Dorset: abstraction licensing strategy

A strategy to manage water resources sustainably

March 2020

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Published by:

Environment Agency
Horizon House, Deanery Road,
Bristol BS1 5AH

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

Further copies of this report are available from our publications catalogue: http://www.gov.uk/government/publications or our National Customer Contact Centre: 03708 506 506

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LIT 7609 Version 2.0

Contents

1. About the licensing strategy

This strategy sets out our approach to managing new and existing abstraction and impoundment within the Dorset catchment in the South West river basin district. The Dorset catchment includes the Frome, Piddle and West Dorset rivers and the Dorset Stour and tributaries.

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

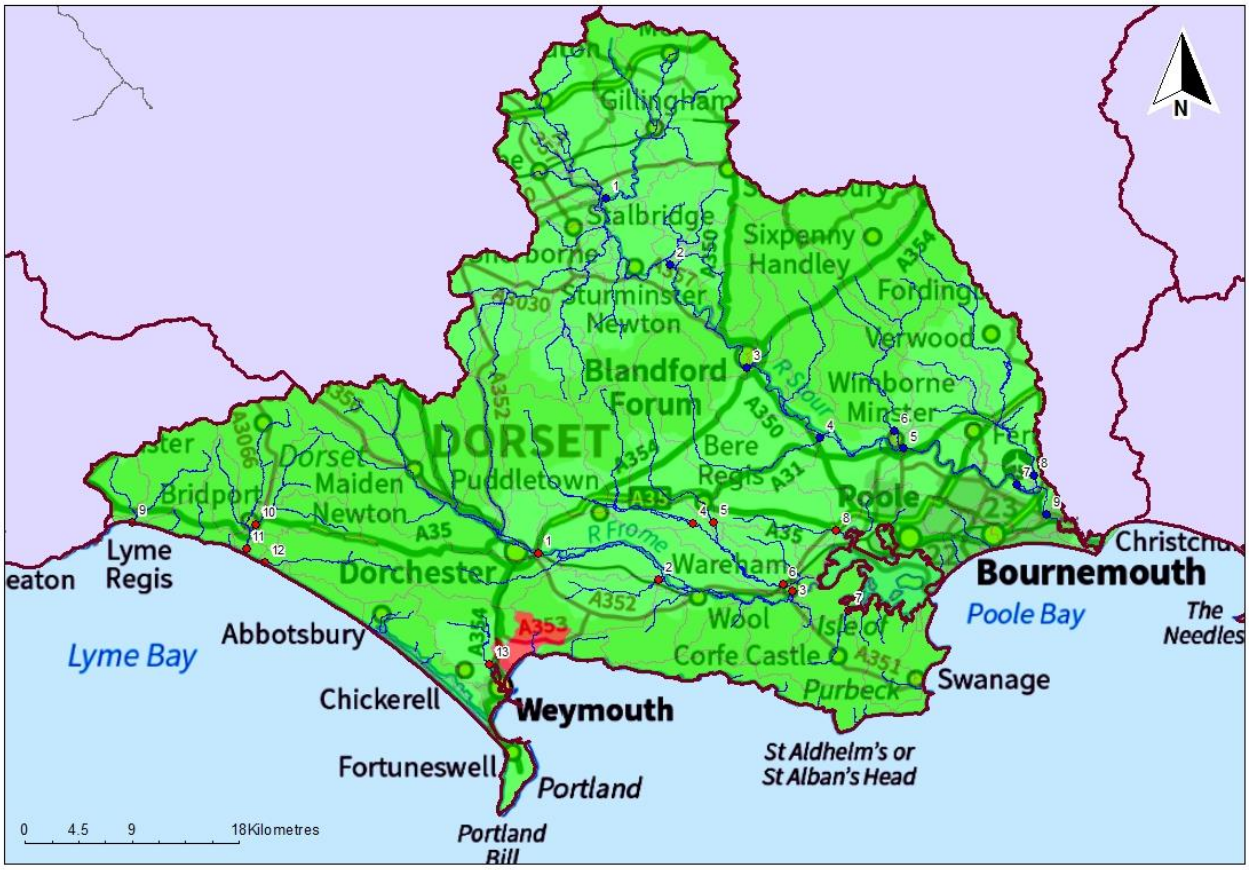
Please see abstraction pages on gov.uk for advice on who needs an abstraction or impoundment licence, and how to apply.

