

News story: New appointments to the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC)

Enrique Vega, Mark White, Ye-Mei Ruby Chang, Andrea Tarr, Helen Ballantyne and Rachel Bennett have been appointed members of the VPC. Professor Malcolm Bennett has been appointed as Chair.

Their appointments, by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, will commence in January 2018.

The new members will receive £148 per meeting with an additional £76 for preparation. The Chair will receive £185 per meeting with an additional £94 for preparation.

- Enrique Vega is a veterinary surgeon with experience of public health and food safety
- Mark White is a pig consultant
- Yu-Mei Ruby Chang is a chartered statistician
- Andrea Tarr is a pharmacist
- Helen Ballantyne is a dual qualified registered nurse in veterinary and human health
- Rachel Bennett is a qualified veterinary surgeon with experience of clinical pharmacology
- Professor Malcolm Bennett is a veterinary surgeon and has served on the VPC since January 2012

Their appointments adhere to the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies. All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process.

In accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if any declared) to be made public: none of these seven members have declared any political activity during the past five years.

The VPC advises the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) on behalf of the Secretary of State. The VMD is an executive agency of Defra and is responsible for ensuring the safe and effective use of veterinary medicinal products to protect public health, animal health, and the environment.

Press release: Sajid Javid acts to

help businesses affected by unfair 'staircase tax'

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has today (29 December 2017) published [draft legislation](#) to reverse the impact of a 'staircase tax' which has unfairly affected up to a thousand businesses.

A recent Supreme Court judgment saw hundreds of businesses that operate in adjoining units or rooms, but are accessed from a common corridor or staircase, receiving separate rate bills for each unit.

The ruling also resulted in some businesses facing higher rate bills, with some paying more due to the loss of small business rate relief.

The action Sajid Javid is taking today will mean these firms can choose to have their rates recalculated under the old single bill system and any savings due will be backdated.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The 'staircase tax' is an unfair rates hike for businesses. For years these businesses in adjoining units or rooms received one rates bill, but this ruling meant they now faced multiple bills for operating in an office linked by a communal lift or stairs.

I am ending this by giving those businesses affected the option of getting their rates bills recalculated and any savings due backdated.

The publication of draft legislation follows a decision in the Supreme Court (Woolway v Mazars) which brought about a change the practice of the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) in assessing rateable values for businesses.

Following this ruling, businesses who occupied more than one property in a shared building received a separate rates bill for each unit. This was widely known as the 'staircase tax' and meant businesses in adjoining units who had previously received one rates bill, were now being subject to several bills. Some businesses were paying more overall due to the loss of small business rate relief – a discount applied to the bills of certain businesses with a lower rateable value.

This ruling overturned an established and widely understood practice where businesses occupying two adjoining floors or two rooms separated by a wall only received a single bill.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Bill, those businesses who have been directly impacted by the Supreme Court judgement can ask the VOA to recalculate valuations based on previous practice. It can then have its bill

recalculated if it chooses, and backdated. This includes those firms who lost small business rate relief.

The department will now consult with stakeholders and experts, with a view to introducing the Bill shortly. See the [consultation document](#).

Press release: UK aid helps clear lethal landmines in war-torn countries following generosity of British public

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) deminers at work in Angola. Picture: MAG

In response to the unprecedented generosity of the UK public in supporting the most successful Christmas landmine-clearing appeal ever, International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt has today (29 December) announced that Britain will extend its demining work to save lives in emergencies in Angola, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Through the support announced today, the UK will work in Angola to eradicate the scourge of landmines, through both UK aid programmes and the UK Government matching pound for pound public donations to the [Mines Advisory Group's \(MAG\)](#) appeal. Angola was where Princess Diana once walked through a landmine littered field to raise awareness of the devastating impact they have on innocent lives.

At an event this year with HRH Prince Harry, DFID made a £100 million commitment to demining to make 15 million square metres of land safe again and Ms Mordaunt is today announcing the war ravaged countries that will benefit from this support. As part of the UK's ongoing commitment, 15,000 community visits will also educate people about the risks of landmines – a paramount and essential lifeline to safeguard entire communities from being maimed or killed.

The MAG's 'Walk Without Fear' appeal on Radio 4 was the station's most successful ever radio appeal. Money donated by the generous UK public to the demining cause has been matched by the UK government, doubling the total amount raised to allow even more lives to be saved.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Landmines have left a shameful legacy of suffering across the world, and the British public can be proud of their contribution to eradicating this hidden, indiscriminate killer.

These barbaric weapons of war kill innocent people years after a conflict has ended, and have left so many devastated families mourning the loss of loved ones. The thousands that do survive have been left maimed and seriously disabled forever, unable to work, unable to feed their families and suffering from a lifetime of debilitating pain.

