

Martin Wrigley
Member of Parliament for Newton Abbot
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15th October 2026

Sent via email

Dear Martin,

I am writing to update you following the Environment Agency's announcement that parts of the South West have now entered Severe Drought status, including communities within your constituency.

This designation reflects the seriousness of the current situation and highlights the critical phase we have now reached following an exceptionally prolonged period of dry weather. While some recent rainfall has been welcome, water resources across parts of our region remain under significant pressure and the drought is far from over.

Many people understandably assume that once it starts raining, a drought is over. Although rainfall has helped to ease some immediate pressures, it has not yet been sufficient to replenish water resources following months of exceptionally dry conditions. After such a prolonged dry period, rainfall must first replenish dry soils and the wider environment before river flows can return to seasonal levels. Only then can reservoirs begin to recover fully.

The South West faces particular challenges during periods of drought. We operate a large and complex network, serving communities spread across a wide geographic area. Unlike some regions that rely heavily on groundwater stored naturally in underground aquifers, much of our water supply comes from reservoirs and rivers. The impact of prolonged dry weather in our region and elsewhere in the country can result in a slower recovery from drought conditions.

The immediate challenge we face is preserving enough stored water to maintain supplies until river flows recover. That is why a hosepipe ban remains in place across the area. We recognise that these restrictions are inconvenient, and we are grateful for the support customers have shown so far.

In addition, and as you are aware, we have applied to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for a Non-Essential Use Ban covering customers in Devon and West Dorset supplied by the Wimbleball reservoir. If agreed by DEFRA, the purpose of these additional measures is to reduce demand further and help preserve water for essential public supply while drought conditions persist.

Alongside these measures, we continue to invest significantly in our water infrastructure. This includes strengthening and connecting our network, improving reservoirs and treatment works, developing new water resources, increasing our ability to move water around the region, expanding smart metering and investing in demand management initiatives. Our teams have also worked tirelessly to detect and repair leaks, fixing more than 27,000 across our network over the last 12 months.

However, protecting water supplies during this period is not something we can do alone. The support of customers, communities and businesses remains vital. As we move beyond the summer months, the greatest opportunities to save water are often through everyday actions within homes and workplaces. Small changes, such as taking shorter showers, running appliances only when full and fixing dripping taps, can collectively save millions of litres of water and help preserve supplies while rivers and reservoirs recover.

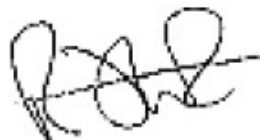
As a community leader, we appreciate the role you can play in spreading the message that everyone needs to use water wisely. We have put together some helpful water saving tips on our website (www.southwestwater.co.uk/household/your-services/save-water) that we hope you can share with your constituents.

We continue to monitor the position daily and will keep stakeholders and customers informed as the situation develops. We remain focused on protecting supplies, supporting customers and taking the actions necessary to ensure water remains available for the communities we serve.

We recognise that your constituents may have questions and we have put together specific FAQs responding to the announcement made today – www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/water-resources/severe-drought/severe-drought-faqs.

It is only by working together and reducing demand wherever possible that we can help safeguard water supplies for the months ahead while our rivers, reservoirs and the wider environment recover.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Stanbrook', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the signature.

Richard Stanbrook
Drought Programme Director
South West Water