2. Surface water resource availability of the Dorset 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 are presented and explained in Maps1-4 and section 2.1.1 below.

Map 1: Water resource availability colours at Q30 for Dorset ALS.



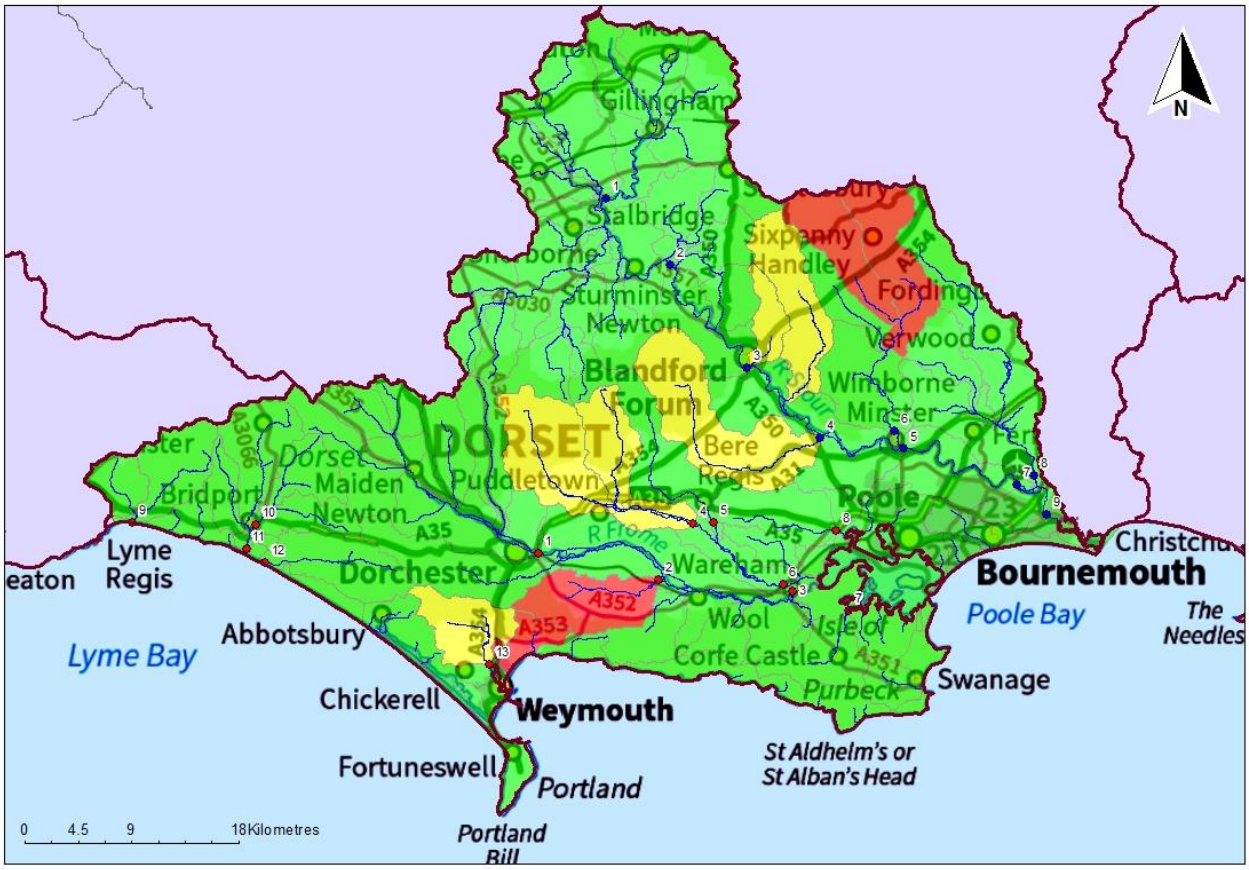
Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Water Availability at Q30:

- Water available
- Restricted water available
- Water not available

Map 2 Water resource availability colours at Q50 for Dorset ALS.



