



Response measures for Algarve's ongoing drought

Council of Ministers Resolution 80/2024 of June 21 continues to recognize the state of drought in the Algarve region.

Portugal - Legal Update

June 24, 2024



Key aspects

Council of Ministers Resolution 80/2024 of June 21 (the “Resolution”):

- maintains the drought warning for the Algarve region;
- eases certain restrictions imposed by Council of Ministers Resolution 26-A/2024 of February 20;
- boosts anti-water shortage and contingency measures;
- creates a tariff component for the supply service;
- establishes restrictions on the public water supply, tourism, and agriculture, as well as on issuing water resource use permits (“TURH”); and
- introduces new financing and incentive measures.



Resolution scope

Since May 2022, the water storage levels in the Algarve's reservoirs have been below 50%. Despite the periods of high rainfall in early 2024, it is still necessary to ensure the reservoirs have sufficient volume by the year's end to secure a full year's public supply.

Currently, groundwater storage levels remain alarmingly low, with approximately 52% of these bodies of water being in a critical state. Therefore, contingency measures aimed at reducing the impacts of drought in the Algarve region still need to be implemented.

However, certain restrictions imposed by [Council of Ministers Resolution 26-A/2024](#) of February 20 have been eased, with an additional 20 hm³ being made available to the region (approximately 10% of overall consumption). This guarantees priority uses and ensures an available water reserve at the end of 2024 for the public supply in 2025. The increase per sector will be as follows: 2.65 hm³ for urban; 13.14 hm³ for agricultural; and 4.17 hm³ for tourism, including golf and tourist accommodation.

In addition to easing certain restrictions, structural measures are underway that will significantly enhance the Algarve region's water resilience from 2026. These measures include (i) the Recovery and Resilience Plan, with a guaranteed funding of €237.4 million; (ii) the Environmental Fund, allocating €15.65 million; and (iii) Portugal 2030, providing €103 million. Despite these measures, there is an immediate need for additional contingency measures with short-term effects.

Considering this context, the Council of Ministers has decided to:

- a) maintain the drought warning for the Algarve region;
- b) limit the monthly water supply for each municipal user by Águas do Algarve, S.A. to 90% of the volume recorded in the same period in 2023;
- c) use 2023 as a reference period for compliance monitoring, with the exception of the Olhão, Lagoa and São Brás de Alportel municipalities, where the consumption average for 2022–2023 serves as the reference period;
- d) implement an extra tariff component for supply services, applicable to users exceeding 90% of the volume recorded in 2023; and
- e) approve immediate and temporary response measures to reduce consumption and optimize water usage in the Algarve region.



Water shortage response measures

In response to the ongoing water shortage, the Council of Ministers has approved a series of anti-drought measures, including the following:

Public water supply measures

- Lowering the water pressure in the public supply, in appropriate operating conditions, to the minimum essential levels, without compromising service quality.
- Suspending the use of public water for irrigating green spaces, private gardens and public parks, except to ensure the survival of native or monumental trees.
- Limiting the use of water from other natural sources for irrigating green spaces, private gardens and public parks to 85% of the permitted volume and only between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.
- Banning the use of public water supply and other natural water sources for ornamental fountains and other aesthetic water features.
- Prohibiting the use of public water supply for washing sidewalks, yards, walls, roofs, road compaction (roads or road bases), and dust control on the roads of public or private construction sites when reclaimed water is accessible within a five-kilometer radius.
- Encouraging the use of alternative water sources—such as reclaimed water—for non-potable urban uses, as well as the reduction of washing frequency. Such uses include washing streets, sidewalks, urban waste containers, and the vehicles and equipment of public entities.
- Suspending the use of public water supply for washing motorcycles and similar vehicles, except at licensed commercial establishments with water recirculation systems, as well as the use of sponges and buckets outside these establishments.
- Halting the provision of public water through meters for water uses that do not generate wastewater (irrigation meters).
- Developing or strengthening emergency call-out teams to monitor and repair burst pipes in water distribution networks, ensuring 24/7 availability.
- Revising low-pressure water supply tariffs for household and non-household users, as well as for uses that do not generate wastewater, in line with the guidelines of the Water and Waste Services Regulation Authority (ERSAR).



Tourism measures

- Suspending the supply of public water for irrigating golf courses.
- Lowering the maximum volume of natural surface water for irrigating golf courses to 1.7 hm³ (1.3 hm³ Sotavento, 0.2 hm³ Arade, and 0.2 hm³ Bravura).
- Reducing the water renewal rate in public swimming pools, while ensuring public health is not compromised.
- Shutting down showers and foot washers in beach areas, except where seawater is exclusively used.
- Expanding the “Save Water” water efficiency seal designed for tourist resorts to include short-term rentals, driverless car rentals, tourist entertainment, and restaurants that demonstrate reduced water consumption and commitment to water efficiency measures.
- Allowing tourist resorts to use the public water supply for irrigating green areas that are essential for outdoor activities, provided they demonstrate at least a 13% reduction in total water consumption from January to May 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

Agriculture measures

- Issuing reference values for survival irrigation for permanent crops in the Algarve region.
- Evaluating and using the dead storage volume in the Arade reservoir for agricultural irrigation.
- Monitoring the volumes allocated for collective irrigation in 2024, ensuring compliance with the commitments made in the Resolution.
- Authorizing underground abstractions requested in conjunction with the irrigation association for the irrigation perimeter areas of the Eastern Algarve, Alvor, and Western Algarve, to expand the Alvor irrigation perimeter up to a maximum of 5 hm³/year.
- Encouraging the use of private underground abstraction areas in hydro-agricultural perimeter areas on an exceptional basis, by proposing a new conservation fee collection model presented by beneficiary associations.
- Stipulating that, in the area benefiting from the Arade reservoir, no annual crops are permitted with an irrigation allocation exceeding the reference allocation for citrus fruit.



TURH measures

- Suspending all procedures for granting new TURHs for abstractions in the 22 underground water bodies in the Algarve region, identified in annex II to the Resolution. This includes the second phase for research TURHs for which a report was submitted after February 2024, except for abstractions to be included in the concession for the Algarve multi-municipal water supply and sanitation system, resilience water abstractions for the Eastern Algarve and Alvor irrigation perimeters, private abstractions for human consumption in areas demonstrably not served by the public network, and abstractions for animal watering on licensed farms without a more sustainable alternative.
- Implementing a temporary revision of some TURHs issued for abstracting surface water for the production of public supply water in the Odeleite–Beliche, Odelouca, Bravura, Funcho, and Funcho–Arade systems within 15 days of the Resolution’s publication.
- Establishing that, when reviewing the conditions of issued TURHs that establish a maximum monthly volume of 5,000 m³ or more, provisions must be included for direct measurement of the extracted water volumes and fortnightly reporting of the abstracted volumes. This reporting must be done by completing the electronic form provided by the Portuguese Environment Agency (APA).

Other measures

- Allocating and creating lines of credit for implementing and complying with anti-drought measures.
- Establishing that the competent authorities will monitor compliance with the measures put in place.

Effects

The Resolution revokes [Council of Ministers Resolution 26-A/2024](#) of February 20 and [Order 4089/2024](#), published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Portugal, 2nd Series, No. 74 of April 15. It will be effective until December 2024 and is scheduled for review in August 2024.

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