

Press release: Environment Agency kick-starts River Witham recovery

The [Environment Agency](#) (EA) has released hundreds of thousands of roach and bream larvae into the River Witham on Friday (25 May 2018), to kick-start the river's recovery process following a major pollution incident in early March.

Following the pollution of the river in March, which is estimated to have caused the death of at least 100,000 fish, the EA has been working to bring those responsible to justice, as well as to ensure that the river recovers as quickly as possible.

Pollution killed at least 100,000 fish

The EA has staff dedicated to the pollution incident full-time and is continuing to take regular samples of the water quality in the Witham as the river recovers.

The release of the larvae into the river forms an important first step on the road to recovery, which could take many months or even years as the river's complex ecosystem gets back to full health.

The fish larvae have come from the EA's [national fish farm in Calverton](#), which produces around 450,000 fish of 9 species each year for re-stocking. Calverton Fish Farm is funded by income from fishing licence fees, and last year it delivered more than 6 million advanced reared larvae back into the wild.

First step in river's recovery

Environment manager Simon Mitchell said:

The release of thousands of larvae, reared by our own fish farm in Calverton into the River Witham, marks an important step on the road to the river's recovery.

According to our latest estimates, the pollution incident in March caused the death of no fewer than 100,000 fish – although the exact figure is likely to be higher. As a river is a complex ecosystem with different species recovering at different rates, the full recovery process may take many months or even years.

We take pollution incidents like this extremely seriously and will always seek to prosecute those who negligently damage our precious environment and wildlife. We have staff continuing to work on this pollution incident full-time, as the river progresses through the recovery phase.

Re-stocking is made possible through fishing licence fees, which fund Calverton Fish Farm. An annual fishing licence is available from only £30, and is [easily bought online](#).

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[Press release: New quarantine proposals to protect England's trees](#)

Proposals to consult industry on new quarantine arrangements for high-risk plants are among the measures set out today (Friday 25 May) in [the Government's plan to protect the UK's precious trees](#).

Currently quarantine is used by some horticulture businesses as part of strong biosecurity measures against high-risk species. We want to explore how this targeted approach can be broadened out so we have better protection against harmful pests and diseases right across the industry.

Once we leave the EU we will have the chance to tighten biosecurity measures further and take swifter, more targeted action against serious threats like Xylella.

[The Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#), the first major publication to come out of [the 25-Year Environment Plan](#), sets out a new proactive approach to tree health, with landowners, charities, the public and government working together to take actions to build resilience against pests and diseases to protect the nation's trees – worth an estimated £175 billion.

As part of this approach, a new senior cross-industry Plant Health Alliance to strengthen biosecurity practices across industry has been established. The Alliance brings together the country's leading nurseries, retailers, tree suppliers, landscapers, foresters, [the RHS](#) and Defra to ensure an effective response to threats such as Xylella and Emerald Ash Borer.

Launching the strategy, Secretary of State Michael Gove said:

The UK has a global reputation for setting the high standards for biosecurity of plants and trees but there is no room for complacency. We must seize every opportunity offered by Brexit to strengthen our biosecurity.

In 10 years' time I want to be able to say our oaks are thriving, that pests are being kept at bay and that our woodlands and forests are flourishing.

Trees benefit our economy, society and wellbeing significantly and this strategy sets out how we will preserve them for generations to come.

The Strategy also includes:

- Launching the 'Don't Risk It' campaign this summer to raise awareness of the risks of bringing back plant materials from holiday destinations
- Consulting with industry on contingency plans for key threats to our trees and plants to ensure a swift and effective response should new pests and diseases enter the UK
- Strengthening protection against Xylella – maintaining continuous scrutiny of the risk situation and taking measures to maintain the strongest possible controls
- Building knowledge and awareness of threats to trees to ensure accurate and up to date information
- Working in partnership with the sector to drive up biosecurity standards through assurance and safe sourcing
- Exploring strengthening of public procurement strategies to specify safe sourcing, and
- Reviewing passenger baggage allowance for regulated plant material to assess whether it should be discontinued.

Christine Reid, Head of Conservation for [the Woodland Trust](#), said:

The Woodland Trust welcomes this strategy. It is an important step in coordinating the UK's efforts to combat tree pests and diseases; we rely on our beloved trees, yet they are facing too many threats.

We need an effective biosecurity strategy, we need to plant more UK-sourced trees, and we need to develop the forestry sector. With the necessary knowledge, skills and capacity, we can ensure a healthy, resilient tree population.

This strategy outlines the key steps required, and has brought

together the sector charged with making this happen.

Sir Harry Studholme, Chair of [the Forestry Commission](#) said:

Publishing this strategy is a critical milestone in our ongoing work to safeguard England's trees.

It provides clear direction on how we can work collaboratively across sectors, to combat tree pests and diseases, to protect our beloved forests and woodlands for not only our current generation but for the future.

Policy paper: Tree health resilience strategy 2018

This strategy sets out plans to reduce the risk of pest and disease threats. It also sets out how we will strengthen the resilience of our trees to withstand threats.

This strategy includes a National Action Plan. The plan sets out what we're already doing and what we and others will need to do to protect our trees and the important services they provide.

In "our goals", we've summarised what we hope to achieve over the next 5 years.

Guidance: Radioactive Waste Management privacy notice

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