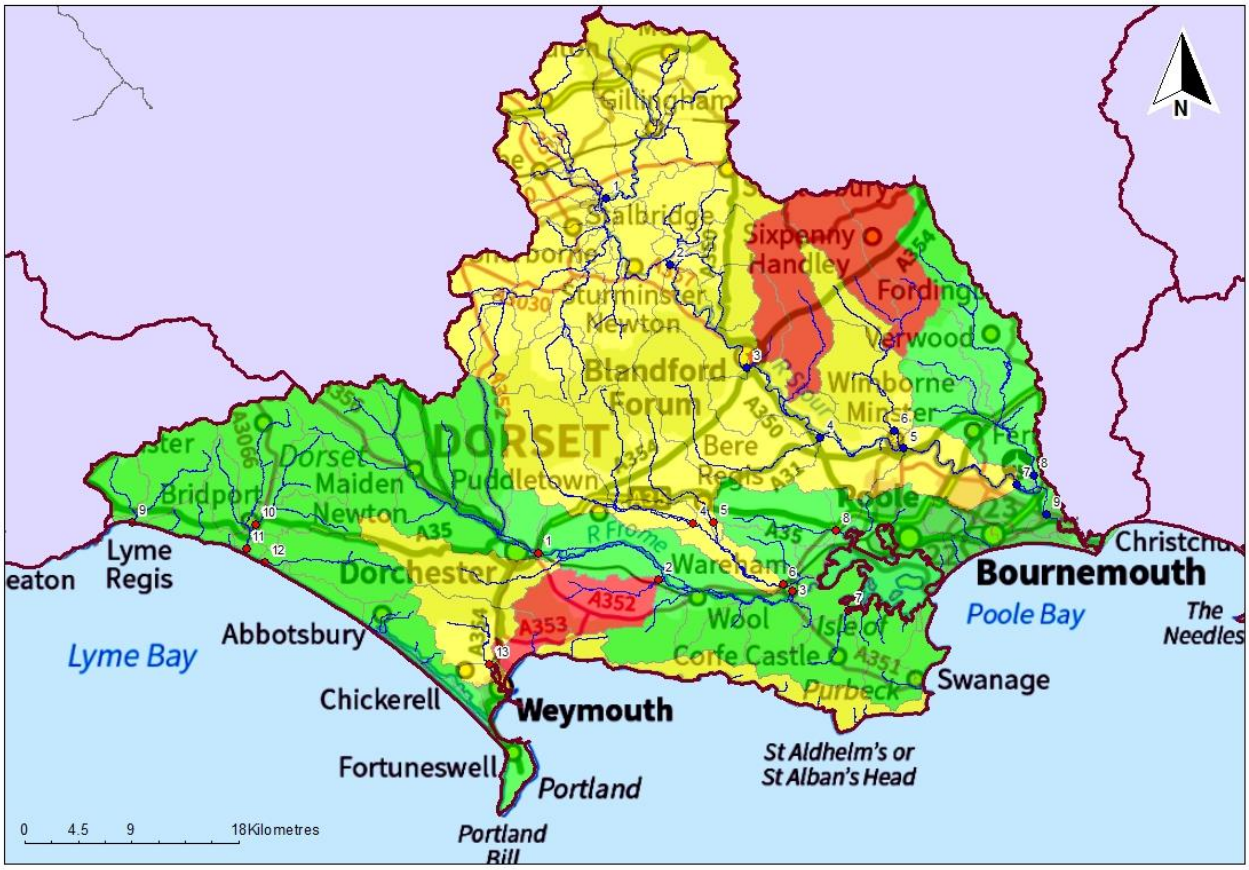
Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Water Availability at Q50:

- Water available
- Restricted water available
- Water not available

Map 3 Water resource availability colours at Q70 for Dorset ALS.



