

The River Darent

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction

Our proposals to change abstraction licences in the Darent Catchment.

Thames Water Utilities Limited holds several licences that allow them to take groundwater within the Darent Catchment for public water supply, including two at Eynsford and Horton Kirby. The amount of water that can be abstracted at Eynsford and Horton Kirby is damaging to this sensitive and important water environment so we want to use our legal powers to change this.

Background

The River Darent suffers from low flows particularly in dry years. This is mainly a result of the canalisation and water abstraction which the catchment has endured over the last century. When water is taken from wells and boreholes close to the river this reduces the amount of water left in the river.

The mid-Darent is an important Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) chalk river habitat, and provides a shelter for many invertebrates, animals, plants and fish. It is this stretch which suffers the most in dry years.

The Darent Action Plan (DAP) was agreed in 1992 to address this issue. Many options were put forward and implemented to improve the flows, including river enhancements, river augmentation boreholes and reducing abstraction.

Water abstraction has already been reduced or stopped at 5 abstraction boreholes operated for public water supply purposes by Thames Water Utilities Limited. These licence change proposals are the last step in the Darent Action Plan.

What is the problem?

Recent surveys show that abstraction is continuing to affect the ecology of the river. This is despite improvements already achieved from the implementation of earlier phases of the Darent Action Plan.

What do we want to do to solve the problem?

To achieve acceptable flows, our proposal is to reduce the combined total annual and daily quantities of water that may be taken out of the river at Eynsford and Horton Kirby. We are also proposing to reduce the individual daily licensed quantity at Horton Kirby. Thames Water Utilities Limited will use new abstraction boreholes that are further away from the river to replace the water that they will be unable to abstract at Eynsford and Horton Kirby.

What will varying these licences achieve?

The variation of these licences will see more sustainable flows in the River Darent, especially in dry months when the river is at greatest risk of drying out. It will give protection to the river ecology and benefit the angling clubs and other people who use the river. It will benefit many species; in particular fish populations such as Brown Trout, invertebrates such as river limpet and nerite, and aquatic plants including ranunculus.

Do these benefits outweigh the costs?

The most cost beneficial method of meeting the river flow requirement is to effectively relocate the riverside groundwater abstraction to sites further away from the river. We have considered the implications of all the possible solutions and have decided that this proposal is the most cost beneficial solution. This means that the benefits that will come from the solution outweigh the costs of implementing it.

So what is happening now?

We have told Thames Water Utilities Limited that we want to change these abstraction licences. They have until 6th February 2013 to tell us if they object to or agree with our proposals. You also have the chance to comment on this proposal. You can do this by sending us an email to rsa.representations@environment-agency.gov.uk or by writing to us at the following address:

**Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Team
Environment Agency
3rd Floor Operations
Horizon House
Deanery Road
Bristol
BS1 5AH**

You need to make sure your letter or email arrives with us on or before 6th February 2013 otherwise we won't be able to consider it. If you want to find out more detail about this abstraction licence change scheme then you can contact John Poole on 07747 173772 or send an email to rsa.representations@environment-agency.gov.uk.

We hope you will support this scheme as we believe it to be very good value for people, the economy and the environment.

Once the 6th February 2013 deadline has passed, if the licence holder has objected to our proposal we will refer this case to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at Defra. The ultimate decision on whether to uphold our proposed abstraction licence changes or not rests with the Secretary of State.