

Water Abstraction Returns - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

13th February 2017

Requirement to submit a return

1. Why do I need to complete a return? Why are returns important? What is the data used for?

We need to know how much water you have abstracted to help us to look after the environment and manage the water resource you rely on. Your data is important and is used by us to:

- Accurately assess the impact of abstraction on river flows, groundwater levels and water dependent habitats, species and sites
- Assess present and future demands for water
- Allocate spare resources to other abstractors
- Provide information on water usage
- Check that licence holders are complying with their licence conditions

2. What happens if I don't submit a return?

If you do not send us return information within 28 days of us requesting it or within 2 weeks of the reminder notice we will record this as a breach of your licence conditions. Failure to comply with the conditions of your licence may lead to enforcement action being taken against you.

In addition:

- If you abstract water for irrigation and hold a two-part tariff agreement, your abstraction charge will be calculated based on the quantity you are licensed to use, not your actual usage. This will cost you more money. We do not give rebates for late submissions
- If your licence has a time limit, you may not be able to renew it
- We may assume you no longer need your licence and may take action to cancel it
- Future abstraction charges may be increased, to cover the extra costs of following up on non-submission of returns

Receiving return notifications

3. The return form looks different to previous years. I previously received my return form from the EA.

We are now responsible for the returns process for water abstractors in Wales. This was previously administered, on our behalf, by the Environment Agency (EA) and they will still administer this process for water abstractors in England.

From now on, abstractors in Wales will receive notifications to submit returns to us. If you also hold licences in England, you will continue to receive separate return notifications from the EA.

Delegated Licences: Management of licences which authorise abstractions within both Wales and England (including returns) have been delegated to either us or the EA. If you hold a delegated licence you will have previously been notified. You will receive your notification from the body your licence has been delegated to.

A new return form, process and IT system have been developed to accommodate these changes. These changes will allow us to administer the returns process, and for abstractors to submit returns, in a more efficient and cost effective way. Guidance to support you is included with paper return forms or available on our website (<https://naturalresources.wales/apply-for-a-permit/water-abstraction-licences-and-impoundment-licences/water-abstraction-returns/?lang=en>) or via a link in your notification email if you receive an electronic return form. There are also guidance notes within the electronic return form.

4. I registered an email address but have received a paper return notification

Unfortunately, we have experienced difficulties with some of the email addresses provided. In these cases, a paper return has been sent on this occasion together with a reply slip providing an opportunity to provide a valid email address for future return notifications. Please complete the reply slip (clearly printing the email address) and submit with your paper return form.

Please note: For electronic returns you will need Excel 2007 or a newer version and your email security settings must allow emails with attached Excel files from waterresources.returns@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.

If you are unable to accommodate electronic returns due to your computer security restrictions or because you do not have the required Excel package, please do not return the reply slip. You will continue to receive paper returns.

5. I registered an email address but have not received an electronic or substitute paper return notification

The return notification will be sent from waterresources.returns@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk. Please check your 'junk' email folder and ensure that your email account is able to receive emails (with Excel attachment) from this email address.

If you have not received an email notification and do not receive a paper notification within a week of the date at the top of this FAQs document please get in touch with us on 0300 065 3000 or by email at waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk. Please be able to provide your licence number(s).

6. I haven't registered an email address but have not received a paper notification

Please get in touch with us on 0300 065 3000 or by email at waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk. Please be able to provide your licence number(s).

7. I would like to register for electronic return notifications

Please complete and return the reply slip provided with your paper return form. Please

ensure the email address is clearly printed.

Please note: For electronic returns you will need Excel 2007 or a newer version and your email security settings must allow emails with attached Excel files from waterresources.returns@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.

If you are unable to accommodate electronic returns due to your computer security restrictions or because you do not have the required Excel package, please do not return the reply slip. You will continue to receive paper returns.

8. I've received a return notification for a licence/abstraction I'm not responsible for?

Please contact our Customer Care Centre on 0300 065 3000 or via waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

9. My licence has expired/been revoked/been transferred to another person but I've still received a return request. What action do I need to take?

You need to complete the return form to provide information on your abstraction activity between the start of the abstraction return period (see 'Return period start date' printed on top of return form 'Cover sheet') and the date the licence expired/was transferred/was revoked.

10. I've received more than one return notification? How do I know what data to record on each form?

Where a licence authorises abstraction for more than one purpose and/or at more than one location then there may be a requirement for multiple returns per licence. This will be specified in the licence conditions and return notifications are generated in line with licence conditions. This was also the case when returns were administered by the EA on our behalf.

If you hold multiple licences you will also receive multiple return notifications.

The pre-populated return ID, site name and purpose information within the return form will help identify which purpose/point/licence each return relates to.

11. I normally receive my notification at the end of March or end of October

Unfortunately we have experienced some delays with the roll out of the new system and process to accommodate the change to us being responsible for returns for abstractors in Wales. The March and October 2016 return notifications to abstractors in Wales have therefore unfortunately been delayed until now. We also anticipate that the March 2017 return notifications will be delayed until June 2017. No delays are anticipated from the October 2017 return notifications onwards.

Completing return forms

12. I haven't abstracted any water. Do I still need to complete a return?

If you have received a return notification, to comply with your licence conditions you must complete and submit a return. If no water has been abstracted you are required to complete

and submit a return form in line with the guidance available to confirm a 'nil' return. We are not able to accept an email stating that no water has been abstracted.

If you spray irrigate and hold a two part tariff billing agreement your charges are partially calculated on the amount of water abstracted. To gain the full financial benefits of this agreement you must submit your return, even if you haven't abstracted any water.

