

Organisation comment received from	Date comment received	Consultation question / Document	Comment ID	Comment	Draft Plan Response
Environment Agency	16/05/2022	Has the water company correctly interpreted the requirement to carry out an SEA on the draft drought plan?	1	The draft Affinity Water Drought Plan was published in June 2021 and was subject to public consultation where customers and stakeholders were able to provide feedback on the content and approach of the Plan. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) were not undertaken as part of the initial development of the draft Drought Plan. However, following the consultation feedback from Natural England, it was identified that these assessments were required to support the Drought Plan. SEA and HRA have therefore now been undertaken to feed into the development of the Drought Plan. This SEA Environmental Report has been prepared for the Drought Plan 2022 and documents the outcomes of the SEA process. The HRA (March 2022) is documented in a separate report but has been added to inform the SEA process.	Noted. No action required.
		Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out for the draft drought plan?	2	Yes an SEA has been carried out on the draft drought plan, documented in an SEA Environmental Report (dated April 2022)	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report include and consider comments we made at the SEA scoping phase?	3	The comments made at Scoping Stage have been considered with explanation given as to how they have been addressed. This is provided in Appendix B.	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report refer to an SEA assessment methodology that is appropriate and describes how alternatives have been assessed and justified?	4	The SEA study area was clear from the Environmental Report, although it is an outlined in the Scoping Report which sets the Affinity Water (NWDF) supply area, with a buffer applied to the GSE with regard to baselines.	Additional detail included on the study area (Section 3.1)
		Does the Environmental Report set out an SEA assessment methodology that is appropriate and describes how alternatives have been assessed and justified?	5	The full baseline chapter is contained within Appendix D, with an overview provided in the Environmental Report of the baseline current baseline and future baseline.	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report consider the environmental effects of a range of drought management actions?	6	We Chapter 4 sets out a proposed methodology. The SEA Framework and methodology aligns with that of the Regional Plan, and explains the link with the Regional Plan in terms of option development. The methodology assesses adverse and covers the key aspects. It is good to see that influence on option development has been considered and this is outlined in further detail in subsequent chapters.	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report identify the key environmental effects (positive and negative) that will result from the implementation of the actions within the draft drought plan?	7	A summary of the assessment is presented within Chapters 5 and 6 of the Environmental Report, with key mitigation effects identified for both the construction and operation effects, as well as consideration being given to residual effects.	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report identify the key environmental effects (positive and negative) that will result from the implementation of the actions within the draft drought plan?	8	General mitigation measures have been identified within Chapter 7, with reference to the EA's own EA 1016 baseline condition advice. Mitigation measures are also outlined in Chapter 6 for the cumulative effects assessment. It would be useful to see the significant negative effects identified in the assessment and outline the mitigation in relation to these potential effects on the water environment within Chapter 7.	Additional detail has been added to the mitigation section where it focuses on the EA's objectives which are identified for the EA's objectives. Significant effects (such as mitigation) SEA aspects on biodiversity, flora and fauna, and the objective on the water environment).
		How the findings from the Environmental Report feed into the decision making process for the draft drought plan?	9	The influence of the environmental assessment is outlined within Chapter 5. This includes the EA's 1016 baseline condition advice. The assessment of the EA's 1016 baseline condition advice is outlined in Chapter 5. The findings of the SEA have been used to influence the ordering in which the drought permit options should be implemented, in particular changes to the Category 1 ordering for the Central Region.	Noted. No action required.
		Does the Environmental Report consider the interaction between the draft drought plan and other relevant plans?	10	A PPV review has been undertaken and is presented in Appendix C. A summary is provided in Section 3.3.	Noted. No action required.
	Monitoring	Does the Environmental Report consider the interaction between the draft drought plan and other relevant plans?	11	Section 7 outlines that the monitoring requirements set out in the EA's within the EA1016, and set out what is included in the EA1016.	Noted. No action required.
	Cumulative effects	Does the Environmental Report consider the interaction between the draft drought plan and other relevant plans?	12	Cumulative effects assessment has been undertaken. Some of the plans considered are currently in the process of being updated e.g. other water company drought plans, etc. How is Affinity Water working with others to understand the cumulative effects of the new/emerging drought plan? Some of these drought plans have been consulted on with draft drought plans available for consideration within the SEA.	The EA1016 sets out the way of working that there are no other known other company drought permit options which the potential for cumulative effects. Affinity Water has worked with neighbouring companies to check whether any of their current drought options have the potential to create cumulative impacts with our options. If necessary once other plans are finalised or revised, Affinity can give them the latest information on the EA's based on a pro-actively additional detail included to make this clearer.