Twenty years after Princess Diana's call for action resonated in every corner of the world, Britain is at the forefront in saving thousands of lives and ensuring that future generations will now have the chance to live without fear of being killed by a weapon from the past.

MAG's appeal raised a total of over £200,000, which will be doubled by UK aid to over £400,000. This will clear 120,000m² of land from landmines, allowing people to live without fear in their own communities.

Notes to Editors

- The money raised by MAG in its appeal, and the public donations matched by the UK Government are in addition to the £100 million commitment over three years made by DFID in April 2017. This £100m commitment comprises:
 - £12.6 million in the current financial year as an extension to the pre-existing contract of the Global Mine Action Programme, which is delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid in Burma, Cambodia, South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.
 - £20 million for Afghanistan in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.
 - £15.4 million for the Middle East including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.
 - The remainder will be for demining programmes in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Angola, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- This year alone Global Mine Action Programme has ensured that more than 140,000,000 square meters of land have been released. Mine risk education programmes have reached more than 426,000 people this year, including near 360,000 women and children.
- DFID will be continuing its programming in Asia and Africa including Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Somalia and South Sudan.
- In January 2018, DFID will invite organisations to bid for work in Angola, South Sudan, Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- In Afghanistan the UK has supported demining activities, through the HALO Trust in Herat (Western Afghanistan), Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan (Northern Afghanistan) since 2008, through two five year phases with a total of £20.5 million. This support to the HALO Trust in Afghanistan will end in March 2018. Through UK aid:
 - 193,650 families have benefited from cleared lands in Herat,

Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan

- 2,900 hectares have been unblocked for development purposes (agriculture, grazing, residential and road access)□
- 96% of households surveyed reported increased income as a result of mine clearance
- 43 communities have been cleared of all known mine/UXO hazards
- 380 direct and 660 indirect jobs have created in all target provinces
- Over 39,147,860 square metres of accessible minefields have been cleared in target provinces
- Over 45,609,000 square metres of remaining area of battlefield with unexploded ordnance and ammunition are cleared in target provinces.

ENDS

Press release: Further 9 terror-related offences added to Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme

Changes to the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme mean that people found guilty of crimes such as tipping off terrorists about an investigation, or flouting terror prevention court orders, could see their sentences increased if victims or the public think the punishment is too light.

The plans announced today (29 December 2017) follow an extension in July which added 19 terror offences to the scheme, with Ministers acting to ensure sentences reflect the devastating impact terrorism has on victims and communities.

Justice Minister Dominic Raab said:

We keep counter-terrorism powers under constant review. These changes will strengthen our ability to punish and deter those who tip off individuals involved in terrorism, and reinforce the conditions imposed by the authorities on individuals subject to monitoring, supervision or control.

The scheme gives anyone the power to ask the Attorney General to review a sentence, who can then decide to refer a case to the Court of Appeal for reconsideration.

In 2016, a record 141 criminals had their sentences increased, helping victims and their families get justice. This is a small proportion of the

80,000 Crown Court cases heard each year, where in the clear majority the judiciary get it right, but the ULS scheme is there to allow adjustment of those sentences where an increase is warranted.

The new crimes announced today include instances where a person learns of terrorist activity through their trade, profession or employment, and fails to report this information to the police. For example, an accountant discovering a client may be funding terror. They also include offences related to breaching orders imposed to protect the public from terrorism, for instance someone suspected of involvement in terrorist activity overseas, who returns to the UK, in breach of travel restrictions.

The decision to add 9 further terror offences builds on a manifesto pledge to widen the scheme. Next month will see the first case referred to the Court of Appeal by the Attorney General, made possible through the expansion in July.

Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC said:

The Unduly Lenient Sentencing Scheme added over 400 years of imprisonment to criminal sentences last year.

While in the vast majority of cases sentencing judges get it right, the ULS scheme gives anyone the ability to challenge sentences within the scheme they think are too low and I'm pleased that more offences will now be included.

Notes to editors

- The ULS allows the Attorney General (AG) to review sentences given by the Crown Court in England and Wales.
- The AG has 28 days to consider the sentence and make a decision whether to refer. If the AG decides to refer the case to the Court of Appeal to review the sentence, the court can decide whether the sentence should stay the same, or if it is unreasonably low, can increase it.
- In July, 19 terror offences were added to scheme, including encouraging terrorism and sharing terrorist propaganda.
- The scheme will now be extended to a further nine terror related offences. The new crimes involve failing to disclose information about offences relating to terrorist property, breaching terrorism-related orders, and offences to dangerous articles and making threats. In total, 27 people have been convicted for all of these offences since 2010.
- The changes will come into force on 29 January 2018.

