



Test and Itchen Abstraction Licensing Strategy

A strategy to manage water resources sustainably

Version 3

March 2019

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment.

We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth.

We can't do this alone. We work as part of the [Defra](#) group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

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1. About the licensing strategy

This strategy sets out our approach to managing new and existing [abstraction](#) and [impoundment](#) within the Test and Itchen [catchments](#) in the Test and Itchen river basin district.

These catchments are located in Hampshire and cover an area of almost 1675 square kilometres. A significant part of both catchments is underlain by chalk, which gives rise to the characteristic flow regimes and drainage patterns. In particular, a number of the tributaries of both rivers are winterbournes, which means that they dry up for periods of time along their lengths.

Significant public water supply abstraction is provided from groundwater sources in the upper and middle reaches of the two rivers and from surface water abstraction in the lower catchments. The rivers support watercress farms, fish farms and agriculture. The River Test, River Itchen and much of the coastal water around Southampton are also nationally and internationally important for their biodiversity and quality of habits. The water resources pressures and designations define the context within which our strategy is set.

Our approach ensures that River Basin Management Plan objectives for water resources activities are met and we avoid deterioration within this combined catchment.

We apply this approach to the [water body](#) in which the abstraction is located. It also applies to all downstream [surface water](#) bodies that may be affected by any reduction in abstraction-related flow, or adjacent [groundwater](#) bodies affected by any reduction in groundwater level.

Please see [Managing Water Abstraction](#) for the technical explanation, legal and policy requirements behind the Abstraction Licensing Strategy ([ALS](#)).

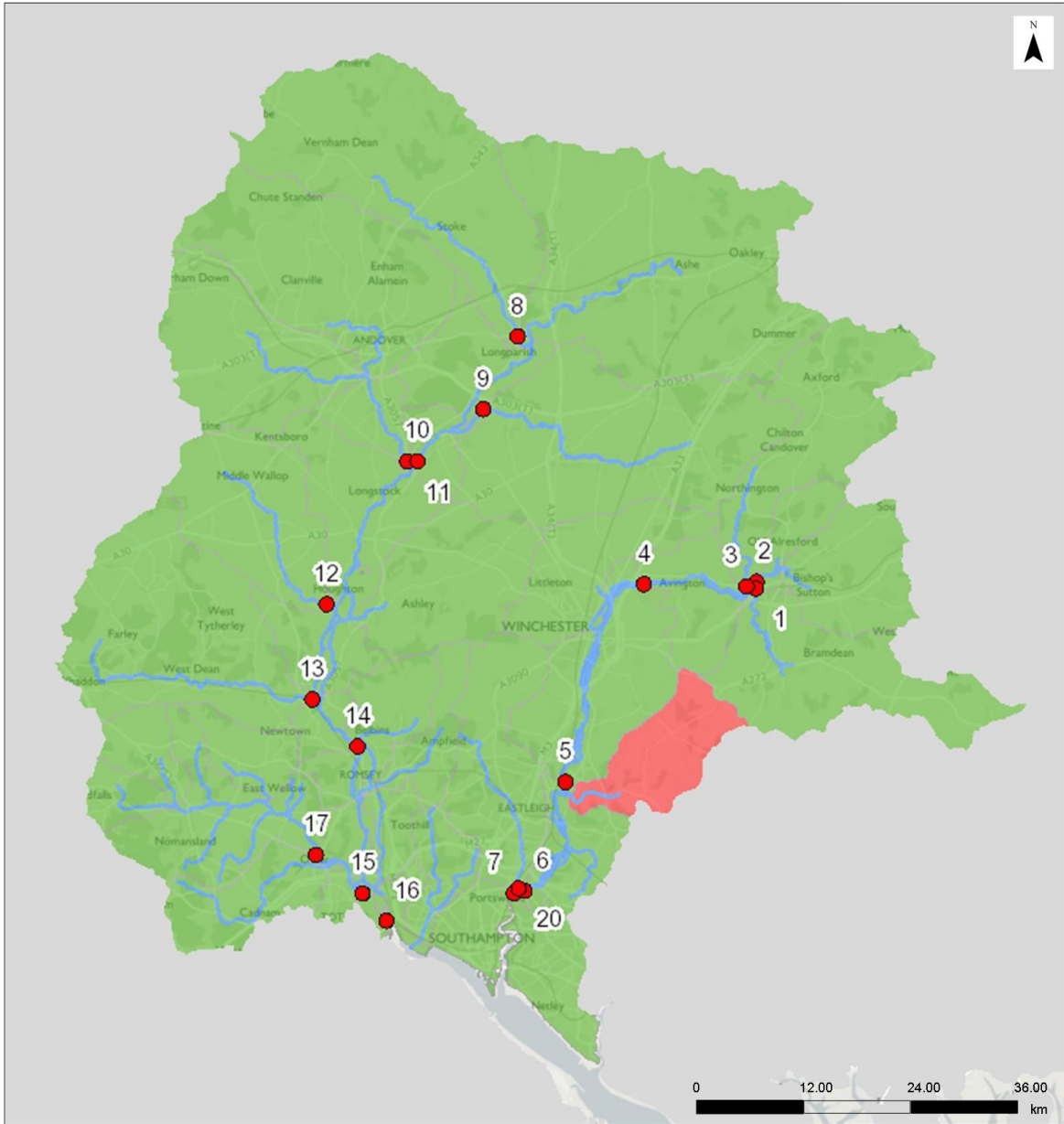
Please see [abstraction pages on gov.uk](#) for advice on who needs an abstraction or impoundment licence, and how to apply.

2. Water resource availability of the Test and Itchen ALS

2.1. Resource availability

The water resource availability, calculated at four different flows, Q95 (the flow of a river which is exceeded on average for 95% of the time i.e. low flow), Q70, Q50, and Q30 (higher flow) for this ALS is presented and explained in Maps1 to 4 and Section 2.1.1 below.