	Key Steps and Consultation	Does the Environmental Report consider the interaction between the draft drought plan and other relevant plans?	13	From Section 8.1 it is unclear as to how the SEA Environmental Report is being consulted on. It sounds like it is going to the Statutory Commission. The SEA Environmental Report should ideally go to for consultation publicly alongside the draft Drought Plan.	The SEA Environmental Report will be published for an eight-week public consultation between June and August. This will allow the public to make any comment on the contents of the Environmental Report. Following the consultation period, a consultation log of responses will be produced to record the comments received from the public (alongside those already received from the Statutory Commission) and to be made available to the public. The Environmental Report will be published to reflect the consultation outcomes.
Natural England	06/05/2022	Environment Report - Methodology	14	The overall approach to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is sound and sufficiently precautionary. It includes an assessment of combined and in-combination impacts of options. We note that many of our comments on an earlier draft of the report (provided by email on 18 March 2022) have been addressed.	Noted. No action required.
	Environment Report - Mitigation and Monitoring	Environment Report - Mitigation and Monitoring	15	There are a few points of the report where further information is needed or would be helpful, and Natural England advises the following amendments are made to the final report: - A clear overview of mitigation options should be provided in the environmental report demonstrating what impacts they will mitigate.	Noted. This is covered in the more detailed comments below.
	Environment Report - Assessment	Environment Report - Assessment	16	The SEA considered the mix of drought permits have the potential to result in residual negative effects on aquatic wildlife, flora and fauna and priority species. There are three options (PPV, ADRS and TLL) which are identified to have potential effects on nationally and locally designated sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). The findings of this assessment should now inform a review of the draft plan and prioritisation of options within that plan.	The individual drought permit assessments and the cumulative effects assessment have been used to identify prioritisation of the implementation of the draft drought plan. The prioritisation exercise undertaken as part of the SEA, supports the categorisation identified within the draft Drought Plan. The SEA has also included the EA's own EA 1016 baseline condition advice.
	Environment Report - Limitations	Environment Report - Limitations	17	The Scoping stage should make it clear that the assessment is based on the baseline data. Any limitations that arise from addressing the assessment stage which should be fully monitored and tracked. Under monitoring the report states that data monitoring will be expanded in the EA1016 but the SEA guidance should also include in the SEA Environmental Report.	Additional detail included on the EA's 1016 baseline condition advice. The EA's 1016 baseline condition advice is outlined in Chapter 5. The findings of the SEA have been used to influence the ordering in which the drought permit options should be implemented, in particular changes to the Category 1 ordering for the Central Region.
	Environment Report - Key Issues and Opportunities	Environment Report - Key Issues and Opportunities	18	Table 3.3 (under biodiversity, flora and fauna) should be priority habitats and species under non-designated sites in the same way that specific protection status is listed under designated sites. Opportunities should include increasing habitat and species resilience to climate change. This could be presented against the climate factors of biodiversity, flora and fauna.	The final table in Table 3.3 under opportunities for biodiversity flora and fauna already covers "Increase the resilience of species and habitats".
	Environment Report - Mitigation	Environment Report - Mitigation	19	It is unclear if it is intended to provide a clear overview of mitigation options. While it is acceptable to include further details in the EA1016 the SEA should demonstrate how impacts identified can be mitigated what what impacts cannot be mitigated. This should then be included in an assessment of the impacts and risks.	Additional detail included on the EA's 1016 baseline condition advice. The EA's 1016 baseline condition advice is outlined in Chapter 5. The findings of the SEA have been used to influence the ordering in which the drought permit options should be implemented, in particular changes to the Category 1 ordering for the Central Region.
	Environment Report - Monitoring	Environment Report - Monitoring	20	Section 6.1.5 should detail any future monitoring needed to address any gaps in the baseline data. While it is acceptable to cover further details in the EA1016, SEA should demonstrate how impacts identified can be mitigated what what impacts cannot be mitigated. This should then be included in an assessment of the impacts and risks.	Additional detail on monitoring provided.
