

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS279)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Written Statement made by: **Minister for Water and Flooding (Emma Hardy)** on 16 Jul 2026.

Water Company Resilience to Heatwaves and Sustained Hot Weather

I wish to update the House on the action this Government is taking to strengthen water company resilience to heatwaves and sustained hot weather.

The Met Office outlook for July to September 2026 indicates that a hotter than usual three-month period is more likely than normal. Higher temperatures can place significant pressure on water resources and infrastructure, increase customer demand, and heighten the risk of localised supply interruptions. It is therefore essential that water companies maintain robust plans to protect customers and sustain supplies during periods of severe and prolonged heat.

This year has already been challenging for water supplies. Some parts of the country have received lower than average rainfall this spring, such as the Anglian region where only 39% of expected rainfall fell. Combined with record spring temperatures, this has reduced reservoir and groundwater storage and river flows across a number of regions.

Alongside recent heatwaves, water companies have increased supply to meet rising demand. During the Met Office Red Heat Warning, Thames Water supplied an additional 316 million litres of water per day compared with the previous year, while Anglian Water increased production by up to 30%, equivalent to supplying a county the size of Lincolnshire. Despite these pressures and some localised supply interruptions, the sector avoided widespread disruption and maintained supplies to the vast majority of customers.

On Thursday 2 July, I brought together the senior leadership of Water UK and those water companies most affected by the recent Met Office Amber and Red Heat Warnings to review the sector's response to the recent period of extreme heat, assess preparedness for the remainder of the summer, and agree the actions necessary to strengthen resilience and protect customers during any future periods of sustained hot weather. The meeting examined lessons from recent heatwaves and the actions needed to reduce future risks to customers.

Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) are in place across a number of regions in response to high levels of demand. TUBs are currently in place for South East Water customers in Kent, Southern Water customers in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, South West Water customers in Mid Devon and parts of East Devon, and across the Anglian Water region. Cambridge Water and Affinity Water have also announced TUBs which will come into force shortly. Such measures can help manage demand and protect supplies during periods of sustained pressure.

Everyone has a role to play in using water wisely, particularly during periods of sustained hot weather. I expect water companies to provide customers with clear and timely information on the practical steps they can take to reduce the amount of water they use during periods of peak

demand.

The Government will maintain close oversight of water sector resilience throughout the summer. My officials remain in regular contact with the sector, regulators and resilience partners to monitor demand, water resource availability, infrastructure resilience and incident preparedness. I expect all water companies to manage periods of exceptional demand, protect vulnerable customers and respond effectively to incidents. Where performance or preparedness falls short, I will not hesitate to take the action needed to minimise impacts on customers.

I welcome Ofwat's announcement of a £30.5m redress package for South East Water for failures that left thousands of households without water for days. The package was developed following a joined-up approach between water regulators, targeting the best possible action to address SEW's failures. This is in line with the Government's proposed water reforms, which will involve the new regulator taking a supervisory approach – enabling a broader and better understanding of company performance, earlier intervention and prevention of further decline. The package also includes requirements to produce a Performance Improvement Plan, setting out how the company will deliver sustained improvement in its performance, and an Independent Monitor to support Ofwat to assess progress against the plan.

A reliable supply of clean water is fundamental to public health, economic growth and community resilience. Alongside immediate action to prepare for summer pressures, this Government is delivering the long-term reforms needed to build a stronger and more resilient water sector.

Through our programme of water reform, we are strengthening regulation and accountability while ensuring companies deliver the investment needed to improve infrastructure and resilience. We will create a single, powerful regulator, giving Government and regulators, for the first time, a clear system-wide view of company performance and stronger tools to intervene where companies fall short. We will also introduce a Water Ombudsman, ensuring that customers have a stronger voice and clearer routes to redress when things go wrong.

This builds on the Water (Special Measures) Act, which introduced the toughest sentencing powers ever applied to law-breaking water company executives and powers to ban unjustified executive bonuses. Together, these reforms will strengthen accountability and help restore public confidence in the water sector.

We will also introduce statutory resilience standards, improve asset mapping and strengthen oversight of critical infrastructure to help water companies prepare for climate change and more frequent periods of extreme heat.