Map 1: Water resource availability colours at Q30 for Test and Itchen ALS.

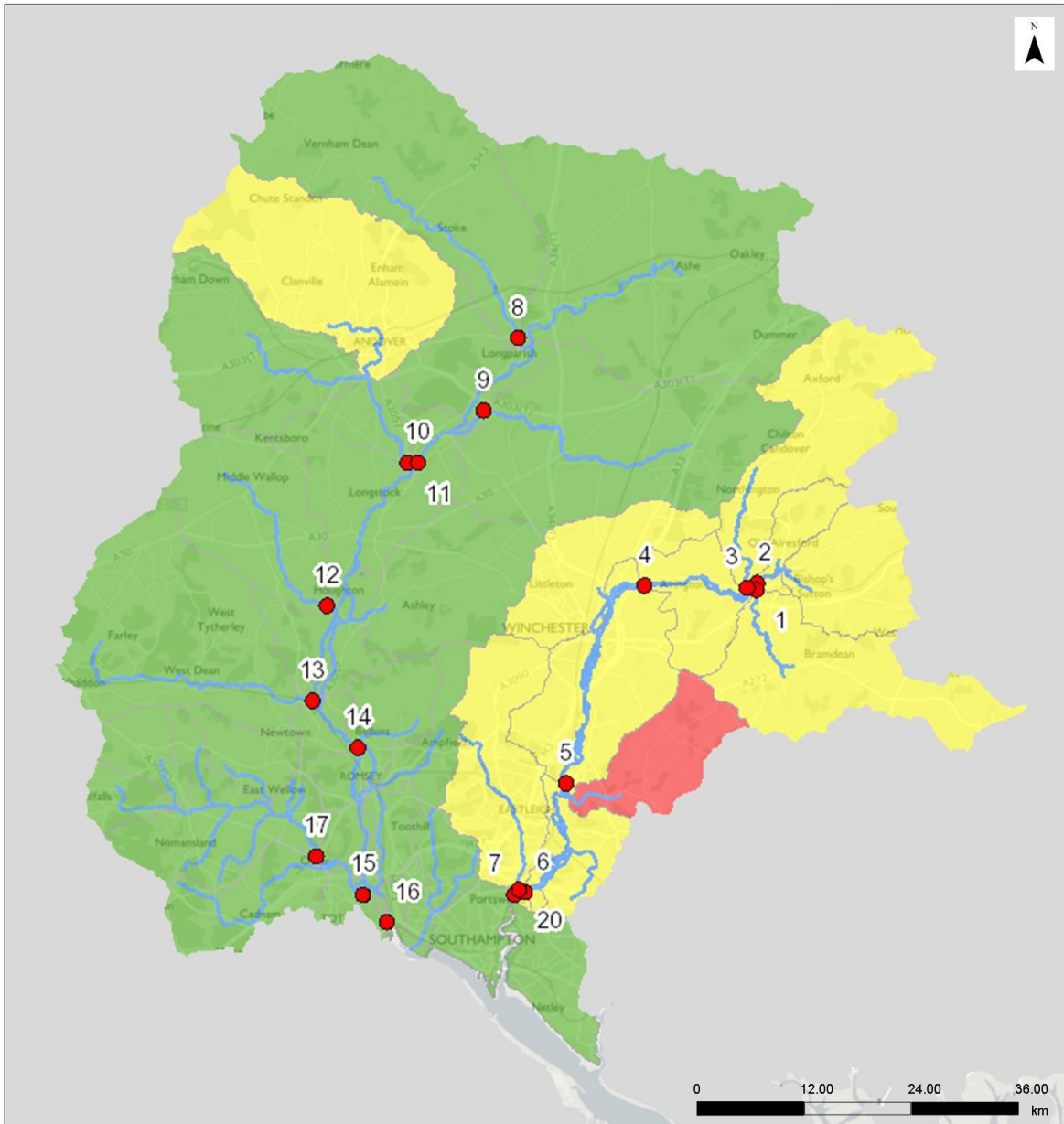


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Legend:

- Assessment Points
 - Rivers
- Water Availability at Q30:
- Water available
 - Restricted water available
 - Water not available

Map 2 Water resource availability colours at Q50 for Test and Itchen ALS.



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Legend:

● Assessment Points

— Rivers

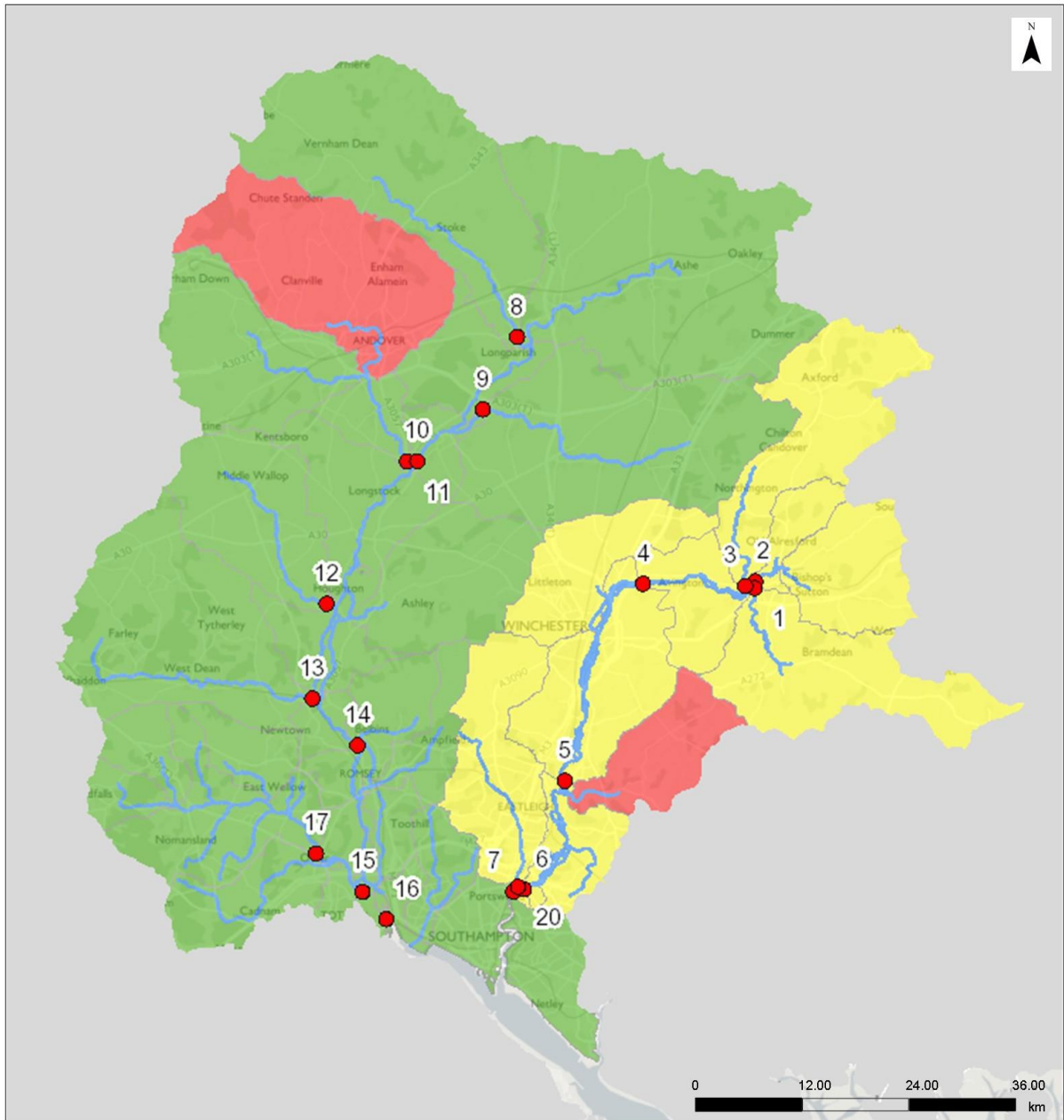
Water Availability at Q50:

■ Water available

■ Restricted water available

■ Water not available

Map 3 Water resource availability colours at Q70 for Test and Itchen ALS.

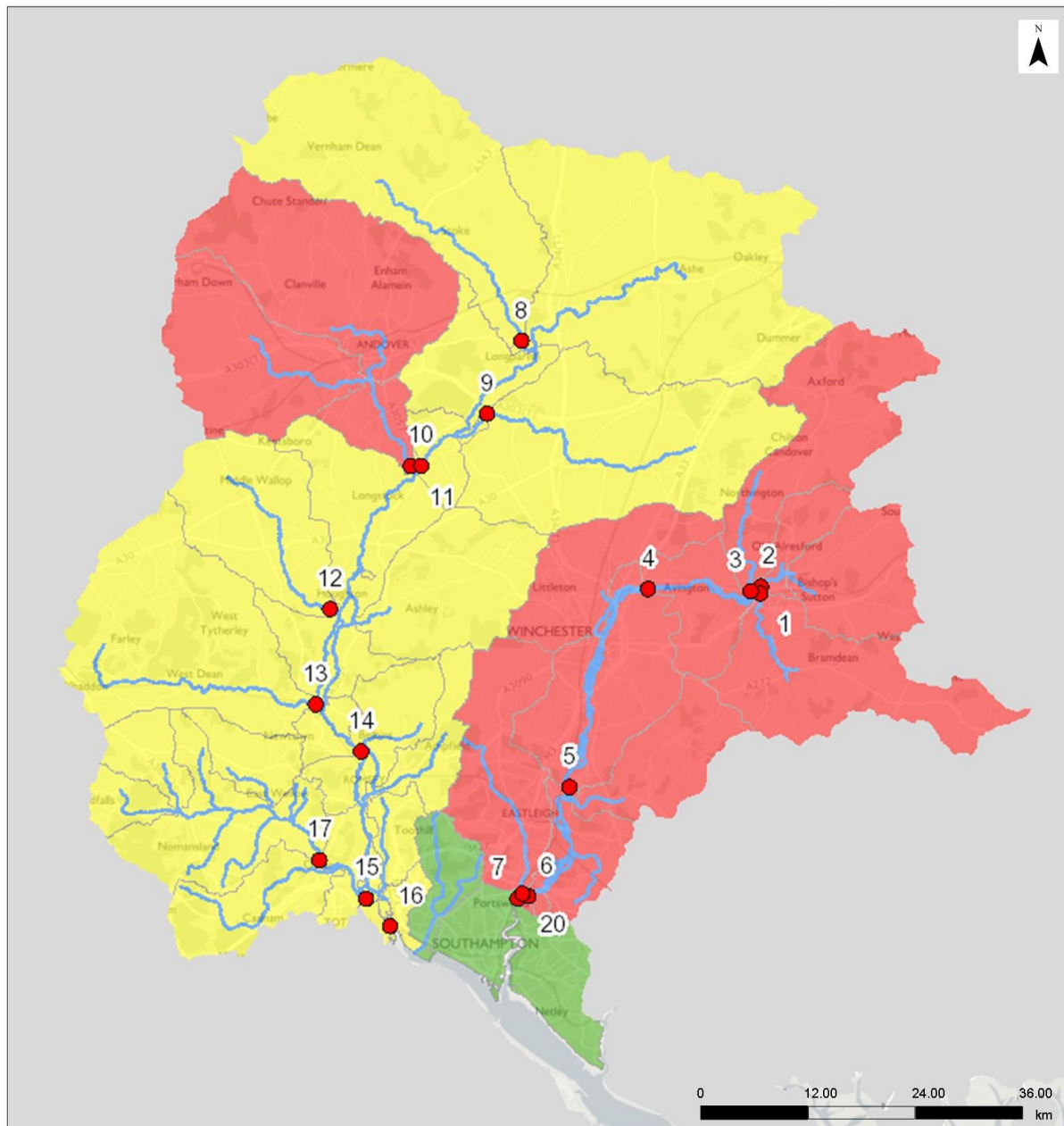


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Legend:

- Assessment Points
 - Rivers
- Water Availability at Q70:
- Water available
 - Restricted water available
 - Water not available

Map 4 Water resource availability colours at Q95 for Test and Itchen ALS



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Legend:

- Assessment Points
- Rivers
- Water Availability at Q95:
 - Water available
 - Restricted water available
 - Water not available

2.1.1. Water resource availability colours and implications for licensing

Water available for licensing

Green 

There is more water than required to meet the needs of the environment.

