# England faces decade-long drinking water crisis amid population growth and climate change



Just over 200 years ago, William Blake lauded England as a "great and pleasant land" in the hymn Jerusalem, celebrating its verdant landscapes and abundant resources. However, as the 21st century unfolds, the country is increasingly at risk of becoming parched, facing a looming drinking water crisis that has prompted urgent government action.

This week, ministers acknowledged that, without significant intervention, England could run out of drinking water within the next decade. Their announcement included plans to fast-track the construction of two new reservoirs—the first such man-made water bodies for human consumption in over thirty years. Urgent calls for action echo across the political spectrum, with looming concerns that population growth, dilapidated infrastructure, and climate change could soon see demand for potable water surpass supply. According to projections from the Office for National Statistics, the UK population is set to swell to 72.5 million by mid-2032, driven predominantly by net migration, which could have profound implications for resource availability.

Critics, including shadow home secretary Chris Philp, have initiated a robust discourse around immigration, asserting that unchecked population growth exacerbates water scarcity. "Water doesn’t lie. It’s a basic test of whether a country can support its people, and we are failing that test," he stated. Recent figures show that while net migration to the UK saw a significant decrease from 906,000 last year to 431,000 this year, the long-term projection indicates that population figures will still rise—due to both migration and an aging population where natural change remains stagnant.

The Environment Agency has highlighted several regions in England, such as Greater Manchester and Lancashire, that are transitioning from "prolonged dry weather" to "drought" status. The urgency is compounded by alarming statistics: nearly a fifth of water supplied by water companies is lost before it ever reaches consumers—a figure that should incite further investigation and reform.

While recent government commitments signal progress, more than just infrastructure expansion is needed to alleviate impending shortages. Plans for new reservoirs in locations such as Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire aim to provide an additional 670 million litres of water per day—but these projects are not expected to be operational until 2040 or later. This delay raises hard questions about the sustainability of existing systems and highlights the urgency for investment in supply-related infrastructures, especially given the East of England faces a projected water shortage of 800 million litres per day by 2050.

Many experts argue that long-term water sustainability must shift focus from merely building new reservoirs to improving existing systems, reducing waste, and promoting efficient water use. A comprehensive £15 billion investment plan has been proposed to enhance regional water management throughout the East, alongside strategies for reducing overall water consumption.

Despite assurances from government officials, including Environment Minister Emma Hardy, that these infrastructure projects will be fast-tracked, the reality remains that England's water crisis is a multifaceted issue exacerbated by rising temperatures, low rainfall, and population increases. The infrastructural footprint must evolve—given that, since privatisation in 1989, only one potable water reservoir has been completed in the UK.

As climate change continues to reshape weather patterns, leading researchers warn that more persistent droughts and intense rainfall will jeopardise water resources even further. Prof. Hayley Fowler from the University of Newcastle notes that "with global warming, we expect more prolonged and intense droughts and heatwaves punctuated by more intense rainfall, possibly causing flash floods." The need for vigilant environmental management and adaptive strategies has never been clearer.

As the government and private sector prepare to grapple with the ramifications of demographic shifts alongside climate challenges, it remains evident that merely expanding current infrastructures cannot be a standalone solution. Projections suggest that unless there are concerted efforts to enhance water efficiency, increase storage capacity, and address the underlying population factors contributing to demand, millions could find themselves facing an uncertain water future. While the government’s targeted housebuilding initiatives may aim to accommodate rising numbers, questions linger about the balance between managing immigration effectively and securing vital resources for current and future citizens.

The complexity of England's water crisis serves as a wake-up call—not just for policymakers but for society as a whole. As the nation navigates these challenges, it must consider bold, comprehensive approaches that bridge the gap between growth and sustainability, ensuring the green and pleasant land remains vibrant for generations to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14761697/Englands-yellow-parched-land-soaring-immigration-30-year-failure-build-reservoirs-trigger-drinking-water-crisis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14761697/Englands-yellow-parched-land-soaring-immigration-30-year-failure-build-reservoirs-trigger-drinking-water-crisis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67694328)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/255/immigration-and-the-demand-for-water-in-england), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17600062)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67467738)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14761697/Englands-yellow-parched-land-soaring-immigration-30-year-failure-build-reservoirs-trigger-drinking-water-crisis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67694328)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14761697/Englands-yellow-parched-land-soaring-immigration-30-year-failure-build-reservoirs-trigger-drinking-water-crisis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67694328> - Experts warn that the East of England faces projected water shortages of 800 million litres per day by 2050. Water Resources East, a group tasked with creating a regional water resources plan, calls for £15 billion investment before 2050 to address these issues. The projected shortage equates to a third of the region's water usage, posing risks to food safety and economic development. The plan includes improving leakage, reducing water demand, and encouraging water-efficient development. Two new reservoirs are proposed near Chatteris and Sleaford to hold a combined 100 billion litres.
3. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/environment/reservoirs-rachel-reeves-water-companies/> - Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced plans for nine new reservoirs, including the Fens Reservoir near Cambridge and the Abingdon Reservoir near Oxford, aiming to 'kickstart the economy' with £7.9 billion investment. However, experts warn that these projects may primarily benefit private water companies, leading to higher bills for consumers. Critics argue that the focus should be on reducing water consumption and reusing water, rather than solely building new reservoirs. The UK has not completed a new drinking water reservoir since privatisation in 1989, raising concerns about the effectiveness of such plans.
4. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/environment/reservoirs-uk-environment-drinking-water-shortage/> - The UK faces significant water challenges, with estimates suggesting a one in four chance of households experiencing extended water supply cuts by 2050 due to severe drought. To mitigate this, the National Infrastructure Commission recommends adding an extra million litres per day to the water supply by 2030, equivalent to the consumption of nine million people. This necessitates building new reservoirs. However, since privatisation in 1989, only one potable water reservoir has been completed, highlighting the need for urgent action to address the water shortage.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67467738> - Anglian Water, serving 4.3 million customers in the East of England, reports that rising temperatures, low rainfall, and population increase pose a 'significant risk' to water supplies in the region. The company plans to invest £9 billion to ensure future environmental and social resilience. The report highlights that the challenges in the East of England are among the severest in the country, second only to London, underscoring the urgency of addressing water supply issues in the region.
6. <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/255/immigration-and-the-demand-for-water-in-england> - Migration Watch UK estimates that net migration will add 6.3 million people to England by 2034/35, increasing water demand by approximately 850 million litres per day. Thames Water estimates per capita consumption at 135 litres daily by 2034/35. This additional demand could lead to higher water bills for households. The report emphasizes the need for infrastructure improvements, such as reducing leakage and increasing water storage capacity, to meet the growing demand.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17600062> - The BBC explores potential solutions to the UK's water shortage, including stabilising or moving the population. The Office for National Statistics forecasts that the UK population will rise to 73.2 million by 2035, with over two-thirds of the increase due to migration. This population growth, particularly in the South East of England, exacerbates water scarcity issues. The article discusses the implications of such demographic changes on water resources and potential strategies to address the challenges.