
This publication was withdrawn on 30 March 2022

Check how to [apply for a water abstraction or impounding licence](#).

Abstracting water

A guide to getting your licence



managing all
our water needs

We are the Environment Agency. It's our job to look after your environment and make it a better place – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

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ISBN: GEHO1108BOYR-E-E November 2008

The Environment Agency's responsibilities

We are responsible for managing water resources in England. As part of our role, we:

- Investigate all new proposals to abstract or impound water before deciding whether to grant a licence, and
- In some cases require prior testing to be carried out to assess any effects of your abstraction on other sources.

We have a legal duty to safeguard existing protected rights before we grant any new licences. The availability of water resources can change rapidly, so you must act promptly if you need to apply for a new licence or to vary or replace an existing one.

We strongly encourage applicants to discuss their outline proposals with us before submitting a formal application.

A guide to getting your licence

If you want to remove or abstract water from a surface source (such as river, stream or canal) or from an underground source and take more than 20 cubic metres (approximately 4,400 gallons) a day, you will almost certainly need an abstraction licence. The following information gives a brief outline of why abstraction licences are necessary, and how you can apply for one. If you are proposing to abstract water, please contact us as early as possible so that we can discuss the details with you. Contact details can be found on the reverse of this leaflet.

Why are abstraction licences necessary?

We need to ensure that water resources are safeguarded and that abstractions do not damage the environment. Unregulated abstraction could lead to water supply shortages, increased river pollution by reducing dilution, damage to wildlife habitats and ultimately to the loss of rivers for all of us to use and enjoy.

By licensing, we can control the level of abstraction to protect both water supplies and the environment. We screen and appraise all licence applications for potential impact. In doing so we must have regard to certain statutory duties or obligations, for instance, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended.

Do all abstractions require an abstraction licence?

If you want to take water from a surface or groundwater source, you will normally need to hold an abstraction licence. In some cases you do not need a licence, such as:

- abstraction for any purpose of less than 20 cubic metres a day;
- some land drainage operations;
- the filling of vessels (ships or boats) for example with drinking or ballast water;
- with our consent, abstraction exceeding 20 cubic metres a day to test for the presence, quantity or quality of water, in underground strata;
- water used for fire fighting those abstractions operating under an exemption order or some other statutory exemption.

If you are in any doubt about the need for a licence, please contact us.

We need to ensure that water resources are safeguarded and that abstractions do not damage the environment



How does the abstraction licensing system work?

An abstraction licence gives you a right to take a certain quantity of water from a source of supply (inland water such as rivers or streams or an underground source). It also guarantees that no one else who applies for an abstraction licence can take the share of water that is already allocated to you. An abstraction licence does not guarantee the quality of the water or that the amount authorised for abstraction will always be available. The quality and quantity will often depend on the weather, climate and other factors outside our control.

An abstraction licence will specify where you can take the water from (the source), the quantities that you can take, and what you can use the water for. It will also have conditions to protect other water users and the water environment.

Abstraction licences are issued for a time-limited period, normally 12 years. These licences carry a presumption of renewal; however, you will need to re-apply for your licence and satisfy us that you still need the water and that you have been using it efficiently. In addition, we will consider what impact the abstraction has on the environment.

Licence application process

Initially you should contact us to discuss your proposal. We will be able to advise you on relevant local issues and provide guidance on matters specific to your proposal. There may be a Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy for your area that will provide information on our approach to abstraction licensing in the catchment. See our website www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

You must use our application form to apply for a licence. You may also need to provide us with supporting information. This can be substantial, depending on what your proposal is and the potential impact it could have on the water environment. Contact us to find out what you need to do as soon as possible.

If you wish to abstract water from an underground source, such as a well or borehole, you will usually require a groundwater investigation consent to construct and then carry out a pumping test before you can apply for an abstraction licence. This will help us to tell whether the water you want is available and, by monitoring the surrounding sources and groundwater dependent features, it will help us to assess the impact on other water users and the environment. You will need to provide an analysis of the pumping test results with your application. The groundwater investigation process alone may take several months.

