

# Press release: Military grade underwater cameras working to end illegal fishing for eels in the Fens

Fisheries enforcement staff at the Environment Agency have been working with new underwater sonar technology to assess fish populations, especially where it's hard to use classic methods like netting and electric fishing. The technology is also being put to excellent use elsewhere and giving us eyes underwater as well as above.

Our fisheries enforcement work helps to protect the environment and ensure fisheries income is generated through rod licence sales. All anglers require an Environment Agency rod licence to fish in England and Wales. The Environment Agency also lead on the enforcement of permits for migratory species like eels, smelt and lamprey. Regular auditing of these fisheries is essential to ensure protection of these iconic and in the case of eel – a critically endangered species; but also to ensure that the activity is regulated and sustainable.

Illegal eel fishing is a priority for the Environment Agency who are the lead organisation responsible for the conservation of this now endangered species. The eel stock is in decline, recruitment is at an all-time low, and exploitation of the stock is currently unsustainable. We regulate the fishing industry, which is carried out by only a handful of licensed fishermen. We also protect eel habitat, improve passage allowing ore access for eels further upstream and regulate other activities that might impact on each life stage of the species. While the West of England has issues with elver fishing – the capture of tiny juvenile eels returning from the America's for a global market, in the East the fens provide excellent habitat for mature eels, vital in supporting this European species. Adult "silver" eels will return to the Sargasso Sea as their final life stage to spawn and much of our enforcement work protects this phase.

Our new sonar equipment has allowed us to see, with amazing clarity, where we've never been able to before – under the water.

This makes checking for nets, especially illegal equipment, much easier and makes us more efficient and in some cases 100% effective. A recent audit of a river near Kings Lynn resulted in a record illegal eel net seizure; 16 nets in total capable of significantly impacting an emigrating eel population – hundreds of eels were released. The nets were removed and we worked with Norfolk police to investigate the case.

Using boat mounted sonar equipment we can travel up to 10km per day, checking every inch of channel for illegal and submerged equipment. This is our greatest weapon in halting the illegal exploitation of eels and gives us a chance to completely rid waters of illegal instruments. We are using this technology to regulate other areas of illegal fishing including poaching,

netting and trapping. You can see from the images how easy it is for us to spot illegal equipment, here both ends of an eel “fyke” net can be clearly seen stretching across the river channel. We use boats and specially trained enforcement staff to check traps and remove any illegal ones we find.

Anyone fishing for eels should be permitted, be fishing within the conditions of the licence, and nets must include visible and valid tags, as well as being equipped with otter guards too.

Any suspected illegal fishing activity should be reported to the Environment Agency’s Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Anyone wishing to fish for migratory species including eels should visit [Permission to trap crayfish, eels, elvers, salmon and sea trout](#).

All anglers need a valid Environment Agency rod licence which can be bought using a credit or debit card by calling the Environment Agency’s telesales line on 0344 800 5386. Alternatively, they can be obtained from any Post Office or visit: [Buy a rod fishing licence](#)

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## [Policy paper: Unlocking the River](#)

# Severn: Powick and Knightsford

This document provides information about work being carried out on Environment Agency owned weirs (Powick Weir and Knightsford Bridge Weir) as part of the Unlocking the River Severn partnership project.

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## News story: Top industry group pledges to support veteran entrepreneurs

The Institute of Directors (IoD) became the latest organisation to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant yesterday at their annual conference in London.

The IoD's Covenant pledges also include allowing veterans to access their organisation's expert network of advice and resources for entrepreneurs, joining with the MOD on forging stronger links between business and the military, and encouraging businesses to help the small number of veterans who struggle with mental health issues.

Earl Howe and Stephen Martin sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The signing comes as National Express, the first business to sign the Covenant in 2013, renewed their commitment to the military community at an event on Horse Guards Parade.

The signings demonstrate how the support for the Armed Forces Covenant has grown across the UK since it was first introduced as part of the Armed Forces Act 2011, with over 2,200 organisations having pledged their support.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

## **Institute of Directors**

Defence Minister Earl Howe attended the annual Institute of Directors Open House conference in Pall Mall yesterday to countersign the Armed Forces Covenant with Director General Stephen Martin.

