



Bringing your community to life

Lessons Learned from the 2025 Drought Event

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1. The 2025 Drought

The Drought Event in 2025 was Leaf Water's first drought event, and the first time that we have implemented our Drought Plan which was created the year prior in 2024. As a result, there have been several times in which we have developed our approach beyond what was set out in our drought plan. This evolution in our thinking has led to us formulating this document to reflect our experience of the 2025 drought and what needs to be considered in the event of another.

We have produced this 'Lessons Learned' document as Leaf Water is not required to update the Drought Plan (DP) for 2027. This document clearly sets out the changes that we will be implementing because of the 2025 Drought Event. It lists the actions we took, and what we (as a NAV) are proposing to do in a future drought event. We will continue to update our DP24 to contain all our new NAV sites in the yearly reviews.

2. What We Would Like to See in the Next Drought Event After 2025's

As the climate gets hotter, we need to prepare for more events such as the Drought of 2022 and 2025. As Leaf Water did not exist in 2022, 2025 was our first Drought Event where we can comment on the process of what happens and what we think should happen to make sure that all parties are prepared when there are more droughts expected to happen in the future.

2.1 Developing Communications

We would like for there to be increased communications between NAVs and the Supplying Water Companies from the beginning and throughout a Drought Event. We would recommend having regular 'many-to-many' meetings with all supplying water companies and NAVs present to obtain a run-down on the current water situations from each water supplying company – with a focus on agreeing actions for NAVs, WASC's and WOC's following the information that is provided during these sessions.

We have found that many Supplying Water companies have described their current position, which is helpful in many ways, but as a NAV – we do not need to know the 'why'. We would like for there to be more of a focus on the 'what this means' moving forwards. In essence, we do not necessarily need to know the specific info such as reservoir or Groundwater levels. This does not mean that we don't appreciate this information, as it can allow us to communicate to our customers the reason as to why a TUB is implemented for example. However, it is more important to us, as a NAV, to know what the Supplying Water company is doing because of the drought, and whether NAVs should follow or implement any specific measures to protect the water supplies of their WSZ's during a Drought Event.

During the 2025 Drought Event, we had to publish several legal notices in local newspapers regarding Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) to keep in line with the supplying Water companies. We request that in the future, if a TUB is needed to be implemented, then we are given at least two weeks' notice of the intention to implement a TUB from the supplying water company. This would allow us to have sufficient preparation time to draft our own TUBs, and to send them to the relevant newspapers and book a slot, so that our TUB will be implemented in line with the Supplying Water Company's TUB – as much as possible.

We have had discussions with several water companies already, asking for this to be considered in the future, and we have also stated that Leaf Water would be happy to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) if the Supplying Water Company has this information embargoed until a certain date.

2.2 Timelines and Forecasting

From the beginning of a Drought Event, we wish for Supplying water Companies to be in immediate contact regarding their Prospects to NAVs. This would allow us to begin acting appropriately for all future scenarios and be prepared to implement whatever is required for whatever the situation develops into. We would require this information to be given as early as is possible, from each water company if needed, as currently waiting for the centralised summary of Prospects is nearly a month out of date by the time it is ready and sent out.

The EA action tracker is something that we would like to be consistently updated – by all parties. This allows us a further insight into what the current situation is.

2.3 Challenging the Effectiveness of Public Notices

This was our first year of implementing TUBs – as a result, we were legally obliged to announce these in local newspapers to where they affected. As a NAV, this doesn't appear to offer a significant benefit due to two significant factors, and we would like to challenge the effectiveness of this legal requirement in its intention of informing the public. The key issues facing these public notices are:

- Declining Readership
- Digital Reach

The first issue that does not solely affect NAVs, is the declining readership of local newspapers, which challenges the effectiveness of having to legally implement a TUB in this way. We are proposing the transition to fully implement digital public notices – as these will have a much larger reach than physical media, as this reflects the change in how people receive news, as the amount of people reached by a physical newspaper will be far less now than it was, say, 30 years ago.

This brings us onto the second issue. As a NAV, our customer base is more likely to be digitally connected than to read a public notice in a local newspaper. From our perspective a public newspaper notice is not proportional and therefore does not reflect an appropriate cost-benefit outcome. For example, if we only had one site within a specific WRZ, and this site only had 10 customers that would be affected by the legal notice, Leaf Water are still legally obliged to send out a public notice in two local newspapers to this NAV Area, despite realistically this providing no benefit to us, or our customers, and we would have already directly contacted them through digital media.

We also believe that it is worth considering as to whether TUBs should be implemented regionally – rather than specific to the WRZ's of a WASC or WOC, and we would like to invite a discussion surrounding this idea.

2.4. Discussion and Future Development on NAVs and NEUBs

We would also like for there to be more of a focus on the use of Non-Essential Use Bans (NEUBs) before the next Drought Event. This is because there seems to be much uncertainty surrounding them, such as to how a NEUB can be successfully implemented (if at all).