New licences can be considered depending on local and downstream impacts.

Restricted water available for licensing

Yellow 

Full Licensed flows fall below the [Environmental Flow Indicators EFIs](#).

If all licensed water is abstracted there will not be enough water left for the needs of the environment. No new consumptive licences would be granted. It is likely we'll be taking action to reduce full licensed risks. Water may be available if you can 'buy' (known as licence trading) the entitlement to abstract water from an existing licence holder.

Water not available for licensing

Red 

Recent actual flows are below the EFI.

This scenario highlights water bodies where flows are below the indicative flow requirement to help support a healthy ecology in our rivers. We call this 'Good Ecological Status' ([GES](#)) or 'Good Ecological Potential' ([GEP](#)) where a water body is heavily modified for reasons other than water resources.

Note: we are currently taking action in water bodies that are not supporting GES or GEP. We will not grant further licences. Water may be available if you can buy (known as licence trading) the amount equivalent to recently abstracted from an existing licence holder.

Heavily Modified Water Bodies ([HMWBs](#)) (and/or [discharge](#) rich water bodies

Grey 

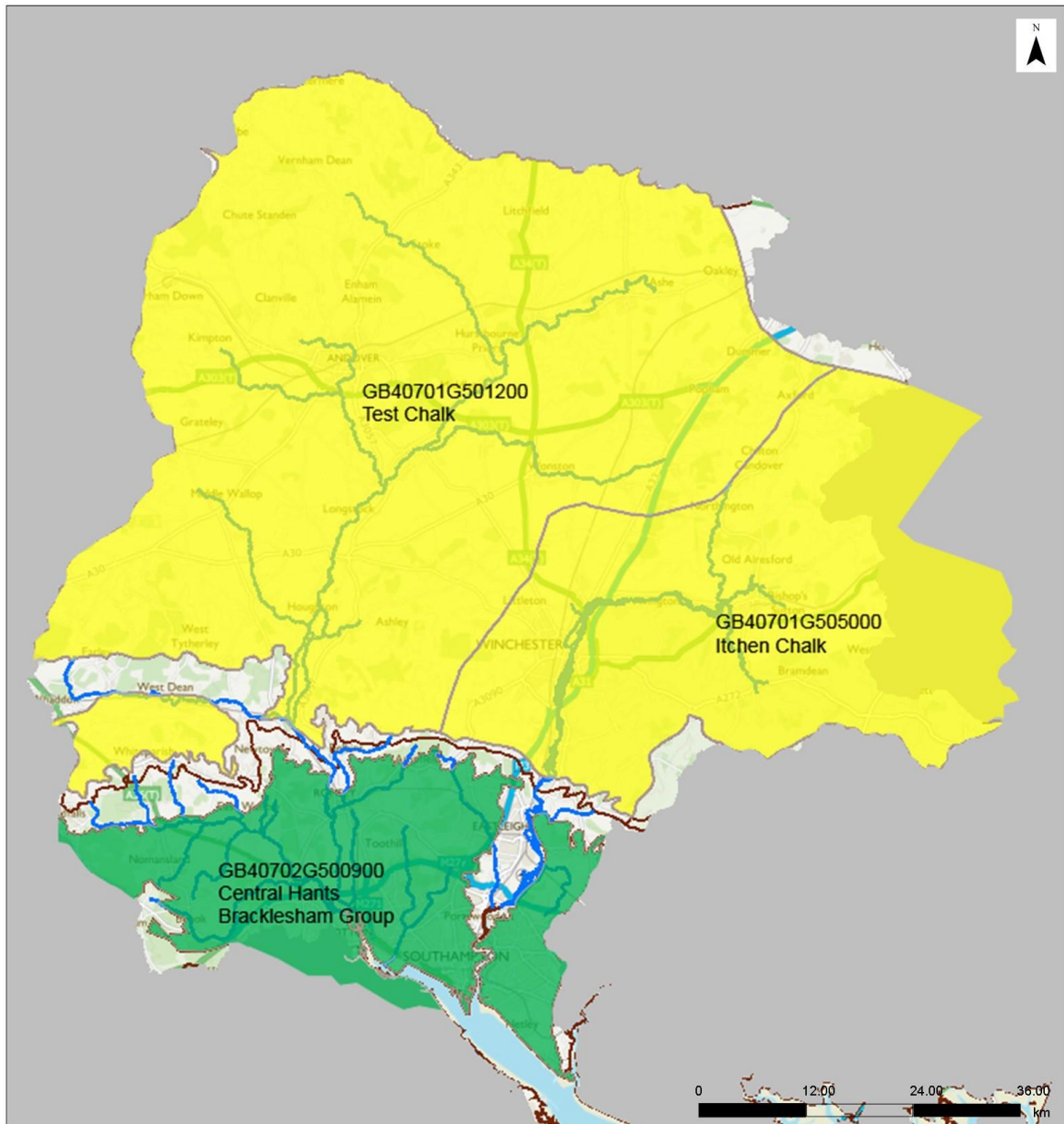
These water bodies have a modified flow that is influenced by reservoir compensation releases or they have flows that are augmented. These are often known as 'regulated rivers'. They may be managed through an operating agreement, often held by a water company. The availability of water is dependent on these operating agreements. More detail if applicable can be found in section 4.2.1 Surface Water

There may be water available for abstraction in discharge rich catchments, you need to contact the Environment Agency to find out more.