Defence Minister for the House of Lords Earl Howe said:

The Institute of Directors signing the Armed Forces Covenant sends a powerful message to its members and those in the wider economy that they are a Forces-friendly organisation, helping to attract high-quality Service leavers who bring with them a wide range of

skills and experience.

Stephen Martin, Director General of the Institute of Directors, said:

I'm extremely proud to signing the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Institute of Directors, and I look forward to the IoD's continued engagement with the Ministry of Defence. In signing the Covenant, the IoD will help to ensure that the immense contribution the armed forces make to our society and to business does not go unrecognised. Not only do service personnel provide the security and freedom that underpins our lives, but they also have the potential to become great assets to the UK economy, bringing the wide array of skills and experience they have gained to businesses activity the country.

In becoming a signatory to the covenant, we will use the tools at our disposal to highlight the many benefits of employing those coming out of the armed forces. In keeping with our Royal Charter, we will also look to help budding ex-services entrepreneurs to establish the networks, confidence, and skills they need to start and scale their own businesses.

The IOD will open its 2,500 members strong IoD99 networking and social events to ex-service entrepreneurs and champion stronger links between the business community and the Armed Forces, showcasing those that highlight the benefits to employers of taking on ex-Service personnel.

## **National Express**

Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood countersigned National Express' Covenant renewal alongside their Group Chief Executive Dean Finch during a networking event at Horse Guards Parade in central London yesterday. A Covenant branded National Express coach, which will be navigating the London airport routes, was parked on Horse Guards for a photoshoot with the Queen's Guard to mark the occasion.

Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood at the National Express re-signing on Horse Guards Parade.

National Express Group Chief Executive Dean Finch said:

We're very proud to have been the first company to sign the Covenant and I am delighted we are signing an even greater commitment today. Armed Forces personnel and their families do a great service to this country and it is right that companies like ours do what we can to support them.

We employ many ex-services members and current reservists and also want to recognise their significant contribution to our company and

the country. Our extended commitments demonstrate both the success of our first covenant and our commitment to growing this important partnership with the Ministry of Defence. I would like to thank all involved in this great initiative.

National Express will offer guaranteed interviews to service leavers and their families for all National Express roles across Coach and Bus, provide ten days extra leave for staff in the Reserve Forces, and offer free bus travel to families visiting soldiers at the Military Hospital at the QE in Birmingham and to volunteers on Remembrance Sunday.

The company already employs over 40 former forces personnel and reservists in a variety of roles including: drivers, health and safety officers, bus engineers, and customer service advisors from all over the Armed Forces, ranking from Private all the way up to Major.

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## [News story: Novichok nerve agent use in Salisbury: UK government response](#)

On Sunday 4 March Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

### **Latest update**

Prime Minister Theresa May gave a [statement to Parliament on 14 March](#). Russia has provided no explanation as to how this agent came to be used in the UK, and there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his daughter. This represents an unlawful use of force by the Russian State against the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister stated that the UK government will:

- expel 23 Russian diplomats who have been identified as undeclared intelligence officers
- develop proposals for new legislative powers to harden our defences against all forms of Hostile State Activity
- make full use of existing powers to enhance our efforts to monitor and track the intentions of those travelling to the UK who could be engaged in activity that threatens the security of the UK and of our allies

### **Earlier statements**

On 8 March the Home Secretary Amber Rudd gave an [initial statement on the](#)

[investigation](#) into events in Salisbury. This followed Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's [response to an Urgent Question](#) in Parliament on 6 March.

On 12 March [Prime Minister Theresa May gave a statement](#) in Parliament. Either this was a direct act by the Russian State against our country, or the Russian government lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others. The [Foreign Secretary spoke to the BBC](#) and reiterated the Prime Minister's message.

**Find out more about Russian state aggression in the past few years**

[Pattern of Russian state aggression](#)

## **International response**

The Prime Minister spoke with world leaders about the ongoing investigation. Each expressed their solidarity with the UK:

The Foreign Secretary also [called for a united response](#) with our international counterparts.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office also raised this issue in international forums:

## **Advice and guidance**