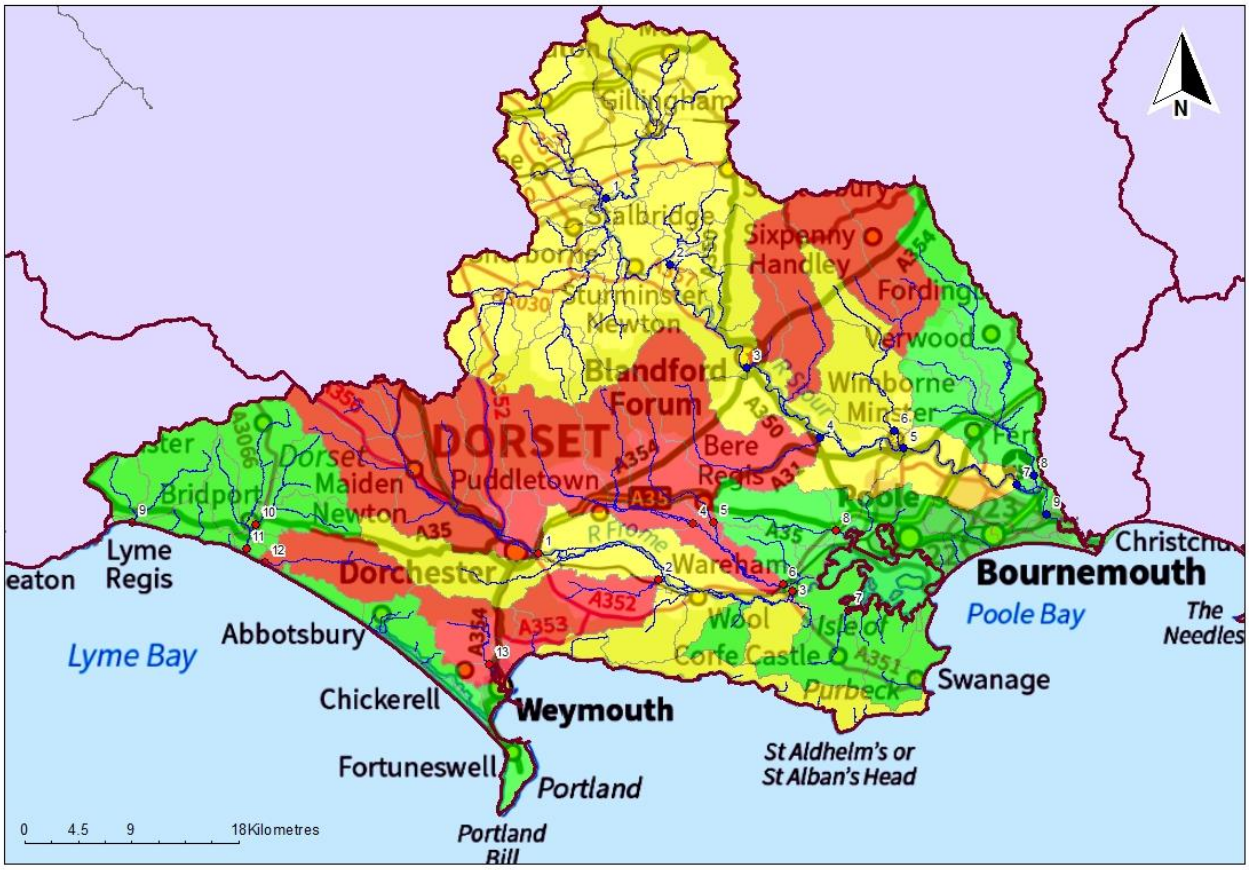
Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Water Availability at Q70:

- Water available
- Restricted water available
- Water not available

Map 4 Water resource availability colours at Q95 for Dorset ALS



Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Water Availability at Q95:

- Water available
- Restricted water available
- Water not available

2.1.1. Surface 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. We may 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 