2.2. Groundwater resource availability

In certain areas, resource concerns over groundwater mean that the standard water resource availability colours have been overridden. Section 2.2.1 explains the groundwater resource availability colours, and Map 5 shows these colours for groundwater in Test and Itchen area.

Map 5 Water resource availability colours for groundwater in Test and Itchen ALS.



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Legend:

● Assessment Points

— Rivers

Water Availability for groundwater:

■ Water available

■ Restricted water available

2.2.1. Groundwater resource availability colours and implications for licensing

Water available for licensing

Green 

Groundwater unit balance shows groundwater available for licensing. New licences can be considered depending on impacts on other abstractors and on surface water.

Restricted water available for licensing

Yellow 

Groundwater unit balance shows more water is licensed than the amount available, but that recent actual abstractions are lower than the amount available OR that there are known local impacts likely to occur on dependent wetlands, groundwater levels or cause saline intrusions but with management options in place.

In restricted groundwater units no new consumptive licences will be granted. It may also be appropriate to investigate the possibilities for reducing fully licensed risks. Water may be available if you can 'buy' (known as licence trading) the entitlement to abstract water from an existing licence holder.

In other units there may be restrictions in some areas, for example in relation to saline intrusion.

Water not available for licensing

Red 

Groundwater unit balance shows more water has been abstracted based on recent amounts than the amount available.

We will not grant further licences.

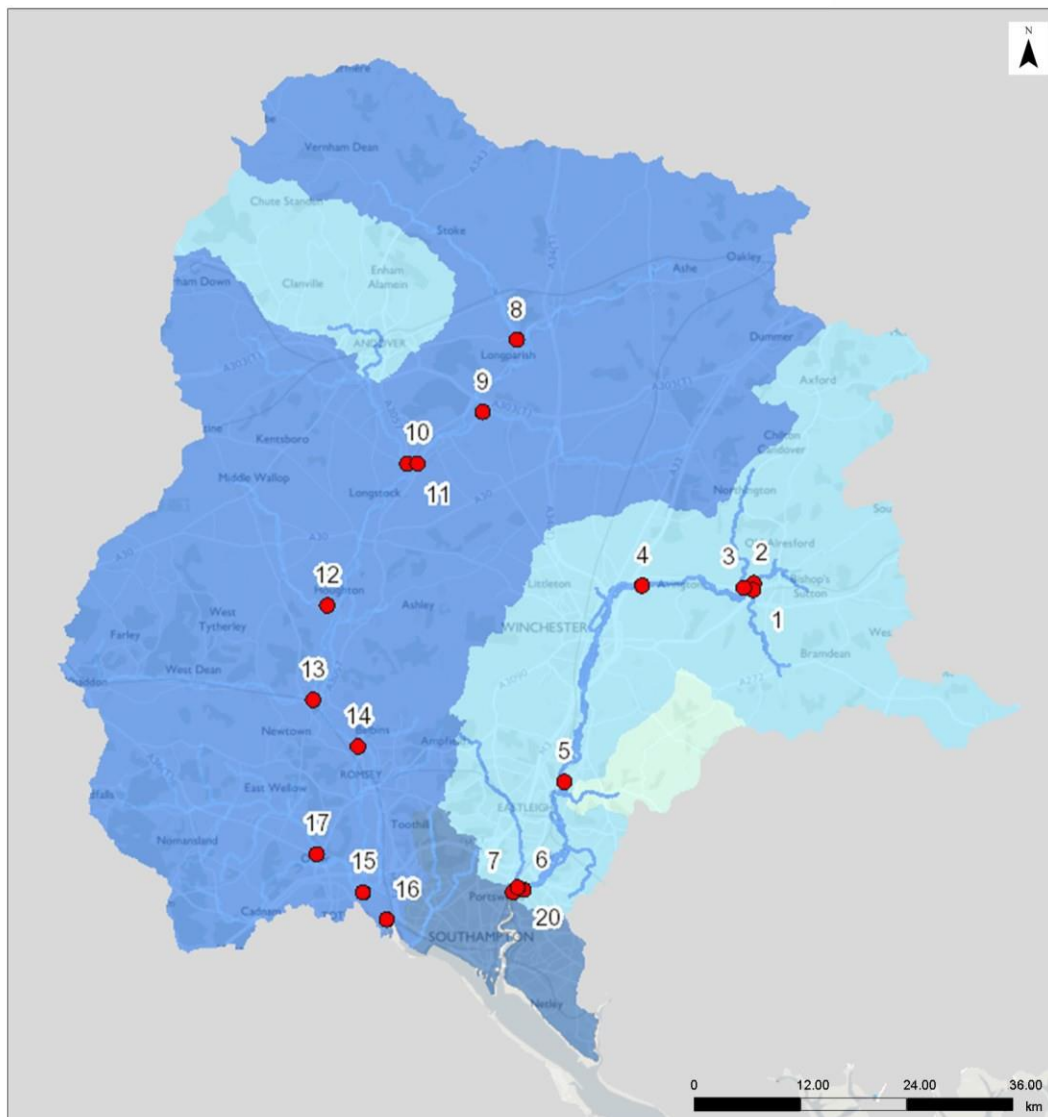
2.3. Resource reliability

If you want to apply for a licence, it's worth considering the reliability of your abstraction.

By assessing the quantity of water available at different flows it's possible to see when there is a surplus or deficit of water and the associated reliability of an abstraction. This is an indication only; actual reliability of a licence will be discussed when you apply.

Map 6 gives an indication of the resource availability for [consumptive abstraction](#) in the Test and Itchen area expressed as a percentage of time.