	Environment Report - Assessment	Environment Report - Assessment	21	Under 6.2 the assessment effects of the BUNDS is unclear when this could provide priority habitats and species under non-designated sites in the same way that specific protection status is listed under designated sites. Opportunities should include increasing habitat and species resilience to climate change. This could be presented against the climate factors of biodiversity, flora and fauna.	The HRA has been updated to reflect that BUNDS drought permit would require minor construction works (this previously included the EA's 1016 baseline condition advice). This has been reflected in the HRA. The EA's 1016 baseline condition advice is outlined in Chapter 5. The findings of the SEA have been used to influence the ordering in which the drought permit options should be implemented, in particular changes to the Category 1 ordering for the Central Region.

		Environmental Report - Assessment	22	In 5.2.3.2 the FUL permit is given a moderate negative effect, while other permits that include an increase in discharge that could affect a SSSI are given minor negative effects. It is not clear why the FUL permit has been given a higher severity rating on the assessment scoring criteria given. An negative impact on a SSSI through a moderate negative impact.	The reference to moderate level minor to relate to effects on SSSIs are taken directly from the CARs. Each of the drought permits are given an overall moderate negative effective mitigation and minor negative point mitigation (see Table 5.1). Address reference to the CARs within the summary text of the effects in Section 5.2.3.2 to reflect additional measures that are not included in the high level assessment.
		Environmental Report - Cumulative Assessment	23	It is not an explicit requirement for a high level assessment of cumulative impacts, any permits which could theoretically be issued at the same time or in succession. However, English agencies that you think it is unlikely that the worst case options would be used together and that you would only do the detailed assessment and update the CARs if required, but it is important to have a high level understanding of the risks so you can plan and prioritise accordingly. If there is a risk, there may be measures you could take in advance of a drought to mitigate any impacts, and make the environment more resilient. This could be useful if by making it more likely that using options concurrently would be acceptable, should that need arise.	The Environmental Report for the new includes a high level assessment of the potential cumulative effects based on the information presented within the EARs. The Cumulative assessment considers where the drought permits in the South East respect the same reaches and therefore identifies the potential for effects in relation to collection of pollutants, flow and Abstraction, and on the water environment. The assessment already identified that there is not anticipated to be cumulative effects identified within the individual drought permits (EARs, SLTE and SDQG) are both located within dry valleys and it is likely these will be dry during periods of drought and as such there is not anticipated to be cumulative effects. The site is not a GWGTE and the Drain SLTE (EAR 2016) surface that is not an integral part of the site would mainly be dependent on local groundwater levels and these would likely be low during implementation of the drought permits. However, it should still be noted that the implementation of the permits in the South East are not likely to be required and the cumulative implementation is also not likely to be required. However, this situation does arise while Ability Visitor need to apply, the CAR will need to be updated.
		Environmental Report - Mitigation	24	You have identified that in-stream measures and adjustments to improve habitat conditions are potential mitigation options. Such works could be planned and delivered in advance of drought, to help make it more likely that drought permits options will be acceptable and reliable during drought. We encourage you to think about this as much as possible, and consider whether such habitat enhancement work programs could be incorporated into the WINEP for PGAs.	There is reference to the WINEP for PGAs and the delivery of projects to improve ecological health including those commitments presently reflected by drought permit options will help to improve natural resilience and in turn will support resilience to any impacts from drought permits. Address text to reference the delivery of in-stream measures to be delivered as part of this programme.
		Environmental Report - Assessment	25	It is not an explicit requirement for a high level assessment of cumulative impacts, any permits which could theoretically be issued at the same time or in succession. However, English agencies that you think it is unlikely that the worst case options would be used together and that you would only do the detailed assessment and update the CARs if required, but it is important to have a high level understanding of the risks so you can plan and prioritise accordingly. If there is a risk, there may be measures you could take in advance of a drought to mitigate any impacts, and make the environment more resilient. This could be useful if by making it more likely that using options concurrently would be acceptable, should that need arise.	The Environmental Report for the new includes a high level assessment of the potential cumulative effects based on the information presented within the EARs. The Cumulative assessment considers where the drought permits in the South East respect the same reaches and therefore identifies the potential for effects in relation to collection of pollutants, flow and Abstraction, and on the water environment. The assessment already identified that there is not anticipated to be cumulative effects identified within the individual drought permits (EARs, SLTE and SDQG) are both located within dry valleys and it is likely these will be dry during periods of drought and as such there is not anticipated to be cumulative effects. The site is not a GWGTE and the Drain SLTE (EAR 2016) surface that is not an integral part of the site would mainly be dependent on local groundwater levels and these would likely be low during implementation of the drought permits. However, it should still be noted that the implementation of the permits in the South East are not likely to be required and the cumulative implementation is also not likely to be required. However, this situation does arise while Ability Visitor need to apply, the CAR will need to be updated.