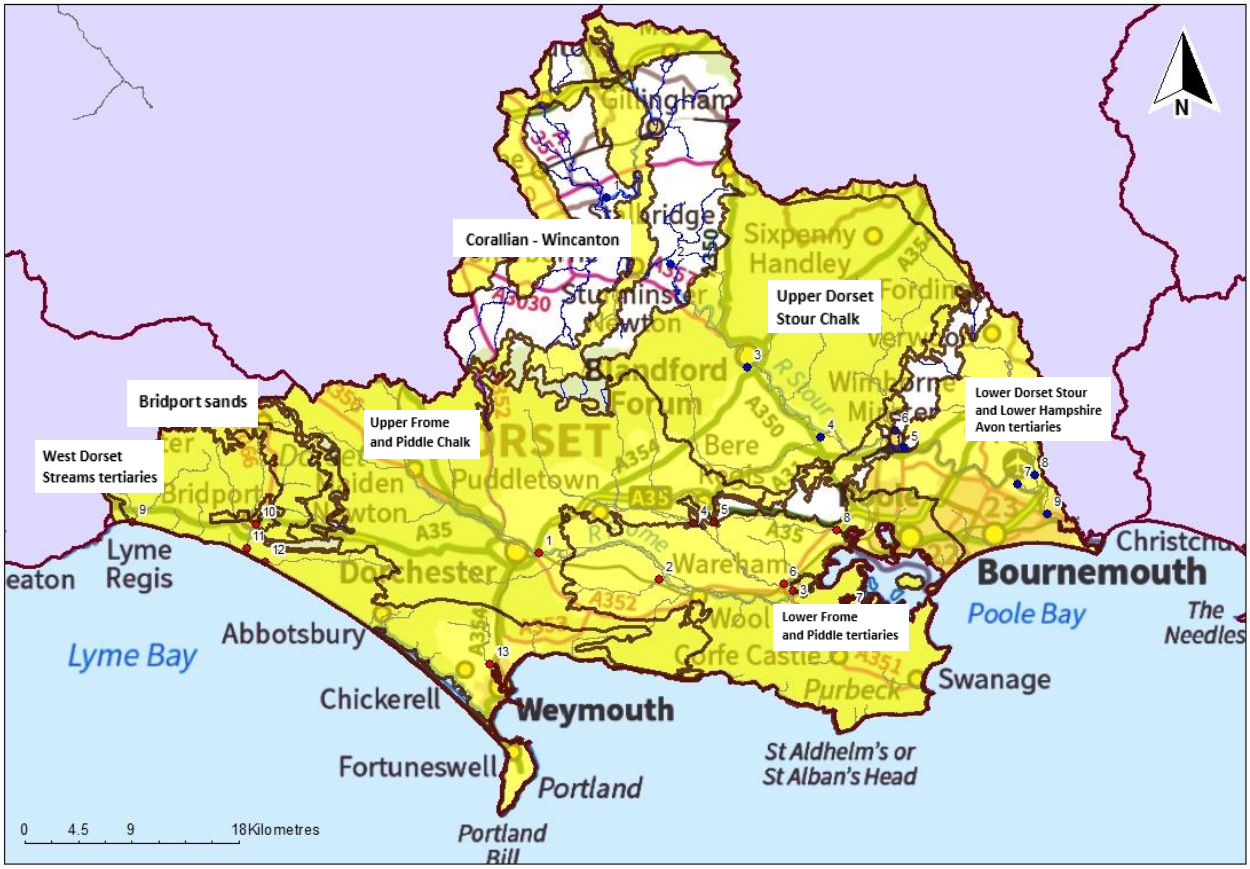
Recent actual flows are below the EFI.

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.

2.2. Groundwater resource availability

In certain areas, resource concerns over groundwater, or the impacts of groundwater abstraction on surface water, 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 Dorset area. More detail can be found in Tables 4 and 5 on the policy for the groundwater underlying specific APs. There may be water available for further groundwater abstraction from the tertiary aquifer in particular, depending on the location, based on local assessments.



Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Groundwater Availability:

- Restricted water available
- Unproductive aquifer

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 e.g. 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.

Uncertain water available for licensing

No fill 

Groundwater is unproductive in this area therefore no certainty can be given on the availability of resource and a local assessment will be needed in each case.

