

England recovered from drought as weather whiplash sees floods

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Heavy rainfall sees water levels recover across England with all areas now back to normal status.

Four months of above average rainfall mean England's water levels have now largely recovered from last year's drought, the National Drought Group heard today.

East Anglia today (Monday 23rd March) became the final area to move out of recovery, with all regions in England now classed at normal status.

The expert group noted that while this is positive for water supplies, exceptional levels of rain have caused devastating flooding in many communities.

Our changing climate means we will likely experience more rapid swings between drought and flooding - sometimes referred to as weather whiplash.

The risk of drought in 2026 is currently low but there remains the possibility of a flash drought - brought about by a sudden combination of very low rainfall and hot temperatures, like we experienced in 2022.

National Drought Group chair and Director of Water at the Environment Agency, Helen Wakeham, said:

Last year's drought was challenging for everyone, affecting our farmers, our wildlife, and our public water supplies.

The winter rainfall has helped our depleted reservoirs and rivers to recover and, while we welcome the improved picture, we are mindful of the problems that flooding brings too.

We enter spring in a favourable position, but we can never be complacent. We expect water companies to carry on quickly fixing burst pipes and to be ready to enact their drought plans in a timely manner, if needed.

The National Drought Group includes the Met Office, government, regulators, water companies, the National Farmers' Union, Canal & River Trust, anglers, hydrologists, and conservation experts.

Each share their current water situation, ongoing research and innovation, areas of concern, and preparations for future drought - so all can work together to protect our precious and finite resources.

The meeting heard that water companies are finalising their statutory drought plans, which are produced every five years and detail how public supplies and the environment will be protected during dry weather.

Alongside this, the Government recently gave additional guidance to water companies for beefing up

their contingency plans should a region enter severe drought – last experienced in England half a century ago in 1976. Measures could include daily limits, reduced water pressure, or business restrictions to ensure the taps remain on.

After attending the National Drought Group meeting, Water Minister Emma Hardy said:

Despite our recent wet weather, we must still talk about drought. Our climate is changing, droughts are becoming increasingly common, and we need to be prepared.

We expect water companies to update their draft statutory drought plans by the end of March and plan for more extreme dry weather – in the hope it never comes.

In the longer-term, the Government is taking decisive action to secure supplies, including nine new reservoirs, multiple water transfer schemes, and eight desalination projects.

CURRENT WATER SITUATION:

- February received 170% of the long-term average (LTA) rainfall. March to date rainfall is 53% of the long-term average for the month
- Reservoir storage for England is now 95% which is slightly above average for this time of year.
- Abberton and Hanningfield reservoirs in Essex, Grafham reservoir in Cambridgeshire and the Dove Group in Derbyshire are still below average for this time of year.
- Soils are now fully replenished across the country, with no deficits remaining.
- Groundwater and river flows are now normal or above across England. See more here: [Water situation reports for England - GOV.UK](#)
- All areas are out of drought and there are no water company restrictions in place.

It is a mixed picture across England, however. The south-west recorded the second highest December to February winter rainfall since records began in 1871, which has caused widespread flooding.

In contrast, despite a wet start to the year, East Anglia's river flows and groundwater levels have been slower to recover from last year's drought. This meant delays for some farmers in refilling their on-site reservoirs ahead of the irrigation season.

To ensure resilience to more extreme weather, the Government announced last week more than 600 projects that will be funded as part of a £10.5 billion flood defence programme.

The Floods Resilience Taskforce also recently met in Manchester to assess the impact of recent winter storms and to accelerate action to protect communities.

Meanwhile, National Drought Group members also spent the winter preparing for the spring and summer ahead.

ACTIONS TAKEN:

- Water companies continue to drive down leaks to meet a commitment to halve the amount lost by 2050.
- Farmers have been saving winter rainwater, where possible, in reservoir storage.
- The Government continues to progress mandatory water efficiency labelling in white goods, such as washing machines to help consumers reduce their water use.
- The Canal & River Trust has been undertaking vital maintenance work on its network, including replacing lock gates.
- The Environment Agency has continued to monitor recovery and reviewed the overall response to 2025 to improve preparedness for future droughts.
- The Environment Agency's Chief Scientist's Group continues its work with The Alan Turing Institute on river flow modelling.

As we now enter spring, the weather is forecast to be mostly dry for the rest of March. The Met Office forecast indicates that conditions will be drier than average for the rest of March albeit with the usual regional variations.

Head of Environment and Energy at the Met Office, Sarah Davies, said:

High pressure is expected to dominate across the UK through to the end of March, keeping conditions mostly fine and dry with limited rainfall, and temperatures near or slightly above average.

As we head into early April, there are some early signs the weather could become more changeable, however, there is still no strong indication at this time of a shift towards significantly wetter conditions.

We continue to work closely with the Environment Agency and other partners to monitor conditions and support preparedness efforts as we move through spring.

The 50-year anniversary of the 1976 drought will also be marked this summer through sector-wide events reflecting on lessons learned and future resilience.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

DROUGHT, FLOOD AND WATER RESOURCES:

See more on the 2025 drought here: [2025 drought: how it developed in England - GOV.UK](#)

See more on the latest flood investment: [£1.4bn flood investment unleashed to protect homes and businesses - GOV.UK](#)

England faces water shortages of five billion litres a day by 2055. Read more here: [National Framework for Water Resources 2025: water for growth, nature and a resilient future - GOV.UK](#)

2025 AND 2026 LONG-TERM AVERAGE RAINFALL STATISTICS:

2025:

Jan 112%

Feb 79%

Mar 25%

Apr 50%

May 57%

Jun 80%

Jul 89%

Aug 42%

Sep 149%

Oct 90%

Nov 149%

Dec 114%

2026:

Jan 150%

Feb 170%

WATER SAVING TIPS:

Whatever the weather, we always need to use water wisely to protect current and future supplies. We can:

- Opt for a low-flow shower head: These use around 6 litres per minute, compared to a standard shower head, which uses 10-15 litres per minute. Over a 10-minute shower, that's a saving of up to 90 litres of water.
- If you don't have a dual flush, get a Cistern Displacement Device (CDD) from your water company: This simple tool can reduce each toilet flush by at least 1 litre and is often available

for free from water companies. Find out more on your water company's website

- In the kitchen avoid pre-rinsing dishes – scrape them instead, as modern detergents are designed to work effectively without extra rinsing and use a washing-up bowl to catch excess water -this can reduce wastage by up to 50%
- Fill your washing machine to its recommended load size for the most efficient use of water.
- Know your house plants and how much water they really need during cooler winter months – try not to over water.
- Install a rain butt to collect rainwater to use in the garden to use when the warmer weather returns.
- Turn off the taps when brushing teeth or shaving.
- Take shorter showers.
- Fix a leaking toilet – leaky loos can waste 200-400 litres a day.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/england-recovered-from-drought-as-weather-whiplash-sees-floods>