

Corporate report: The Marine Management Organisation annual report and accounts 2017 to 2018

Annual report and accounts cover the financial year 2017/18. This paper was laid before Parliament in response to a legislative requirement or as a return to an address and was ordered to be printed by the House of Commons.

News story: Michael Gove celebrates the best of Welsh at the Royal Show

Environment Secretary Michael Gove joined Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns at the Royal Welsh Show in Llanelwedd today, 24 July, experiencing the very best of Welsh food, farming and rural life.

They met with the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths AM, as well as representatives from the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society, Farmers Union Wales and NFU Cymru, to discuss future farming policy once we leave the EU.

Earlier this month the Secretary of State welcomed the proposals from the Welsh Government to replace the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and make the most of the new freedoms provided by Brexit.

He also reiterated the need for Defra and the Welsh Government to work closely to reduce the bureaucracy faced by farms on the Wales-England border, addressing some of the points raised in response to Defra's public consultation.

Later in the afternoon he visited the Food Hall – sponsored by Food is GREAT – which celebrates fantastic local produce including:

- Snowdonia Cheese – The Snowdonia Cheese Company was established in 2001 and has created a luxury range of cheeses from around the lakes and mountains of North Wales
- Anglesey Sea Salt – the finest sea salt from the clean waters that surround Anglesey, produced by food company Halen Môn and used in some of the best restaurants worldwide
- Lochmeyer Farm Ice Cream – a family dairy farm making ice cream from its 350 free-range cows, with flavours including blackberry, ginger and Pembrokeshire salted caramel
- Blodyn Aur – translated as 'Golden Flower', this is Welsh rapeseed oil

- grown and pressed on a farm near the village of Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr
- Apple County Cider – award-winning ciders from orchards on the Monmouthshire hills

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

It is a pleasure to be here in this beautiful part of Wales for one of the biggest and best agricultural events of the year.

As we leave the EU we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform our food, farming and environmental policies. We expect to see more powers than ever before being granted to the Welsh government, and we are continuing to work closely to deliver a Brexit that will benefit Welsh farmers and consumers.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

I am delighted to welcome the Environment Secretary to the Royal Welsh Show once again. It's a wonderful showcase for the quality of our livestock, food and drink and farm produce, highlighted by the hundreds of thousands of visitors who flock to Builth Wells year upon year to experience this showpiece event.

From multi-million pound investments in superfast broadband to supporting innovation in the agri-tech sector through our modern Industrial Strategy, we are delivering the measures needed to support the agricultural industry in Wales. As we move into the final stages of EU exit negotiations, we are stepping up our engagement to make sure the voices of the sector are heard.

To find out more about the Royal Welsh Show, which runs until 26 July, please see [here](#)

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News story: CMA publishes Annual Report for 2017/18

The [report](#), which the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has laid before Parliament, looks back on work carried out during 2017/18, and highlights the impact the organisation has made over that year for households and businesses across the UK.

The CMA carried out competition enforcement investigations to protect vulnerable customers, crack down on cartels and tackle illegal online practices. It used its full array of powers flexibly and secured important enforcement outcomes across a range of sectors, including [online auction platforms](#), [residential estate agency services](#) and [supplies of household fuels](#).

Through its consumer enforcement, much of which focused on digital commerce, the CMA addressed unfair practices in markets as diverse as [secondary ticketing](#), hotel booking and car hire. This includes securing landmark [changes for online gambling players](#), with four leading operators formally committing to stop unfair online promotions.

The CMA built on previous years' improvements to its merger control, operating with increased pace and with more targeted interventions. It carried out several major merger investigations, including Tesco/Booker, Wood/Amec and [Fox/Sky](#). In the latter, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport accepted the CMA's recommendation that the anticipated acquisition was not in the public interest due to media plurality concerns and has [required the sale of Sky News to Disney](#).

The CMA carried out an in-depth review into one market long central to people's lives and during a period of life when they can be at their most vulnerable (care homes), calling for urgent reform of the sector so that people get the support they need in their old age. This was alongside another review into a rapidly-evolving area of the economy ([digital comparison tools](#)), in which it set clear ground rules for all online comparison tools on issues such as communicating how they use people's personal data and clearly displaying important information like price and product description. Following both these market studies, the CMA launched enforcement action and

[secured important policy changes](#) by major care home providers and over £2 million in compensation to a large number of residents who had paid significant upfront fees.