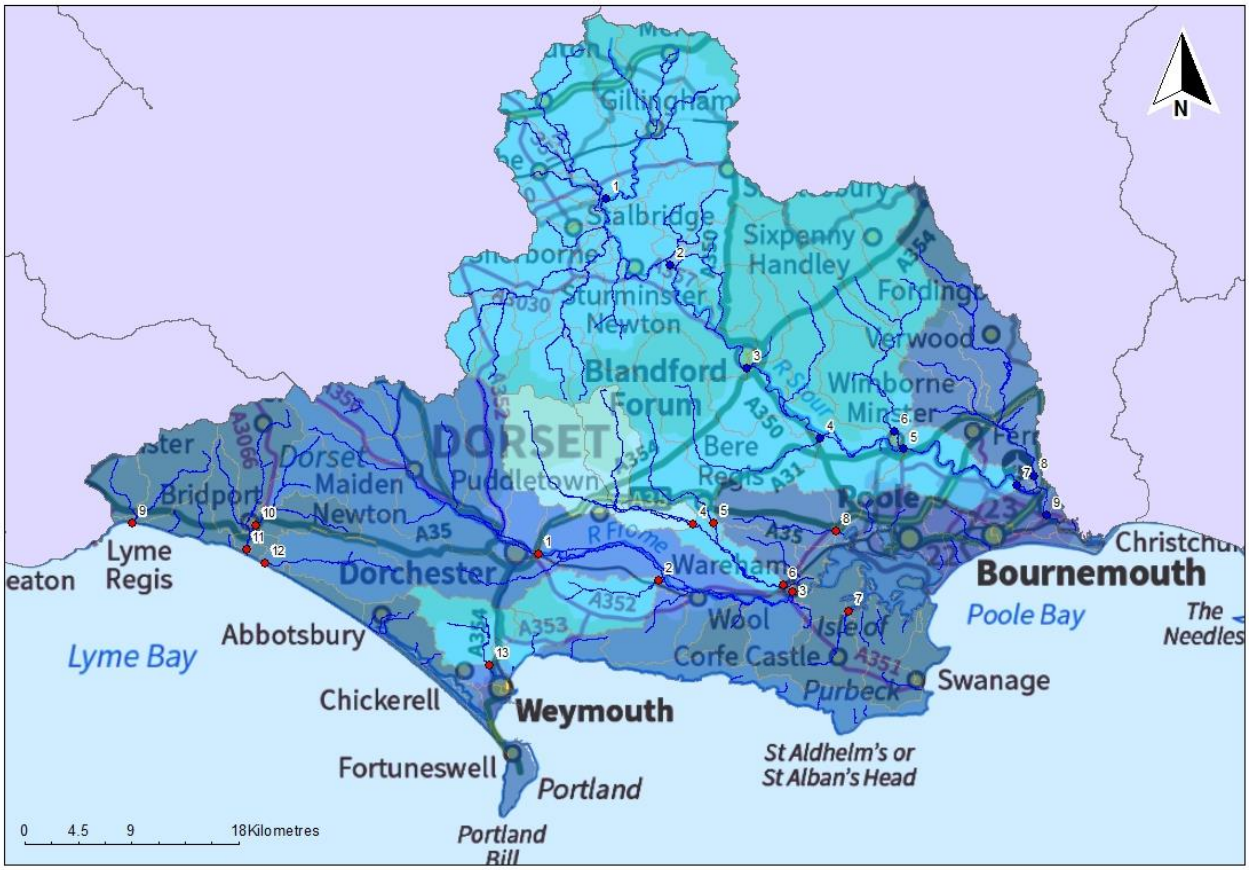
2.3. **Resource reliability**

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 Dorset area expressed as a percentage of time.

Map 6 Water resource reliability of the Dorset ALS expressed as percentage of time available



Legend:

- Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Assessment Points
- Dorset Stour Assessment Points
- Rivers

Percentage of the time additional consumptive resource may be available:

- 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) or 'hands off level' (HoL) 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 CEDs for this ALS and the subsequent ones are indicated in Table 1.

Catchment	Next CED	Subsequent CED
West Dorset Streams	31 March 2026	31 March 2038
Dorset Stour	31 March 2028	31 March 2040
Frome Piddle and Purbeck	31 March 2029	31 March 2041

Table 1 Common End Dates for the Dorset ALS

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 Dorset ALS

3.1. Surface water 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.

Tables 2 and 3 give 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 has been taken into account in the figures in Table 2 and 3. Any additional restrictions are given in the last column of the tables.

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 Tables 2 and 3 are the APs in the Dorset ALS area. Reading across the columns the potential reliability of a new licence is expressed as a percentage of the year and the number of days water may be available under this restriction. 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.

As new licences are issued the percentage of the year that water is available will go down.

Frome, Piddle and West Dorset						
AP	**Name**	**Surface water Resource Availability**	**Percentage of the year water may be available**	**Number of days per annum abstraction may be available**	**Is there a gauging station at this AP?**	**Additional information or restrictions**
1	Dorchester Frome	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	76	227	No	N/A
2	Broomhill Bridge, Tadnoll Brook	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	50	182	No	This AP is augmented. New abstractions will only be granted above Q50 to protect this water.
3	Frome tidal limit	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	76	277	No	In order to protect the River Frome SSSI no further abstraction will be permitted below Q76.
4	Cecily Bridge, Piddle	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	Local assessment		No	The water company have made reductions within AP4 and they also augment flows. The Bere Stream SSSI is within AP 5. The complex nature of the river and geology on these watercourses mean a generic AP restriction can't be used. Appropriate restrictions will be calculated on a case by case basis.
5	Snatford Bridge, Bere Stream	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	Local assessment		No	
6	Baggs Mill, Piddle	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	Local assessment		Yes	
7	Corfe tidal limit	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	No	N/A

Frome, Piddle and West Dorset						
AP	**Name**	**Surface water Resource Availability**	**Percentage of the year water may be available**	**Number of days per annum abstraction may be available**	**Is there a gauging station at this AP?**	**Additional information or restrictions**
8	Sherford tidal limit	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	No	N/A
9	Charmouth, Char	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	No	N/A
10	Bridport, Asker	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	Yes	N/A
11	West Bay, Brit	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	No	N/A
12	Burton Bradstock, Bride	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	77	281	No	N/A
13	Weymouth, Wey	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	51	186	No	N/A

Table 2 Summary of licensing approach for the Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Streams assessment points within the Dorset ALS.