Also, we would like to discuss the option surrounding potential derogations from NEUB implementations if a Supplying Water Company decides to implement a NEUB. This is because for some of our NAV sites it may not provide any cost-benefit to implement a NEUB. We have created a NEUB Assessment Decision Tree that we will use to determine our proposed way forward for discussion and agreement with the Supplying Water Company. We will then either follow with a NEUB, or seek derogation, depending on whether the NEUB will provide a positive cost-benefit.

We would also like to discuss what a NEUB would mean in terms of development sites, for example with the issue of dust suppression and environmental hazards that this may cause. What would be the priority here, would it be the NEUB being implemented, or to continue as usual to protect the local environment to that development site? These are questions that should be considered, especially if NEUBs are to increase in likelihood due to future drought events becoming increasingly common.

3. What We Have Learned From this Drought Event

There have been numerous developments at Leaf Water as a result of the 2025 Drought Event, leading to our questioning and planning for what we must do, both in the event of another drought, and in the time before – to make sure we are as prepared as possible to manage the effects. We are continuing to send out our ‘Water-saving’ messaging to pre-emptively protect water supplies regardless of whether a Drought Event is anticipated. We will do this throughout all seasons of the year.

The 2025 Drought taught us that the most important action is quickly establishing effective communications with Supplying Water Companies if a drought event appears to be a possibility. This will allow us to successfully prepare and respond to any level of drought scenario that may occur – keeping in line with the incumbent’s Drought Event Levels.

It will also allow us to identify our sites that are more at risk of a drought event by discussing with Supplying Water companies what the Drought Level is, and will develop into, in their WRZs. This will allow us to prepare our customers effectively in a drought scenario. These hopefully will help steady the potential worsening of the drought level through early conservation of water resources. Leaf Water will also engage with those customers who are more at risk, depending on the local drought situation, and will send out communications accordingly to provide regular updates.

As an industry, we should consider framing out how communications will work, and these should be set out as a protocol between NAV’s, WASC’s and WOC’s in advance of an event to support Drought Plans, rather than being developed as a Drought Event is unfolding. Our experience in 2025 was that neither NAV’s, WASC’s or WOC’s had the capacity to start considering what these comms should look like. As a result, whilst still effective, the comms were bespoke to individual organisations rather than following a pre-agreed framework that would be better suited moving forwards. The potential to agree a framework in DP27 will allow – across the industry – more effective, efficient and consistent communications during the next drought event.

It is important to update our customers as soon as possible – by identifying who will be affected and letting them know when restrictions may be put in place. To respect any information that is embargoed, we will do this in accordance with the Supplying Water Companies timeline and will also sign a non-disclosure agreement if it is required. However, for this we need to have this effective communication with the incumbent water company in which the customers of our NAV Areas are found within their WRZs.

This will allow us to send out notifications to our customers via social media, email, and through public notices in the newspapers if so required. This messaging will be tailored for what may occur but will be done to respect any confidential information until it becomes official. If Leaf Water had access to relevant information, we would be able to identify Leaf Water sites most at risk and begin to draft the necessary announcements earlier, which would allow us to be prepared if these needed to be implemented at short notice.

Due to several supplying water companies verging on the implementation of NEUBs we suggest that there should be an increase in discussions regarding this topic specifically. These should focus on increasing the guidance on how to implement a NEUB, or what would constitute one to being necessary in the NAV Area. Currently the criteria for a NEUB appears to be rather unclear and easily contestable, which therefore questions the effectiveness of NEUBs. We would also like this to be an opportunity for us to share our NEUB Decision Tree Assessment – showcasing how we plan to manage any potential NEUBs in future Drought Events.

4. AWIN Actions in the Event of Another Drought

Following AWIN's experience of the Drought Event of 2025, there are several elements which we would like to put into practice if another Drought Event were to take place in the near future. These developments will be reflected in our future Drought Plan 2032, but this document confirms that these will be put into practice before drafting of the DP32 is required if another Drought Event were to take place in the time from the 2025 Drought Event until the publication of our DP32.

Leaf Water will continue to send out 'Water saving' messaging to our customers, as this is generally beneficial for all parties involved and will help in protecting water supplies during times when they are at increasing risk of becoming stressed. These customer communications will also continue throughout the Autumn/Winter months to preserve and maintain supplies before the Spring/Summer months – where the risk of a drought increases. The messaging will vary depending on the season to be more digestible to customers who may not understand why water saving is important during all times of year, and not just when there is a risk of a drought event in the Spring and Summer months.

Regarding communications with Supplying Water Companies, we will contact WASCs and WOCs during Business-as-Usual activities to discuss Drought Comms. This would allow all parties involved to have the opportunity to develop a communication protocol before a drought event, rather than attempting to form a comms plan whilst a Drought Event is either on the horizon, or ongoing. This would also assist in our wish of understanding what Supplying Water Companies' forecasts are – as we can discuss these and plan together. For example, we would be able to align our temporary use ban public notices within a Supplying Water companies' region to coincide with when the supplying water companies' TUB would be enacted (if they were to implement one).

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