13. I no longer use/need the licence. Do I still need to complete a return?

You are required to provide details on quantities of water abstracted in line with your licence conditions until you revoke the licence or transfer it to someone else. If you have not abstracted any water you must complete and submit a 'nil' return in line with the guidance available. We are not able to accept an email stating that no water has been abstracted.

If your circumstances have changed and you no longer need the licence you should seek to revoke your licence. Information on how to change an existing licence is available on our website at <https://naturalresources.wales/apply-for-a-permit/water-abstraction-licences-and-impoundment-licences/applying-to-change-an-existing-abstraction-or-impoundment-licence/?lang=en>. If you require additional information or would like to discuss the licence revocation further please contact our Customer Care Centre on 0300 065 3000 or via waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

14. I have returns data recorded in a spreadsheet/form of my own. Can I submit this as my return?

Electronic returns: Please note we can only accept the Excel return form provided. Alternative spreadsheets or information copied and pasted from earlier return forms are not compatible, therefore cannot be uploaded and will have to be returned.

Paper returns: You must use the form provided. The form is designed to enable you to provide all the information we require as accurately and efficiently as possible.

15. Which parts of the return form do I need to complete?

Detailed information on which sections you need to complete is provided in the new guides available. The relevant guide is provided with paper returns notifications. For electronic returns please access the relevant guide via <https://naturalresources.wales/apply-for-a-permit/water-abstraction-licences-and-impoundment-licences/water-abstraction-returns/?lang=en> (link also provided in your return notification email)

Guidance on completing each section of the return form is provided within the guides. Guidance notes will also appear when you start entering information in certain sections of the electronic return form.

16. I've used the relevant guide to determine which sections of the form I need to complete but think I've received the wrong form

Please get in touch with us on 0300 065 3000 or by email at waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

17. I'm having difficulty completing the form (paper returns)

Please ensure you have read the step by step guide on how to complete your return provided with your return form and all this FAQs document. If you are still having difficulties please call us on 0300 065 3000.

18. I'm having difficulty completing the form (electronic returns)

Please ensure you have read the step by step guide on how to complete your return (available at <https://naturalresources.wales/apply-for-a-permit/water-abstraction-licences-and-impoundment-licences/water-abstraction-returns/?lang=en> or via link provided in your return notification email) and all this FAQs document. If you are still having difficulties please call us on 0300 065 3000.

19. What is a nil return?

A 'nil' return indicates that no water has been abstracted during the abstraction reporting period.

20. I've used more than one meter during the return reporting period

Please enter the make and serial number of only one meter and provide further information to explain meter usage as a separate sheet(s) attached to the reply email or enclosed with your paper return (see Section 5 of return form for details on submitting further information).

21. I determine abstracted volumes by a non-metered method and would like to provide details on my calculations

Please provide any further information required as a separate sheet(s) attached to the reply email or enclosed with your paper return (see Section 5 of return form for details on submitting further information).

22. My licence authorises a summer (April to October) or winter (November to March) abstraction but the return form allows entry of return information for 12 months?

This is correct. The return form will always show 12 months even if your licence does not authorise all year abstraction. This is to allow you to provide details of actual abstraction activity and to assess whether the authorised licence period meets your requirements.

23. I've followed the guide and completed the relevant meter reading and/or abstracted volume sections but the total water abstracted section is not auto-populating (electronic return only)

Please note this field will not auto populate from inputted meter readings/abstracted volumes. There are a number of reasons for this including avoiding mis-calculation where more than one meter has been used during the abstraction period and to serve to validate the meter reading/abstracted volume data entered.

24. I abstract for hydropower but do not know the performance data required in section 6 of my 'Hydro return' sheet

In accordance with your licence conditions, you should have recorded the performance data (net operating head and turbine/water wheel, generator and transmission system

efficiencies) on the calculation checklist attached to your licence document. If you do not know this data, please note we do not hold this site and equipment specific data. Any further assistance will need to be sought from the company/companies who provided the equipment and/or any agent responsible for scheme design and construction.

25. The pre-populated details within the return form are incorrect

This will need to be reviewed by our Water Resources Permitting team as some corrections may require amendments to be made to the licence document via a licence application. Please provide us with details via our Customer Care Centre on 0300 065 3000 or via waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

Creating the .xml file and submission (electronic returns)

26. I'm unable to create the xml document for submission

Please review the 'Completion Checklist' at the bottom of the return form you completed to check that all required information has been provided.

You will not be able to submit the return until 'Yes' appears next to every 'Completion Checklist' entry. Please review and update any relevant sections still appearing as 'No' to change to 'Yes'.

27. I've created the xml file but I'm unable to locate it on my computer

To create the .xml file first you have to save the Excel file in a known place on your computer. It is very important you know where you have saved the file as the .xml file you create will be saved in the same folder.

Licence related queries

28. I need to make changes to my existing abstraction licence

Please note applications to change existing licences cannot be accepted via the water resources returns mailbox. Information on how to change an existing licence is available on our website at <https://naturalresources.wales/apply-for-a-permit/water-abstraction-licences-and-impoundment-licences/applying-to-change-an-existing-abstraction-or-impoundment-licence/?lang=en>. If you require additional information or would like to discuss the licence change further please contact our Customer Care Centre on 0300 065 3000 or via enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

29. I'm not happy with/don't understand the metering and recording conditions on my licence.

Please contact our Customer Care Centre on 0300 065 3000 or via waterresources.returns@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.