Dorset Stour						
AP	**Name**	**Surface Water Resource Availability**	**Percentage of the year water may be available**	**Number of days per annum abstraction may be available**	**Is there a gauging station at this AP?**	**Additional information or restrictions**
1	Factory Farm, Stour	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	58	211	No	In the Shreen and Ashfield Water the water company are running an Abstraction Incentive Mechanism trial to protect flows. Opportunities for additional abstraction on the Shreen are very limited.
2	Hammoon, Stour	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	58	211	Yes	N/A
3	Blandford, Stour	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	58	211	No	N/A
4	North Winterbourne	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	Local assessment		No	The complex nature of the river and geology on these watercourses mean a generic AP restriction can't be used. Appropriate restrictions will be calculated on a case by case basis.

Dorset Stour						
AP	**Name**	**Surface Water Resource Availability**	**Percentage of the year water may be available**	**Number of days per annum abstraction may be available**	**Is there a gauging station at this AP?**	**Additional information or restrictions**
5	Wimborne, Stour	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	58	211	No	A new Abstraction Incentive Mechanism is due to commence in 2020 within this AP. No further surface water abstractions will be permitted in The Tarrant or Pimperne Brook. Further abstraction in the rest of the AP will be restricted by a Q58 HOF.
6	Walford Mill, Allen	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	57	208	Yes	The water company have made reductions within this AP and also augment flows. Further abstraction is only acceptable at higher flows (above Q57). Further investigations into the impacts of abstraction in this AP commenced in March 2020.
7	Throop, Stour	Restricted Water Available for Licensing	58	211	Yes	N/A
8	Hurn Court, Moors	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	Yes	The Moors River SSSI is within this AP. Local restrictions may be needed in some areas to protect it.
9	Iford Bridge, Stour	Water Available for Licensing	100	365	No	N/A

Table 3 Summary of licensing approach for the Dorset Stour assessment points of Dorset ALS.

3.2. **Groundwater**

For groundwater 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. In the Dorset ALS area we have maintained the simple groundwater body division between the Chalk in the centre of the catchment, the overlying Tertiary sands gravels and clays in the south and east and the thin outcrops of Corallian limestone in the upper Stour. The Chalk is divided into the two units to represent the groundwater body draining to the Stour and the Frome and Piddle respectively. There are also two groundwater bodies in the west representing the Bridport Sands and the Dorset streams catchment.

All groundwater abstractions are largely at the expense of flows which would otherwise discharge as surface waters. Each groundwater abstraction is assessed to determine its impact on surface water flows, including the degree of flow reduction, and where the impact occurs at the surface water AP. In cases where the surface water AP is already adversely depleted due an existing level of licensed demand, restrictions may be applied to licences, such as Hands off Level or Flow (HoL or HoF) conditions. The HoL is a groundwater level below which an abstractor is required to reduce or stop abstraction to protect the surface water flow.

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 Dorset ALS area

Groundwater provides spring flow to streams and plays a very important part in the flow regime particularly during periods of low rainfall during summer and early autumn. Depletion in groundwater due to borehole abstraction can have a very significant influence on spring flow and hence stream flow across the year. When assessing whether we will grant licences for abstraction from the Chalk, we have to determine the impact the abstraction may have. This includes how it may affect nearby water features including springs, the flow in the water course near and downstream from the abstraction, other licence holders and the overall balance of water resources in the Chalk aquifer

Our Groundwater analysis shows that there is very little scope for any additional abstraction over a significant portion of the Chalk Aquifer, where that abstraction would cause further impacts on sensitive water features already depleted due to the existing licensed use. This applies to those catchments defined as ‘water not available for licensing’. Consequently, where this is the case, there is a presumption against new consumptive groundwater abstractions from the Chalk. In less sensitive Chalk catchments, defined as 'restricted water available', consumptive abstraction will be granted. Although in all cases there is likely to be restrictions limiting abstraction to high flow winter months. In all cases, licence trading or non-consumptive licence purposes will be considered.

Tables 4 and 5 show the restrictions that may be applied to new or varied abstractions for consumptive use.