		Environmental Report - Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z	26	You have identified that in-stream measures and adjustments to improve habitat conditions are potential mitigation options. Such works could be planned and delivered in advance of drought, to help make it more likely that drought permits options will be acceptable and reliable during drought. We encourage you to think about this as much as possible, and consider whether such habitat enhancement work programs could be incorporated into the WINEP for PGAs.	There is reference to the WINEP for PGAs and the delivery of projects to improve ecological health including those commitments presently reflected by drought permit options will help to improve natural resilience and in turn will support resilience to any impacts from drought permits. Address text to reference the delivery of in-stream measures to be delivered as part of this programme.
		Environmental Report - Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z	26	You have identified that in-stream measures and adjustments to improve habitat conditions are potential mitigation options. Such works could be planned and delivered in advance of drought, to help make it more likely that drought permits options will be acceptable and reliable during drought. We encourage you to think about this as much as possible, and consider whether such habitat enhancement work programs could be incorporated into the WINEP for PGAs.	There is reference to the WINEP for PGAs and the delivery of projects to improve ecological health including those commitments presently reflected by drought permit options will help to improve natural resilience and in turn will support resilience to any impacts from drought permits. Address text to reference the delivery of in-stream measures to be delivered as part of this programme.
	04/08/2022	Environmental Report and Description	27	Natural England finds the SEA environmental report sufficiently precautionary and having sufficient flexibility.	Noted. No action required.
		Environmental Report - Historic Environment	28	As a summary, we are concerned that potential impacts on the historic environment are largely dismissed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report, without clear and concrete justification.	Noted. Additional responses provided below.
		Environmental Report - Historic Environment	28	We therefore suggest that the assessment is revisited to carefully consider the potential implications for the historic environment (both designated and non-designated), if the work has been done, to better establish how these issues have informed the assessment.	Additional detail has been included in regards to the historic environment. This includes information from the EARs which reviews heritage assets within the water study area. Areas at drought permits, it was determined that there would not be any additional impacts as a result of the drought permit implementation therefore the assets were not considered to be sensitive.
		Environmental Report - Historic Environment	28	We therefore suggest that the assessment is revisited to carefully consider the potential implications for the historic environment (both designated and non-designated), if the work has been done, to better establish how these issues have informed the assessment.	The overall conclusions have remained neutral at this stage. However, the additional potential effects identified by Historic England from the consultation response are now recognised within the assessments. These effects are addressed on this stage and it is recognised that further baseline collection and assessment is required at a more detailed stage.
		Environmental Report - Historic Environment	28	Historic England recommends the collection and assessment of specific baseline information which could include identifying the potential for buried, waterlogged or buried and partially submerged remains of significant interest and highlights that can be associated with river valleys, floodplains, estuaries, coastal and wetland areas, including sites, high ground and other features.	It should also be noted that drought permits will be implemented in severe drought conditions and the additional impact of the drought permits on these assets is not likely to be significant. However, this will be reported further at a more detailed stage as required.
		Environmental Report - Historic Environment	28	Although it may be appropriate for this evidence gathering and assessment to take place in the more detailed declassification stage, it is important to raise these issues and suggest how they might further divert the line, be located as the consideration of waterlogged archaeology may be costly to deal with and deep floodplain, estuarine and coastal deposits difficult to evaluate by standard techniques.	As outlined above in (Comment 27), the SEA now recommends further baseline collection and assessment is undertaken at a more detailed stage to determine the additional potential effects. It should also be noted that drought permits will be implemented in severe drought conditions and the additional impact of the drought permits on these assets is not likely to be significant. However, this will be reported further at a more detailed stage as required.