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The Environment Agency has given a drought permit to South East Water to help secure the public water supply at Ardingly Reservoir.

Ardingly Reservoir is near Haywards Heath in West Sussex and serves 280,000 customers. The reservoir level is exceptionally low for this time of year. Ardingly Reservoir total storage capacity was 23% as of 28 September. This is the reservoir's lowest level on record at this time of year.

The drought permit will affect the River Ouse by leaving less water in the river at Barcombe Mills. The permit also means less water can be released from the reservoir to compensate the River Ouse's Shell Brook tributary.

However, the Environment Agency has warned the permit will not be enough to improve security of water supply and the company needs to pursue further steps in its drought plan. Steps can include removing exemptions from its current temporary use ban and applying for a non-essential use ban.

Richard O'Callaghan, Environment Planning Manager of the Environment Agency, said:

Granting any drought permit is not a decision done lightly. We take great care weighing up the needs of the environment and will continue keeping a close eye on river conditions.

We are also staying alert for any impacts on the environment and we will make sure South East Water obeys the tough but fair conditions of its temporary permit.

The coming winter will be important for the recovery of water resources. At least average winter rainfall is needed to refill Ardingly Reservoir and move Sussex out of drought and into recovery by spring. If rainfall is below average, pressure on water resources is expected to continue.

The Met Office outlook for October forecasts average rainfall and temperatures.

Everybody has a part to play in using water wisely. We support this new campaign to help save water: [Let's Save Water - Water Efficiency Campaign for England & Wales](#). There are simple ways people can use less water, including shortening your shower, fixing home leaks, swapping the hosepipe for a bucket or watering can, using a washing up bowl and the eco mode on your appliances.

Background

South East Water applied for the drought permit on 28 August. An independent Planning Inspector held a public hearing on 18 September where South East Water presented its case, and stakeholders and objectors were able to share their views and raise concerns about the application.

The permit will remain in effect for six months until 29 March 2027 unless South East Water withdraws it before then.

South East Water is normally expected to compensate the Shell Brook tributary of the River Ouse by releasing four million litres of water, or megalitres, a day from Ardingly Reservoir. The drought permit will reduce that flow to one megalitre.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drought-permit-granted-to-help-ardingly-reservoir>