

Water



HTA Briefing

Introduction

Following last year's extreme drought conditions and as global temperatures rise, there is a risk drought will become more frequent in the UK. It has therefore become increasingly urgent that a long-term water strategy is developed. The global nature of the water cycle means that there is a collective responsibility to address this to protect businesses, communities and livelihoods across the globe.

Dependent on the rate of expansion or contraction in the UK's green spaces, there is a potential economic benefit to the UK of an extra £1.8 billion in total GDP contributions per year by 2030.

As an industry that relies on water to flourish, we are wholly supportive of greater water resilience for all. We have long encouraged, and will continue to advise, horticultural business to reduce their reliance on mains water through the use of rainwater capture technology. This is not only to protect businesses from the potentially devastating impacts of drought, but also to reduce stress on local water networks.

In 2020, over 50% of growers were already using rainwater capture and recycling systems, 52% were using automated watering systems, 41% own reservoirs – the main barriers are land availability, planning restrictions and the ability to invest in such infrastructure.

Key asks for Parliament & Policy Makers

- Water companies and the Environment Agency provide, or advocate for a funding pot that horticultural businesses of any size can apply for to increase their rainwater capture, reservoir construction, run-off recapture, and grey water use to reduce the capital costs facing these businesses.
- Horticulture must be consistently recognised as an industry separate to "agriculture" – water use and outputs vary significantly between the two.
- This recognition of the horticulture industry will help to differentiate funding specific to horticulture and allow the unique needs of, and demands on, the sector to be better supported.
- Horticulture businesses must be given greater forewarning of, and be consulted on, changes to abstraction licences and support for alternative water sources to ensure business continuity.
- There must be consistent water provisions for growing plants to ensure the sector can continue to contribute towards the governments tree planting, biodiversity and net zero ambitions.
- Water companies and the Environment Agency work together with the garden centre sector to encourage consumers to reduce water use in the garden and increase rainwater capture/water reuse at home.

About us

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents 1500 members in the Environmental Horticulture Sector including; garden centre retailers, tree and plant growers, goods manufacturers, landscapers,

and service providers. Our industry supports nearly 700,000 jobs, has a national GDP of £28.8 billion, mitigates climate change and benefits health and wellbeing for 30 million gardeners in the UK.

Further information

For further information contact the HTA Policy Team via email at policy@hta.org.uk and visit hta.org.uk/policy

Challenges

The [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) sets out the government's aim to increase the percentage of water storage used by the agriculture and horticulture sectors by 66% by 2050. To be able to do this, investment in equipment and technology is needed. **Lack of funding or high capital costs, plus difficulty in gaining planning permission for larger reservoirs, are the greatest barriers to horticultural businesses being able to increase their water storage capacity and reduce reliance on mains water.**

The need to improve water security presents a unique opportunity for the government, industry and water companies to collaborate on the planning and delivery of long-term water resilience. Environmental horticulture has a pivotal role to play in meeting the government's environmental targets and the importance of water security has long been recognised by the sector. In order to deliver other environmental services and further reduce stress on local water networks, the value and specific needs of the sector need to be recognised and funding pots made available accordingly. **Nature and 'green' solutions have a hugely important role to play in climate resilience, biodiversity, and human health.** Plants and trees provide cooling and

insulation (ONS found the shading of urban trees saved around £250 million in energy costs and productivity gains), flood control, and improving air quality.

With extreme heat across the UK this summer and drought conditions that are likely to continue, mitigation is key to protecting the most vulnerable.

The current Water Management Grants from Defra are open to horticultural businesses growing or planning to grow irrigated food crops, ornamentals, or forestry nurseries. However, the investment minimum needs to be lowered for many members of the HTA to make it viable. Smaller members want to implement reservoirs for self-sufficiency but don't need them at the specified scale required to access the Water Management Grant and cannot afford the initial outlay. If the necessary scale and investment were reduced, more businesses could reduce their reliance on the national water supply. **Smaller growers need the investment support – which will not only provide an economic return over relatively few years, but a priceless environmental return on investment.**

Temporary Use Bans

The provisions for businesses growing/selling plants for commercial purposes under a Temporary Use Ban and Non-essential Use Ban were critical last year and will remain so going forward. The industry will continue to increase its use of rainwater capture, but in the event of sustained drought periods, before the necessary funding for investment is made available, it is imperative that we are able to continue to operate.

WRE: Water Resources East

WRSE: Water Resources South East

WRW: Water Resources West

WReN: Water Resources North

WCWR: West Country Water Resources

Figure 4: Sum of regional shortfall (2025 Vs 2050, excluding drought measures)

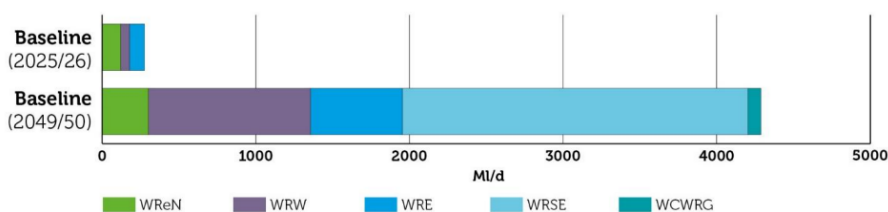
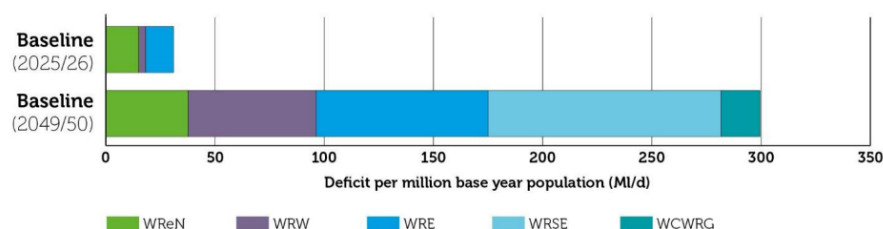


Figure 5: Forecast shortfall per million base year population (normalised)



Source: [Summary of Regional Plans for Water Resources](#) – November 2022

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