

Government legislation, likely to become law in the near future, will see the end of unlimited abstraction licences. How will this affect you?

# Losing the right to IRRIGATE

Abstraction licenses for all bore holes are soon likely to be issued on a renewable basis rather than indefinitely while those applying for licences or licence renewals will be required to present a case justifying their need for such a licence.

This was one of the main topics which came out of a recent UK Irrigation Association Seminar held in The London Club, under the title "Losing the right to irrigate".

Information on the proposed new Government legislation was given to the assembled irrigators, by Gwyn Williams, Water Resources

Regulation Policy Manager for the Environment Agency.

Gwyn explained that following the droughts of the 1990s the Government had reviewed the arrangements for controlling abstraction of water and the publication of "Taking Water Responsibly" in March '99.

Changes for the licensing system including the introduction of regional Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) where local officers will assess the water needs of the area together with the availability of water and produce

a plan to ensure that the two are not too far apart.

"We wish to move away from the rights of abstractors to the responsibilities of abstractors," said Gwyn, who urged delegates to become involved in the CAMS process wherever possible.

While explaining that abstraction licences would become renewable he did stress that it was not something about which to be overly concerned.

"The normal renewable period will be 12 years but six years notice will be given should a licence not be renewed for environmental reasons while there will be a reasonable assumption that licences would be renewed provided certain conditions are satisfied," he explained.

He urged irrigators to examine their abstraction needs carefully so that a strong case could be built to take to the CAMS officer.

Earlier Nigel Hepworth, Regional Water Resource Planner for the Environment Agency in the Southern Region, had highlighted the extent of the problem in general terms and specifically in his area, and he admitted that that there was over licensing of water at the moment.

He showed a map which, in simple terms, identified that there was available water in the north of the country all year round; that some areas had problems in the summer and that some including the Kent area, had year round problems, with over licensing or over abstraction.

An action plan has been put in place to improve this situation over the next 15 years using CAMS.

Later Dr Jerry Knox, a Research Scientist at the Institute of Water and Environment at Cranfield University, described the work he was doing to develop a framework for assessing reasonable need.

The methodology developed involves taking into account spatial variations in soil type, land use, typical irrigation practices and local agroclimate. The result produces a relatively simple yet scientific based and rational approach for allocating water between irrigators.





"Because the methodology is transparent to applicants as well as the Environment Agency staff the needs can be assessed and agreed at an early stage in any application," said Jerry, who explained that the framework had been drawn up with agriculture in mind but that it would also be introduced to the sports turf, and golf, industries as well.

He was able to begin discussions with the golf industry so that the necessary criteria could be put in place for any calculations.

The bulk of the audience comprised those involved in agriculture but there were also several delegates representing golf, including Paul Todd, Superintendent of The London Club, as well as others from irrigation companies, consultancies and colleges.

The general feeling during the Seminar and among the delegates was that golf was fairly advanced in its use of irrigation water - The London Club itself was held up as an example of somewhere which collects and stores rain water in the winter to use as an irrigation supply in the summer.

Earlier in the day David Winn, Training and Education Manager for the IOG, described how the sports turf industry had progressed in its use of irrigation in recent years.

He explained that the IOG had been working with the Football Association for the last 18 months and the Lawn Tennis Association for the past 12 and that more consideration was being given to the reason stadia are built in the first place - the pitch. In the past the pitch was the last thing to be considered when a new stadium was built.

He also recalled how groundsmen were sometimes told by the football team manager to flood the pitch to negate a visiting team's strengths or force a postponement to allow injured players additional time to recover.

He admitted that often amounts of irrigation were decided by how much had been given in the past rather than any more objective approach.

He told delegates that technology was now available to map sports pitches and race tracks to show the

different make ups of the soil structure which could be within them so that different regimes may be undertaken of specific areas to ultimately provide better continuity of surface.

"With so many different types of soil on some race courses the 'going' is going to be different depending upon the area inspected," said David, who also made a pertinent point when it came to the public's desire to look after the environment.

"A bottle bank or a car wash. Where's the queue?" he quizzed.

Michael Martin, of York and Martin, highlighted the need for appropriate sprinkler selection, spacing and positioning together with the need for good pipe systems, pumping plants and control systems.

He also cautioned against the use of weather stations other than their ability to record data.

Summing up the day Keith Weatherhead, Senior Lecturer, at the Institute of Water and Environment at Cranfield University, said that water was a valuable resource for serious irrigators and that it was going to become more valuable.

"Water is scarce and is going to become scarcer as the climate continues to change and irrigation needs increase but we know that water could be used more effectively."

He said that we would have to take every opportunity to get more water through winter collection; filling up the reservoirs in times of flood using powerful pumps and, as The London Club does, rain water harvesting.

He also said we had to guard against "wet year apathy", accept that water shortage would continue to be a problem and urged people to work in groups and participate in the consultation programmes to ensure the best possible use of the available water.

The Seminar was organised by the UKIA. Anyone seeking more information about the Association should contact Melvyn Kay, UKIA Executive Secretary, 5 Lea Road, Ampthill, Bedford, MK45 2PR Tel: 01525 635127 Email: m.kay@ukia.org

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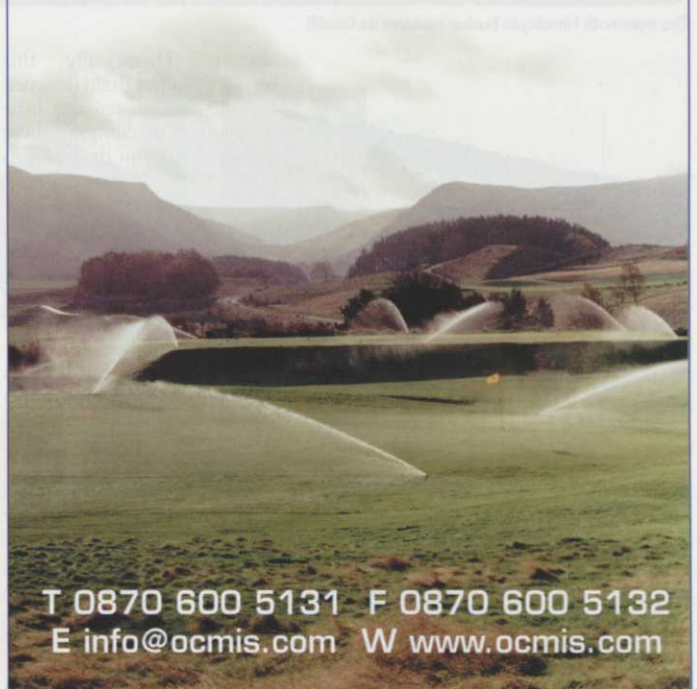
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