Table of new offences in scope

Offence	Description	Max penalty (yrs)
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Offence	Description	Max penalty (yrs)
Terrorism Act 2000 s19	Failure to disclose information on 'terrorist property'- knowledge of which gained through their trade, profession or employment	5
Terrorism Act 2000 s21A	Failure to disclose information on 'terrorist property'- knowledge of which gained through work in the 'regulated sector' (e.g. financial business)	5
Terrorism Act 2000 s21D	Tipping off a terrorist from information obtained in the regulated sector	2
Terrorism Act 2000 s39	Tipping off any person of a terrorist investigation	5
Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 s54	Failure to comply with notification	5
Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 s23	Failure to comply with a Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure (TPIM)	5
Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 s10	Contravening a Temporary Exclusion Order (TEO) or not complying with restriction after return to the UK	5
Aviation Security Act 1982 s4	Offences related certain dangerous articles	7
Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 s114	Hoaxes involving noxious substances	7

[Speech: Global momentum to end the ivory trade: article by Boris Johnson](#)

2018 must be the year we defeat the ivory traders

There is one question I would never want the children of the future to ask; in fact I'm haunted by the thought that they might. How could we reply if they feel compelled to enquire: "Why did you not do more to save the elephant?"

Humanity is privileged to share the planet with these magnificent throwbacks from the Pleistocene, whose every attribute is a walking metaphor, and to be frank I find it heart-breaking to observe how their numbers have declined.

Four decades ago, the great zoologist Iain Douglas-Hamilton assembled a small squadron of light aircraft and embarked on the first comprehensive survey of

the elephant populations of Africa. In 1979 he found that 1.3 million elephants roamed the savannah and rainforest. Today, we are down to 415,000 African elephants and the pace of slaughter has recently accelerated. At least 110,000 have been wiped out since 2006: in East Africa, half of the elephants are gone; in Tanzania, nearly two thirds have vanished.

If we do nothing, there is a real danger that our great grandchildren will grow up in a world without wild elephants. They will look at yellowing photographs of giant herds, they will watch David Attenborough documentaries on their ipads (or whatever virtual reality wizardry will then be commonplace), they will marvel at how such creatures once walked the earth, and then they will point accusing fingers and ask why their forebears – you and me – somehow neglected to save the elephant from extirpation?

China government ban on domestic sales

So it is fantastic news that decisive action is now being taken. About 70 per cent of the ivory hacked from the carcasses of poached elephants finds its way to China. There, workshops specialise in converting magnificent tusks into ornamental knick-knackery for display in countless homes.

But that will soon change. From 31 December, the Chinese government will ban the domestic sale of ivory, albeit with certain exemptions. The biggest ivory market in the world – in which poachers and dealers enrich themselves – should then be restricted.

Everything will depend on how this measure is enforced – and we must be cautious until we see the full impact. But just the prospect of a reduction in Chinese demand is already having an effect. If you track the volume of online advertising for ivory products, you will find that it declined by almost a third in the first four months of 2017, compared with the same period last year. The price of raw ivory also appears to be falling, reducing the profits to be made from butchering elephants.

Once the Chinese ban comes into effect, I hope these benign trends will gather pace. But this far-sighted decision by China's leaders signifies something even more important, namely the emergence of a global consensus that buying or selling ivory is no longer acceptable anywhere. Saving elephants is not some Western obsession, but a cause that unites humanity.

UK action to tackle the Illegal Wildlife Trade

Britain has done a huge amount to encourage this new consensus. The Duke of Cambridge, whose passion for conservation is well known, met President Xi Jinping of China twice in 2015 and Prince Harry has just been named president of African Parks, a conservation NGO. In the New Year, the Government will act on our plans for a British ban on domestic ivory sales; in October I will co-host with Michael Gove an international conference in London on how to curb the Illegal Wildlife Trade.

And in the besieged strongholds of the African elephant, Britain is helping to beat the poachers. When I visited Kenya in March, I met the UK-funded

Anti-Poaching Team that protects the elephants of Lewa Conservancy.

My aim is to make 2018 the year of UK leadership in defeating the ivory trade: wherever I go as Foreign Secretary and whenever I meet the representatives of a relevant country, I will repeat our message.

I did just that when I saw the Japanese foreign minister, Taro Kono, here in London earlier this month. Japan has a large domestic ivory market and its government could play a key role in stamping out elephant poaching.

I've instructed our diplomats in embassies across the world to have frank conversations with our friends and allies.

The slow death of Africa's elephants is a disaster that proceeds from other disasters. Poaching is but one tentacle of the octopus of corruption, trafficking and gun-running that suffocates states and holds back national economies across Africa and Asia. If China now deprives the ivory poachers of their biggest global market, then the whole edifice of trans-national organised crime will be weakened.

Africa's elephants face many other threats besides poaching. Year after year, their habitat is lost or degraded. They are locked in a struggle for land and water with rising human populations. Yet with determination and goodwill, I have no doubt that we can solve these problems – just as we are acting to curtail the ivory trade – and ensure that our great grandchildren share our planet with elephants.