To ensure the best possible opportunity for eventual success, it is essential that you contact us as early as possible



We may need to advertise your application. If so, we will do this by publishing a press notice in a local newspaper and on our web-site. You will need to pay the costs for advertising in local newspapers.

To ensure the best possible opportunity for eventual success, **it is essential that you contact us as early as possible** to discuss your proposals, and certainly before you make a formal application. We will be able to advise you on relevant local issues and provide guidance on specific matters related to your proposals. If you require the services of a consultant or a technical advisor, you will need to arrange this independently; we cannot provide this service for you.

You can apply for three types of licence. The type of licence you need depends on what you want to use the water for, and how long for. As a guide, the types of licence are:

- Full abstraction licence – for most types of abstraction over 20 cubic metres a day;
- Transfer licence – for moving water from one source of supply to another with no intervening use;
- Temporary licence – for abstractions over 20 cubic metres a day over a period of less than 28 consecutive days.

If you only need a temporary licence, the application procedure is simpler. Please contact us for further advice about how you do this.

The flow chart '*Applying for an abstraction or impoundment licence*' outlines the procedure in more detail.

Applying for an abstraction or impoundment licence



In some cases there are exceptions to this procedure. It is important that you contact us for advice before contemplating any form of abstraction, reservoir construction or sinking a borehole.

You must allow enough time for the application process. You can't start abstracting water until you have a licence



How long will it take?

Provided that you supply us with all the required information, we aim to make a decision within 13 weeks, of accepting your application. For temporary licences, we aim to make a decision within 28 days of receiving your completed application. You must allow sufficient time for the licence application process before you plan to start abstracting water. If your application is complex or it needs to be advertised, it may take longer. We will advise you if this is the case and may ask you to agree an extension of time for our decision. If you are not happy with our decision you have the right to appeal to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

How much will it cost?

You will normally pay an application charge for the work we do in processing and registering your application. You must include this fee with your completed form. You will need to pay additional charges and costs if we have to advertise your application; we can provide details on request.

If we grant you a full abstraction licence, you will usually have to pay an annual charge for the amount of water you are authorised to abstract, calculated in accordance with our Abstraction Charges Scheme. The amount you pay will depend on what you use the water for, the source from which it is abstracted, the season in which you take it and other relevant factors. We can supply a copy of our Abstraction Charges Scheme on request. There is no annual charge for transfer or temporary licences.

You will also be responsible for any private consultancy fees.



What if my needs change or I sell my land?