Map 6 Water resource reliability of the Test and Itchen ALS expressed as percentage of time available



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Legend:

● Assessment Points

— Rivers

Percentage of the time additional consumptive resource may be available:

- Consumptive abstraction available less than 30% of the time
- Consumptive abstraction available at least 30% of the time
- Consumptive abstraction available at least 50% of the time
- Consumptive abstraction available at least 70% of the time
- Consumptive abstraction available at least 95% of the time

2.4. Other considerations for availability and reliability

We may have to add constraints to licences such as ‘[hands off flow](#)’ (HoF) conditions to protect the environment and the rights of other abstractors. As a result, when we grant a licence, it doesn't mean that we guarantee a supply of water. These conditions specify that if the flow in the river drops below what's needed to protect the environment, abstraction must reduce or stop. So, in dry years, restrictions are likely to apply more often, which will affect the reliability of supply.

Whilst this document may say that water is available for abstraction, this doesn't guarantee that all applications will be successful. This is because we have to determine each application on its own merits, and local factors may mean we're either unable to grant a licence as applied for, or even at all.

New licences within an ALS are usually given a Common End Date ([CED](#)), which allows them to be reviewed at the same time. The next CED for this ALS is 31 March 2037, but we may set a CED to 31 March 2025 if we have concerns about any proposals.

2.5. Impoundments

Applications for impoundments will be dealt with on a case by case basis. More information may be found on our [water management web pages on gov.uk](#).

3. How we manage abstraction in the Test and Itchen ALS

3.1. Assessment points

We assess surface water flows at [Assessment points](#) (APs), which are significant points on a river, often where two major rivers join or at a gauging station. APs cover multiple surface water bodies.

Where groundwater abstractions directly impact on surface water flows, the impact is measured at the surface water AP.

Table 1 gives an indication of how much water is available for further abstraction and the associated restrictions we may have to apply to new and varied [abstraction licences](#) from the main river. Tributaries to the main river may be subject to different restrictions and quantities and will be assessed locally on a case by case basis.

Each HoF is linked to an AP and is dependent on the resource availability at that AP. In some cases additional restrictions may apply to licences where there is a more critical resource availability downstream to protect the ecological requirements of the river. This is detailed in the last column of Table 1 if applicable.

All abstraction licence applications are subject to an assessment to take account of any local and downstream issues and may be subject to further restrictions.

Reading from top to bottom in Table 1 are the APs in the Test and Itchen ALS area, with AP1 to AP7 and AP20 being in the River Itchen catchment and AP8 to 17 being in the River Test catchment. Reading across the columns you can see the potential HoF that may be applied to a licence, the number of days water may be available under this restriction and the approximate volume of water in [MI/d](#) that may be available etcetera. In cases where there is water available at all flows we may apply a Minimum Residual Flow (MRF) to protect very low flows. We'll decide this on a case by case basis.

AP	Name	Water Resource Availability	HOF Restriction (MI/d)	Number of days per annum abstraction may be available	Approximate volume available at restriction (MI/d)	Is there a gauging station at this AP?	Additional restrictions
1	Sewards Bridge GS	Water not available for licensing	69	95	5.5	Yes	HOF @ AP6
2	Drove Lane GS	Water not available for licensing	162	95	5.5	Yes	HOF @ AP6
3	Borough Bridge GS	Water not available for licensing	66	95	5.5	Yes	HOF @ AP6
4	Easton GS	Water not available for licensing	434	95	5.5	Yes	HOF @ AP6
5	Allbrook & Highbridge GS	Water not available for licensing	539	95	5.5	Yes	HOF @ AP6
6	Riverside Park GS	Water not available for licensing	559	95	5.5	Yes	To protect flows in River Itchen SAC
7	Itchen Total	Water not available for licensing	571	102	12	No	To protect flows in River Itchen SAC
8	Bourne GS	Restricted water available for licensing	29	266	7.5	Yes	HOF @ AP16
9	Bransbury GS	Restricted water available for licensing	56	266	18	Yes	HOF @ AP16

AP	Name	Water Resource Availability	HOF Restriction (MI/d)	Number of days per annum abstraction may be available	Approximate volume available at restriction (MI/d)	Is there a gauging station at this AP?	Additional restrictions
10	Chilbolton GS	Restricted water available for licensing	344	266	23	Yes	HOF @ AP16
11	Fullerton GS	Restricted water available for licensing	119	208	6	Yes	To protect flows in lower River Test
12	Bossington GS	Restricted water available for licensing	15	266	7	Yes	HOF @ AP16
13	Dunbridge GS	Restricted water available for licensing	47	266	12	Yes	HOF @ AP16
14	Timsbury Bridge GS	Restricted water available for licensing	621	266	23	Yes	HOF @ AP16
15	Blackwater Total	Restricted water available for licensing	70	266	18.5	No	HOF @ AP16
16	River Test Total	Restricted water available for licensing	647	266	23	No	To protect flows in River Test SSSI and Solent Maritime SAC

AP	Name	Water Resource Availability	HOF Restriction (MI/d)	Number of days per annum abstraction may be available	Approximate volume available at restriction (MI/d)	Is there a gauging station at this AP?	Additional restrictions
17	Ower GS	Restricted water available for licensing	20	266	7.5	Yes	HOF @ AP16
20	Monks Brook	Water not available for licensing	29	102	12	No	HOF @ AP7

Table 1 Summary of licensing approach for the assessment points of Test and Itchen ALS.

The critical AP for licensing on the River Itchen is AP6 at Riverside Park, which is the most downstream gauging station on the river. We need to protect flows in the River Itchen SAC and the coastal SPA and SAC. Abstraction will only be considered at medium to high flows.

Water availability in the River Test catchment and its tributaries is constrained by AP16, which is the most downstream assessment point. Abstraction will only be considered when flows are high across the catchment, in order to protect flows in the riverine and coastal protected sites. Additionally, abstraction in the River Anton and Pilhill catchments is also constrained at moderate flows.

