

Press release: Man sentenced for assaulting Environment Agency officer

A Northumberland man has been ordered to pay almost £4,000 after assaulting an Environment Agency officer investigating a pollution incident and threatening to burn down his house.

John Aaron Laing, 54, of East Learmouth Farm in Cornhill-on-Tweed had pleaded not guilty to assault, threatening and abusive behaviour and obstructing an Environment Agency officer in the execution of his duty.

He was found guilty of all offences following a trial which concluded at Berwick Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 2 October.

He was fined £1,246 for assault and threatening behaviour, ordered to pay £250 compensation to the Environment Agency officer he assaulted, and £2,400 costs. He was also given a 12-month conditional discharge for obstruction.

Prosecuting for the Environment Agency, Chris Bunting told the court that on Saturday 6 January this year two Environment Agency officers attended a suspected pollution incident at Cornhill-on-Tweed.

After taking water samples they then drove to New Heaton Farm, owned by Laing, to further investigate and requested a staff member to stop land spreading activities while they were making enquiries, which was agreed.

The two Environment Agency officers then started to take samples from a surface water ditch on the land. One of them went back to the car to collect some equipment, and at this point Laing arrived on site.

He walked up to and into the Environment Agency officer, was very hostile and threatening, continuously bumping into his chest. The officer explained they were investigating a pollution incident. Laing demanded to know who had reported him and the officer replied that he didn't know.

Threats to burn down house

Laing then said he would "finish" the officer, find out where he lived, burn his house down and kill his family. He kept walking into the officer as they walked towards the road, and raising his hand as if he was going to punch him, and kept inviting the officer to strike him first.

The officer said he was calling the police, and then received a phone call from another Environment Agency officer who overheard Laing's threatening behaviour. Laing then left the area and the officers left the farm.

During a police interview, Laing agreed he had spoken to the officer, disputed there was any pollution problem and asked the officer to leave only for health and safety reasons because of cattle on the farm. Laing accepted he had been stern but said the officer started pointing and trying to provoke

him.

Laing added there was no violence or threatening behaviour and that the officer hadn't shown him any identification, denying all the allegations put to him. He said he had mentioned the officer's house but with reference to how he would like it if he turned up uninvited and walked over his garden.

During the trial, Laing repeated these claims and said that the officer had made up his account. However, the court rejected Laing's version of events, stating that it contained significant contradictions.

Paul Whitehill, Enforcement Team leader for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

Our officers are doing an important job to protect the environment and investigate anything which impacts on the quality of our rivers and they shouldn't have to put up with any kind of abusive or threatening behaviour during the course of their work.

The officers were taking water quality samples after reports that a watercourse was impacted by slurry pollution and this is all part of enquiries to establish a potential source for the pollution so it can be stopped and prevented in future.

The safety of our officers is paramount and we will always take action against people who assault them or are threatening and abusive. Hopefully this sends out a message to others that it will not be tolerated.

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Behaviour 'will not be tolerated'

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[Press release: Helping residents be prepared for flooding](#)

The Environment Agency is working with residents in Chester-le-Street to help them be better prepared for flooding.

[News story: Wedgetail is on the radar, Defence Secretary announces ahead of NATO conference](#)

The E-7 Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) System is able to fly for long periods of time and manage the battlespace from the sky, providing situational awareness and tracking multiple airborne and maritime targets at the same time. It then uses the information it gathers to direct other assets like fighter jets and warships. It has already been proven on operations in the battle against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

Further discussions are set to take place before any investment decision is made, as the MOD follows a stringent approvals process to ensure the aircraft meets the military requirement and represents value-for-money. If selected, UK industry could be involved significantly with the programme, from modification work to through life support.

Speaking ahead of the meeting of Defence Ministers in NATO, Defence Secretary

Gavin Williamson said:

The Wedgetail is the stand-out performer in our pursuit of a new battlespace surveillance aircraft, and has already proved itself in Iraq and Syria. Running air operations from the sky, it could be an excellent asset for the RAF and give us a real edge in this increasingly complex world.

Our future with Australia will already see us operate the same maritime patrol aircraft, world-class Type 26 warships and supersonic F-35 jets. Wedgetail may join that formidable armoury and help us work together to take on the global threats that we both face.

Following market analysis and discussions with other potential providers, the MOD has concluded that the potential procurement of the E-7 represents the best value for money option for the UK against need, whilst representing a significant opportunity for increased defence cooperation and collaboration with our key ally Australia.

The MOD will work closely with Boeing to ensure Britain's leading defence industry could also benefit from any deal.

Named after Australia's largest bird of prey, the wedge-tailed eagle, the high-performing aircraft has been proven on operations with the Royal Australian Air Force, having seen action against Daesh over Syria and Iraq and impressing US Forces in the 'Red Flag' series of large-scale exercises.

The Wedgetail uses a standard Boeing 737 airliner modified to carry a sophisticated Northrop Grumman active electronically-scanned radar and can cover four million square kilometres over a single 10-hour period. If selected, it would replace the E-3D Sentry, which entered service in 1992.

It is a proven and reliable aircraft that has been in-Service with the Royal Australian Air Force for some time, with potential to considerably reduce the risk normally associated with acquiring a complex new platform of this nature. The aircraft is based on the Boeing 737 airliner family as is the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft due to enter service in 2019.

The news represents a further development of the UK's increasingly close military capability and industrial relationship with Australia, who recently selected the British Type 26 design for its future frigate. That decision confirmed the UK's world-leading ship design capabilities, whilst strengthening collaboration in anti-submarine warfare and demonstrating the value of the global five-eyes partnership.

With its proven interoperability, the Wedgetail could also link up with the RAF's latest arrival, the F-35 Lightning, providing pilots with the latest intelligence and situational awareness demonstrating how a modernised next generation Air Force can fight and win in an increasingly complex and dangerous environment, characterised by high speed and low observability.

With Australia also a partner in the F-35 programme, the RAF and the Royal Australian Air Force will have further opportunities to work together across platforms and with other allies such as the United States to share and collect data and conduct joint training missions, all leading to faster, more effective and more integrated combat forces.

Press release: UK festival of creativity and innovation to be held in 2022

A major nationwide festival showcasing the UK's unique strengths in creativity and innovation will be held in 2022.

Backed by £120 million government investment, the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be a moment of national celebration and help attract new inward business and investment.

It will deliver an exciting programme of events on arts, culture, design and tech across the country.

Taking place in the year of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the festival will amplify key anniversary celebrations of some of our most beloved institutions. In 2022, The BBC will mark its 100th birthday, the Edinburgh International and Fringe Festivals will celebrate their 75th anniversary and Birmingham will welcome 54 Heads of State to the Commonwealth Games.