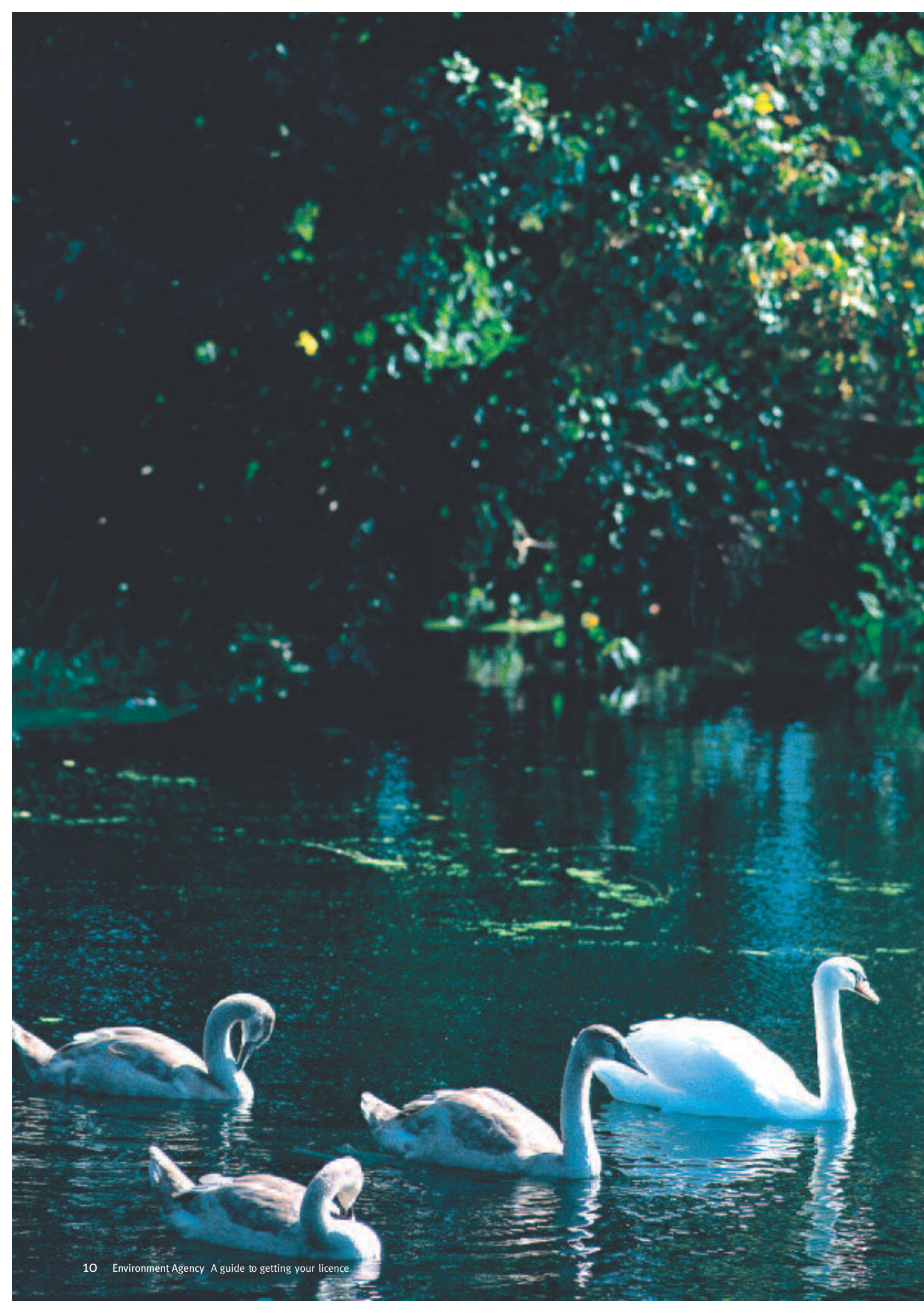
If your need for water changes you can apply to vary your abstraction licence or have it revoked if you no longer need it. Please contact us as soon as possible to discuss your changes. Abstraction licences (other than temporary licences) can also be transferred or apportioned (split between two or more parties) if you sell or lease the land. We will supply more details on request. In some cases, abstraction licences can be traded; for further details, ask for our leaflet on '*Water Rights Trading*'.

Data Protection Act, Public Registers and Environmental Information Regulations

We will comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act in handling any personal information you give us in respect of your application. By law we have to keep a register of applications for licences, our decisions on those applications and any subsequent changes made to licences.

We will register details of your formal application and our decision and make these available for public inspection at our offices. We must also release any environmental information we may collect during the course of your application. This may include environmental reports, pumping test information and, after you obtain your licence, details of how much water you have actually abstracted and reported to us.

We will not make public details of any pre-application discussions you have with us.



Related publications

Making Your Views Count:

A Guide to Making a Representation about Applications for Licences to Abstract or Impound Water

The Environment Agency has the power to decide whether or not to grant licences to abstract or impound water in England. Anyone concerned about a proposal for a licence can make representations to us about it. This leaflet explains how you do this.

Abstraction Charges Scheme

Applicants for and holders of water abstraction licences are required to pay charges to cover the costs the Environment Agency incurs in managing water resources in line with the Water Resources Act 1991.

**Would you like to find out more about us,
or about your environment?**

Then call us on

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or visit our website

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