Examples of consumptive licences are agriculture, domestic use, public water supply and water bottling. Non consumptive uses include ground source heat pumps (closed loop or fully returned water). Non consumptive abstractions will be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account the local conditions.

Frome, Piddle and West Dorset		
AP	**Name**	**Water Resource Availability**
1	Dorchester Frome	Restricted water available for licensing
2	Broomhill Bridge, Tadnoll Brook	Restricted water available for licensing
3	Frome tidal limit	Restricted water available for licensing
4	Cecily Bridge, Piddle	Water not available for licensing
5	Snatford Bridge, Bere Stream	Restricted water available for licensing based on a local assessment
6	Baggs Mill, Piddle	Tertiary aquifer - Restricted water available for licensing Chalk aquifer - Water not available for licensing
7	Corfe tidal limit	Water available for licensing based on local assessment
8	Sherford tidal limit	Water available for licensing based on local assessment
9	Charmouth, Char	Water available for licensing based on local assessment
10	Bridport, Asker	Water available for licensing based on local assessment
11	West Bay, Brit	Water available for licensing based on local assessment
12	Burton Bradstock, Bride	Restricted water available for licensing based on a local assessment
13	Weymouth, Wey	Restricted water available for licensing based on a local assessment

Table 4 Summary of licensing approach for groundwater in the Frome, Piddle and West Dorset assessment points of Dorset ALS.

In all areas, groundwater abstractions will be considered during extreme high winter flow conditions. Applications will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Dorset Stour		
AP	**Name**	**Water Resource Availability**
1	Factory Farm, Stour	Tertiary aquifer - Restricted water available for licensing Chalk aquifer - Water not available for licensing
2	Hammoon, Stour	Restricted water available for licensing
3	Blandford, Stour	Restricted water available for licensing
4	North Winterbourne	Restricted water available for licensing based on a local assessment
5	Wimborne, Stour	Tarrant and Pimperne - Water not available for licensing Rest of AP - restricted water available for licensing
6	Walford Mill, Allen	Water not available for licensing
7	Throop, Stour	Restricted water available for licensing
8	Hurn Court, Moors	Restricted water available for licensing
9	Iford Bridge, Stour	Restricted water available for licensing

Table 5 Summary of licensing approach for groundwater in the Dorset Stour assessment points of Dorset ALS.

In all areas, groundwater abstractions will be considered during extreme high winter flow conditions. Applications will be assessed on a case by case basis.

3.3. Coasts and estuaries

Consideration needs to be given to impacts on Poole Harbour when granting new licences within this ALS area.

3.4. **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.

Sections of the River Frome, Moors River and Bere Stream are riverine SSSI's. In addition, parts of the Dorset Heaths SAC and Ramsar sites and within this ALS area. And the majority of the coast is designated as part of the Chesil and the Fleet SAC and Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC. Restrictions may be required in some circumstances to protect these sites. This will be decided on a case by case basis.

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 on Maps 1 - 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.

4.2. Taking action on unsustainable abstraction

Changes to a number of public water supply abstraction licences have taken place over the past few years through the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme. Further investigations are planned at some water company sources in 2020-2025 to assess the impact of abstractions on the rivers and/or groundwater bodies (see Tables 2 and 3).

With the anticipated climate change the sustainability of all licences will be kept under review.

4.3. Regulating previously 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 previously 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 introduced new Regulations which took 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. All the new authorisations licences are due to be determined and issued by 31 December 2022.

5. List of abbreviations

ALS
Abstraction Licensing Strategy.

AP
Assessment Point.

CED
Common End Date.

Defra
Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

EFI
Environmental 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.

Ml/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 Incentive Mechanism
A means by which water companies are incentivised to reduce their abstraction from environmentally sensitive water courses to help protect flows.

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

Aquifer
An underground layer of water bearing rock.

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

Augmented water body
Where flows are artificially increased for part of their length. This is usually by pumping water from the groundwater into the river to increase the flow in order to mitigate the impact of a nearby abstraction. This is also known as stream support.

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, general agriculture, domestic use, public water supply and water bottling.

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.

Hands off level

A condition attached to an abstraction licence which states that if the level (in the borehole) 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.

Non consumptive abstraction

Abstraction where a significant proportion of the water is returned either directly or indirectly to the source of supply after use. For example for hydropower.

Q30, 50 etc

The flow of a river which is exceeded on average for 30%, 50% etc of the time.

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.

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