

Initial Priority Catchments

Improving the way we manage water

May 2018

This briefing note explains what an Initial Priority Catchment is, how it affects you and how you can get involved.

What is the Abstraction Plan?

The [Abstraction Plan](#)¹ was published in December 2017. It sets how we will reform abstraction by;

- making full use of existing regulatory powers and approaches to address unsustainable abstraction and move around 90% of surface water bodies and 77% of groundwater bodies to the required standards by 2021
- developing a stronger catchment focus – bringing together the Environment Agency, abstractors and catchment groups to develop local solutions to existing pressures and to prepare for the future. These local solutions will:
 - protect the environment by changing licences to better reflect water availability in catchments and reduce the impact of abstraction
 - improve access to water by introducing more flexible conditions that support water storage, water trading and efficient use
- supporting these reforms by modernising the abstraction service, making sure all significant abstraction is regulated and bringing regulations in line with other environmental permitting regimes

We will report to Parliament on the progress of abstraction reform next year so it is important the work starts now.

What is an Initial Priority Catchment?

Initial Priority Catchments (IPCs) are the test beds for developing innovative solutions to abstraction issues. We have chosen catchments where:

- there is unmet demand for water
- there is potential for water to be shared amongst abstractors
- there are a number of abstractors who we can work with to trial new and innovative ways of managing water abstraction.

In some of these catchments too much water is abstracted during low flows damaging the ecology. We hope that abstractors and stakeholders will come together in each IPC to develop voluntary solutions to abstraction issues. Working across a range of stakeholders should mean that solutions deliver multiple benefits.

We already have some outline proposals for achieving greater access to water and addressing unsustainable abstraction; such as the higher flow abstraction proposals which are summarised in the plan.

Each IPC's direction and outputs need to be overseen by a catchment group including abstractors and other partners. We want to co-develop solutions with our partners, not dictate them.

What will happen in an Initial Priority Catchment?

We will work with existing local groups to identify the catchment partners and abstractors who will form the catchment groups charged with overseeing the IPC work. There may already be successful partnerships and groups operating in the catchments and we want to see groups working closely together.

We will look to each IPC catchment group to define the challenges in the catchment, and work collaboratively to develop solutions to trial. For example, certain abstractors might not be able to access water as their

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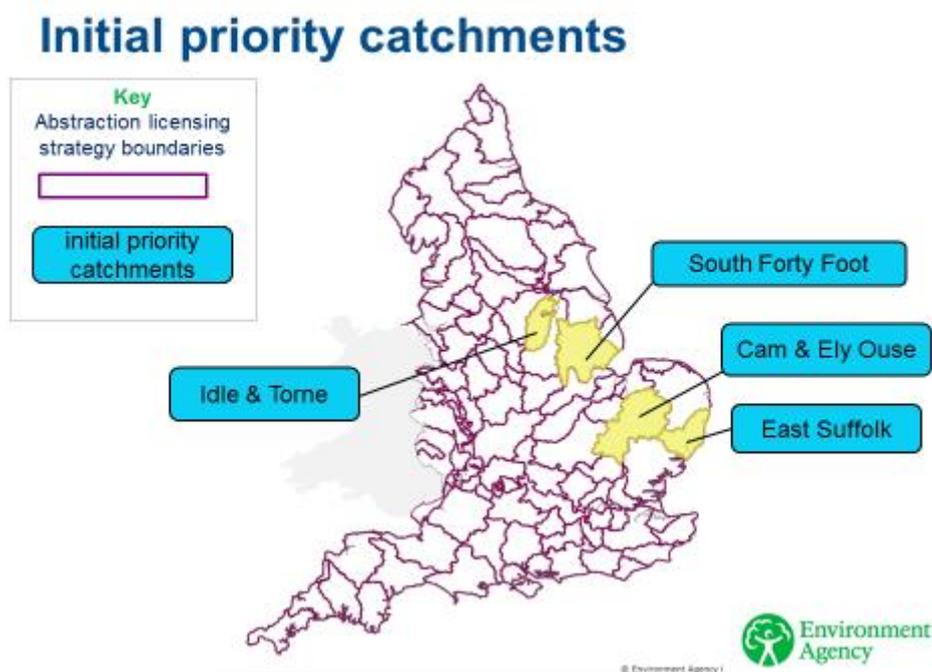
¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-abstraction-plan-2017>

catchment is closed to new applications to abstract. A solution might be trialling a faster water trading service, or giving abstractors access to on-line river flow. We hope that each group will be open to all reasonable suggestions and be willing to test them if suitable trials can be designed.

We recognise that these proposals depend on support from dedicated local groups, such as a local catchment partnership or water abstractor group. Catchment partnerships are supported by a national support group. We have set up a dedicated independent water resources sub-group to support IPCs and help share best practice.

We will learn from the successes and failures of solutions and approaches trialled in IPCs, capturing policies in updated Abstraction Licensing Strategies (ALS) for each catchment during 2020. These documents provide information to abstractors on water availability in a catchment and provide guidance on how to apply for an abstraction licence.

Where are the IPCs?



How will it affect me?

If you currently abstract within an IPC catchment or have an interest in the way water resources are managed there, then you may wish to join a catchment group and use your experience and knowledge to develop solutions to unsustainable abstraction and limited access to water.

We will begin to meet with catchment groups in early summer 2018, and continue to meet and progress the Initial Priority Catchments over the coming months and years.

How can I get involved or find out further information?

If you wish to get involved, learn more about the Abstraction Plan and IPC or have any questions please contact the abstraction reform team at abstraction_reform@environment-agency.gov.uk

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