

Case Study

Southern Water

In 2019 stricter limits were placed on the amount of water Southern Water can abstract from the rivers Test, Itchen and Candover. This case study reveals limited progress, concealed information and a continued lack of water supply solutions.



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of the water needed for Southampton East in extreme drought will come from the River Itchen & Candover Brook

In March 2019, stricter limits were placed on the amount of water Southern Water can abstract from the rivers Test, Itchen and Candover during periods of low flows [1].

These cuts are to protect the ecology in these internationally important and highly protected chalkstreams.

Despite this, progress on new supply solutions has not been fast enough and Southern Water plan to rely on drought permits, that allow them to **increase river abstraction above ecologically-safe limits.**

WildFish.

Feb 2023

A water resource management scheme was entered into by the parties pursuant to section 20 of the 1991 Water Industry Act. This section 20 agreement implements the abstraction reductions and included an objective: “not to require the Itchen and Candover Drought orders after 2027 and only to require the Test Surface Water Drought Order or Permit after 2027 in extreme drought events (1 in 500-year drought severity) [1].” Accordingly, Southern Water committed to having new sources of water available, in particular Havant Thicket reservoir, by 2027. However, as we enter 2023 progress towards establishing the new supply solutions has been glacially slow.

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Southern Water is responsible for maintaining the water supply to an area designated as Southampton East. This area is highly dependent on the section 20 rivers. In times of extreme drought this area has a water supply deficit of approximately 80 million litres-per-day [2]. Our meeting with Southern Water uncovered that **around 90% of the water needed in this area, during periods of extreme drought, will come from the Itchen and Candover.** Southern Water will achieve this using drought permits, which allows them to increase their abstraction above ecologically-safe limits.

Southern Water’s dependency on the section 20 rivers will remain in place up until Havant Thicket reservoir and associated projects are completed. We understand, from our meeting with Southern Water, that **the earliest the full Havant Thicket supplies could come online is now 2031 – though it may take until the mid 2030s.** This means the rivers will bear the brunt of the drought deficit – with huge potential environmental costs – for far longer than was envisaged in the section 20 agreement. This is not presented in a transparent way in Southern Water’s dWRMP consultation documents.

Customers and stakeholders with an interest in the Test, Itchen and Candover would be appalled knowing these rivers are the only supply source, to a number of Southern Water’s supply areas, during an extreme drought. Thus, concealing this information minimises the criticism Southern Water could expect to receive on their plan.



[1] Agreement under Section 20 of the Water Resources Act 1991 between Southern Water Services Limited and The Environment Agency.

[2] Environment Agency personal communications