Thus there is very limited opportunity for abstraction at all assessment points, which means that no new unconstrained licences will be granted within the Test and Itchen ALS Area. In all catchments, we would support and encourage potential abstractors who wish to take water during high flow periods to provide reservoir storage for subsequent re-use during drier months when other surface water resources are unavailable.

Small streams without assessment points and located in the tidal or coastal reaches are modelled in the Test and Itchen ALS, but we have low confidence of resource assessment and reliability in these areas on account of no measured flow data or ecological monitoring. We will consider potential applications in these water bodies on a case-by-case basis.

For licence applications received from 2019 onwards, we will apply a time limit to 31 March 2037 in order to avoid issuing a short-duration licence. Where we are uncertain of the long-term impacts of a proposed abstraction, we will apply a CED to 31 March 2025 so that environmental monitoring data can be collected.

3.2. Groundwater

For major aquifers we may divide the area into groundwater management units (GWMU), which are sub-divisions of the groundwater bodies. In these cases we use the information and assessments on these units to determine water availability and licence restrictions.

Where groundwater abstractions directly impact on surface water flows, including reduction of base flow, the impact is measured at the surface water AP. In these cases, restrictions may be applied to licences, such as Hands off Level ([HoL](#)) conditions. The HoL is a groundwater level below which an abstractor is required to reduce or stop abstraction.

Other restrictions may apply where availability is limited or to protect the environment, for example to prevent saline intrusion.

Licence restrictions on groundwater abstractions in the Test and Itchen ALS area

River Test Chalk - Restricted water available

When assessing whether we will grant licences for abstraction from the Chalk, we have to assess how those abstractions may affect nearby water features, other licence holders and the overall balance of water resources in the Chalk aquifer. Analysis shows that there is very little scope for any additional abstraction that would not cause additional impacts on sensitive water features. Consequently, there is a presumption against new consumptive groundwater abstractions from the Chalk.

River Itchen Chalk - Restricted water available

When assessing whether we will grant licences for abstraction from the Chalk, we have to assess how those abstractions may affect nearby water features, other licence holders and the overall balance of water resources in the Chalk aquifer. Analysis shows that there is very little scope for any additional abstraction that would not cause additional impacts on sensitive water features. Consequently, there is a presumption against new consumptive groundwater abstractions from the Chalk.

Central Hants Bracklesham Group - Water available for licensing

New licences can be considered depending on impacts on other abstractors and on surface water. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Customers should contact the Environment Agency to discuss proposals.

3.3. Coasts and estuaries

The River Test and River Itchen flow into Southampton Water and the Solent, which are designated under the Habitats Directive for their habitats and species. Freshwater flows to the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site and Solent Maritime SAC are important. The effects of abstractions on these designated areas have been investigated through the RSA programme and the Habitats Directive Review of Consents. Further information on the designations can be seen in Section 3.5.

3.4. Heavily modified water bodies

In the Test and Itchen ALS Area there are no water bodies which are heavily modified for Water Resources purpose, which could include features such as significant lakes or reservoirs, that would influence the downstream flow regime of the river.

Both the River Test and River Itchen have a complex network of multiple channels along their lengths. Over time, much of the natural braiding has been modified by the installation of sluices, operated by riparian landowners to artificially control the flow apportionment between channels. The majority of channel modifications do not significantly alter the water resource availability within the catchment.

The exception to this is the Itchen Navigation, which is a disused 18th century canal system linking Winchester to the sea at Southampton. Throughout the valley between Winchester and Mansbridge the river and Navigation flow in separate channels with flow exchanging between the two channels at certain points. The flow split means that water availability on either side of the valley is reduced locally between Winchester and Mansbridge.

3.5. Protected areas

UK law provides a very high level of protection to two types of designated sites due to their special environment. These are:

- Special Areas of Conservation ([SAC](#)), which contribute to biodiversity by maintaining and restoring habitats and species;
- Special Protection Area ([SPA](#)), which provides protection to birds and their nests, eggs and habitats

Ramsar sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest ([SSSI](#)) also carry a high level of environmental importance.

Within the Test and Itchen ALS area there are a number of protected sites. Both the River Test and River Itchen are important chalk streams and are classified as SSSIs, with the River Itchen additionally designated as SAC. The South Downs National Park includes the River Itchen SAC. The New Forest National Park extends into the River Blackwater catchment in the south-west of the ALS area. The coastal designations include Solent Maritime SAC and the Solent and Southampton Water SPA. Much of the remaining rural area is covered by local landscape designations.

Applications for new abstraction may have to be supported by supplementary assessments to evaluate the potential impact of the abstraction on the protected sites.

4. Managing existing licences

4.1. Water rights trading

We want to make it easier to trade water rights. A water rights trade is where a person sells all or part of their water right, as defined by their abstraction licence(s), to another person on a permanent or temporary basis. In the majority of cases a trade will involve a change in abstraction location and/or use which we will need to approve through the issue or variation of abstraction licences.

In licensing trades, as with new abstraction licences, we need to make sure that we don't cause any deterioration in water body status both within the water body / bodies where the trade will take place and to downstream water bodies. The section below provides a guide to the potential for trading in water bodies of a particular ALS water resource availability colour, as shown previously on Maps 1 to 4.

To find out more about licence trading please go to our [water management web pages on gov.uk](#)

Guide to the potential trading in water bodies of a particular ALS water resource availability colour

Water available for licensing

Green 

Allow trades of recent actual abstraction and licensed abstraction, but little demand for trading expected within water body as water available for new abstractions.

Restricted water available for licensing

Yellow 

There may be opportunities for licence holders to trade up to their full licensed quantities, but the quantities of water available to trade may be restricted once levels of actual abstraction reach sustainable limits. We will not permit licence trades in water bodies where we are taking action to prevent deterioration unless the trade is consistent with achieving water body objectives.