Millions of households and businesses are seeing the benefits from the CMA's market-wide reviews of the [£10 billion energy sector](#) and the [£35 billion retail banking sector](#), with a range of innovative and important remedies coming into effect. For example, four million energy customers on pre-payment meters are paying lower bills thanks to a price cap and smaller businesses are no longer trapped into expensive auto-rollover contracts. Banks must now support the tech-enabled Open Banking revolution, it is easier for customers to switch bank and banks must warn customers if they are about to slip into an unarranged overdraft.

Over the year, there was a step-change in the level of co-operation between the CMA and sector regulators, as shown in the latest [Annual Concurrency Report](#). The CMA has, or in some cases continues to carry out significant work alongside other regulators, including the market investigation into [investment consultants](#) following a referral from the Financial Conduct Authority. Almost all the regulators with powers to enforce competition law have now launched an investigation of their own since the start of the new concurrency regime in 2014.

The CMA remains a strong voice for competition, within the UK and overseas, and is preparing to play a bigger role on the world stage following the UK's exit from the EU. Planning for the new arrangements, which include a significantly increased merger and antitrust review role, as well as a new responsibility to enforce State aid rules, is an important priority for the organisation. The CMA is expanding to ensure it is ready for these new responsibilities, including by opening a larger office in Edinburgh.

[News story: Decision announced on the Hydraulic Fracturing Consent application by Cuadrilla Bowland Ltd](#)

Energy and Clean Growth Minister Claire Perry has today (Tuesday 24 July 2018) granted Hydraulic Fracturing Consent for shale gas operator Cuadrilla Bowland Ltd for the horizontal well, number 'PNR-1z' at its Preston New Road site in Lancashire, subject to certain conditions being met.

Hydraulic Fracturing Consent was introduced in the [Infrastructure Act 2015](#) as an additional step to the existing regulatory and permitting regime. It ensures a final check that all the necessary environmental and health and safety permits have been obtained and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is otherwise satisfied it is appropriate to grant

Hydraulic Fracturing Consent.

Cuadrilla Bowland Ltd submitted an [application for Hydraulic Fracturing Consent](#) to BEIS on 18 May 2018 in line with the regulatory regime.

The government has been clear it is committed to ensuring a meticulous approach, rooted in rigorous evidence, is taken when reviewing applications to explore for shale gas.

Having given careful consideration to the evidence submitted and after scrutiny from the department, minister Claire Perry is satisfied the [13 technical requirements set out in section 4A of the Petroleum Act 1998](#) have been met.

In a [written ministerial statement](#) in January 2018, the Secretary of State set out that the financial resilience of shale gas operators would be looked at as a matter of policy. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority was asked to carry out an independent assessment and has confirmed its view Cuadrilla has satisfactory financial resilience to operate. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority concluded:

Cuadrilla Bowland Limited, as operator of the PEDL 165 Licence and equity investor in the Licence alongside AJ Lucas and Spirit Energy on a joint and several basis, combined with continuing financial support from its ultimate shareholders has an adequate level of financial resilience to undertake the project.

After reviewing all of the information, Energy and Clean Growth Minister Claire Perry confirmed she is otherwise satisfied to issue the consent, subject to certain conditions being met, which include the department receiving a copy of the unqualified audited report and accounts relating to the latest full financial year of Spirit Energy Limited, or a deposit in a suitable Escrow account in support of any potential Decommissioning Cost liability.

It is the government's view there are potentially substantial benefits from the safe and sustainable exploration and development of our onshore shale gas resources.

Energy and Clean Growth Minister Claire Perry said:

Shale gas has the potential to be a new domestic energy source, further enhancing our energy security and helping us with our continued transition to a lower-carbon economy. It also has the capacity to deliver substantial economic benefits, both nationally and locally, as well as through the creation of well paid, high-quality jobs.

We already have an excellent, long-standing reputation for safe oil and gas exploration. Our world class regulations will ensure that

shale exploration will maintain robust environmental standards and meet the expectations of local communities.

I have carefully considered Cuadrilla's application and I am content that Hydraulic Fracturing Consent should be granted in this instance.