Water not available for licensing

Red



We will only trade recent actual abstraction but no increase in recent actual abstraction is permitted in water body. Licensed abstraction will be recovered for the environment.

HMWBs

Grey



Opportunities for trading will depend on local operating agreements and local management.

4.2. Taking action on unsustainable abstraction

AP1 to 7 and AP20: River Itchen

The water resource availability colour is red.

The impact of abstraction licences on the River Itchen SAC was assessed in the Review of Consents process. As a result of that process, we have modified three fish farm licences to protect flows in the River Itchen.

We have also reviewed the use of groundwater augmentation schemes to support flows in the River Itchen during low flows. We have revoked the licence for the Alre Scheme and have significantly reduced the licence for the Candover Scheme as a result. This will lead to a less managed and more natural flow regime in the upper reaches of the River Itchen.

We have been working with the water companies over many years to add conditions to their abstraction licences to protect the River Itchen SAC. Portsmouth Water changed their abstraction licence in 2011 and, following a recent Public Inquiry, Southern Water's licences were changed in March 2019.

Further investigations will be completed in the period 2020 to 25 to look at the impact of abstractions on the Candover Stream and possible abstraction impacts on the wetlands of the Itchen Valley. We will also consider the impact on abstraction and water quality of applying the Common Standards Monitoring Guidance standards to the River Itchen.

AP11: River Anton at Fullerton GS

The water resource availability colour is red.

The flows in the River Anton and Pilhill catchments are impacted by a major public water supply abstraction that supplies Andover and a waste-water discharge at Fullerton that exports water from the catchment. Both of these influences create a depleted reach in the River Anton. The possible impact of abstraction is being investigated and any necessary licence changes will be made by March 2020.

AP8 to 10 and AP12 to 18: River Test

The water resource availability colour is yellow.

Abstractions in the Upper and Middle River Test are mainly small, local public water supplies or non-consumptive fish farm and cress-bed abstractions and the waterbodies are meeting their environmental indicators.

The largest abstraction in the Lower River Test is for public water supply and has been subject to extensive investigation, resulting in a Public Inquiry. As a result of that process, Southern Water's licence was reduced and further conditions were added in March 2019. This included increasing the level of flow protection afforded by the licence.

We are also seeking to reduce or revoke any unused or partially used licences in this area to secure the proper use of water resources.

4.3. Regulating currently exempt abstraction

As the abstraction licensing system in England and Wales developed over the past 50 years, certain abstractions have remained lawfully exempt from licensing control. This meant that unlimited supplies of water could be abstracted, even in areas that are water stressed.

This means that those exempt abstractions could potentially take unlimited amounts of water, irrespective of availability and without regard to impacts on the environment or other abstractors.

Following two public consultations Government have introduced new Regulations to take effect from 1st January 2018. The Water Resources (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2017 have removed the majority of previous exemptions from licensing control, and current exempt abstractors will now require a licence to lawfully abstract water.

The main activities affected are:

- transferring water from one inland water system to another in the course of, or as the result of, operations carried out by a navigation, harbour or conservancy authority;
- abstracting water into internal drainage districts;
- dewatering mines, quarries and engineering works, except in an emergency;
- warping (abstraction of water containing silt for deposit onto agricultural land so that the silt acts as a fertiliser);
- all forms of irrigation (other than spray irrigation, which is already licensable), and the use of land drainage systems in reverse (including transfers into managed wetland systems) to maintain field water levels;
- abstracting within currently geographically exempt areas, including some rivers close to the borders of Scotland; and
- abstractions covered by Crown and visiting forces (other than Her Majesty the Queen and the Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster in their private capacity).

Where we have details of these abstractions, we've included them in our assessments to consider how they impact on the catchment.

We recognise the important historical and landscape features provided by water meadow systems in the River Test and River Itchen catchments and so we would encourage good water level management through appropriate use of high flows in the winter months.

Where new or renovated structures are installed, flood defence consent and an abstraction licence may be needed. An impoundment licence may also be required.

Potential applicants should contact the Environment Agency for advice at an early stage when planning this type of work.

5. List of abbreviations

ALS

Abstraction Licensing Strategy.

AP

Assessment Point.

CED

Common End Date.

Defra

Department of Environment Fisheries and Rural Affairs.

EFI

Ecological Flow Indicator.

GEP

Good Ecological Potential.

GES

Good Ecological Status.

GW

Groundwater.

HMWB

Heavily Modified Water Body.

HoF

Hands off Flow.

HoL

Hands off Level.

MI/d

Megalitres per day.

SAC

Special Areas of Conservation.

SPA

Special Protection Areas.

SSSI

Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

UKTAG

United Kingdom's Technical Advisory Group.

WB

Water body.

6. Glossary

Abstraction

Removal of water from a source of supply (surface or groundwater).

Abstraction licence

The authorisation granted by the Environment Agency to allow the removal of water.

Assessment point

A significant point on a river, often where two major rivers join or at a gauging station.

Catchment

The area from which precipitation and groundwater will collect and contribute to the flow of a specific river.

Consumptive abstraction

Abstraction where a significant proportion of the water is not returned either directly or indirectly to the source of supply after use. For example for the use of spray irrigation.

Discharge

The release of substances (for example, water, treated sewage effluent) into surface waters.

Environmental flow indicator

Flow indicator to prevent environmental deterioration of rivers, set in line with new UK standards set by [UKTAG](#).

Groundwater

Water that is contained in underground rocks.

Hands off flow

A condition attached to an abstraction licence which states that if flow (in the river) falls below the level specified on the licence, the abstractor will be required to reduce or stop the abstraction.

Impoundment

A structure that obstructs or impedes the flow of inland water, such as a dam, weir or other constructed works.

Surface water

This is a general term used to describe all water features such as rivers, streams, springs, ponds and lakes.

Water body

Units of either surface water or groundwater which we use to assess water availability.

Would you like to find out more about us or your environment?

Then call us on

03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

email

enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

or visit our website

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