

Press release: Landmark Agriculture Bill to deliver a Green Brexit

Legislation to deliver a cleaner and healthier environment for future generations after nearly half a century under EU rules is being introduced into Parliament today (12 September).

The Agriculture Bill sets out how farmers and land managers will in future be paid for “public goods”, such as better air and water quality, improved soil health, higher animal welfare standards, public access to the countryside and measures to reduce flooding.

This will replace the current subsidy system of Direct Payments, which is ineffective and pays farmers based on the total amount of land farmed. These payments are skewed towards the largest landowners and are not linked to any specific public benefits. The top 10% of recipients currently receive almost 50% of total payments, while the bottom 20% receive just 2%.

In its place, a new Environmental Land Management system will start from next year. The government will work together with farmers to design, develop and trial the new approach. Under the new system, farmers and land managers who provide the greatest environmental benefits will secure the largest rewards, laying the foundations for a Green Brexit.

The Bill will also be underpinned by measures to increase productivity and invest in (R&D).

For example, there will be funding available for farmers to come together to develop and get the research projects that they want and need, whether that be on soil health or sustainable livestock farming. This will lead to practical gains for farmers that help them become more profitable and reduce their environmental footprint.

The government will also be able to make payments during the seven year transition period for farmers to invest in new technologies and methods that boost productivity.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The introduction of the Agriculture Bill is an historic moment as we leave the EU and move towards a brighter future for farming.

After nearly 50 years of being tied to burdensome and outdated EU rules, we have an opportunity to deliver a Green Brexit.

This Bill will allow us to reward farmers who protect our environment, leaving the countryside in a cleaner, greener and healthier state for future generations.

Critically, we will also provide the smooth and gradual transition that farmers and land managers need to plan ahead.

Farmers will be supported over a seven year transition period as we leave the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

For 2019, Direct Payments will be made on the same basis as now, subject to simplifications where possible. Direct Payments for 2020 will also be made in much the same way as now. Simplifications will be made as soon as possible, subject to the terms of the overall Brexit implementation period. There will then be an agricultural transition period in England between 2021 and 2027 as payments are gradually phased out.

During consultation, there was a widespread support for applying reductions to Direct Payments more widely. All farmers will therefore see some reduction to their payments from the start of the transition, although those who receive the highest payments will see bigger reductions initially. This will free up funds to invest in public goods.

To help new entrants get into the sector and give farmers flexibility to plan for the future, Direct Payments during the agricultural transition period up until 2027 will be "delinked" from the requirement to farm the land.

These payments, which may be calculated according to money received in previous years, can be used by farmers to invest in their business, diversify their activities or else retire from farming and give way for new people to enter.

The Bill also sets out how the government will strengthen transparency in the supply chain to help farmers get a better deal in the marketplace.

By collecting data from across the supply chain, the government will help food producers strengthen their negotiating position at the farm gate and seek a fairer return.

The introduction of the Agriculture Bill now means that all the necessary measures will be in place for the start of the agricultural transition in 2021, delivering a smooth transition to the new domestic policy.

Press release: Peatland work kick-starts multi-million pound project

Weardale residents are reaping the benefits of a project which has kick-started a £2.1million natural flood management (NFM) project.

A programme of peatland restoration over last winter on a Weardale hillside

will help reduce flooding further down the dale, as well as encouraging carbon capture and improving the land for nature.

And a film of the work has launched a new series of Environment Agency Youtube videos which will capture the pioneering Weardale project throughout.

There is also an introductory video about the whole project and what it aims to achieve.

[Introduction to Weardale Natural Flood Management project](#)

Extensive areas restored

The North Pennines AONB Partnership worked with East Allenheads Estate to restore extensive areas of bare peat on Wolfcleugh Common, above Rookhope.

It's the first step for the Weardale Natural Flood Management pilot project which will see the Environment Agency and its partners investigate the potential for a much bigger initiative.

The ambition is to deliver natural features across 100km² area to reduce the risk of flooding to 141 properties and create a haven for wildlife to thrive.

The project team is currently carrying out an assessment of NFM techniques that might help reduce flood risk in Weardale and takes in towns and villages including Stanhope, Westgate, Eastgate and Wolsingham.

The Environment Agency is working on the project with Natural England, Forestry Commission, Durham County Council, the North Pennines AONB Partnership and the Wear Catchment Partnership, established under Defra's Catchment Based Approach.

The project team, supported by Wear Rivers Trust, is now working with local farmers and landowners to discuss voluntary involvement in the scheme for future features to be delivered on site at the end of this year.

The peatland restoration work at Rookhope includes installing coir rolls and stone dams to slow down the flow of surface water over bare peat. Steep sided erosion gullies have been reshaped to encourage revegetation, and heather and mosses have been harvested and spread over the bare peat. This helps protect it from further damage from wind, rain, frost and ice and also creates an ideal environment for seeds to germinate.

A series of videos of the Weardale work will be uploaded to Youtube so the community can understand the project and stay updated with progress.

[Peatland restoration](#)

Fantastic to see work completed

Alistair Lockett, Field Officer at the North Pennines AONB Partnership, said:

We have been working with Natural England and East Allenheads Estate for the past three years and it is fantastic to see the work completed. It will make a big difference to the valley, by improving carbon storage and mitigating flooding downstream. We're also pleased that we have been able to support local contractors within the North Pennines.

Kirsty Hardy, the Environment Agency's Project Manager for Weardale NFM scheme, added:

The AONB Partnership's peatland restoration work kick starts what is a pioneering project to explore and deliver natural flood management features to reduce flood risk in Weardale, as well as enrich the landscape and habitat of what is a beautiful area of countryside.

Together with our partners we hosted a series of events in the Spring for the community to come along and find out more about the project. We're now speaking with local farmers and landowners to identify any suitable locations for potential delivery of natural flood management features early next year.

This is a really exciting opportunity to increase our understanding of the impact natural flood management can have on reducing the risk of flooding. A series of videos about the project from start to finish will help people understand the process and stay up to date with progress.

In March 2017 the Environment Agency announced £15million of funding had been made available for NFM schemes nationally. Initial work to engage with farmers and communities and model the flood risk benefits that can be achieved will be complete by the end of the year. If this is successful then the project will deliver a programme of work from early 2019 for a two-year period.

Press release: Environment Agency bags award at Inland Waterways Association's Festival of Water

A prestigious 55-year-old trophy has been presented to Environment Agency staff as thanks for their hard work in helping boaters make the most of Anglian waterways this summer.

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) made the gesture at their Festival of Water at St Neots as the Environment Agency welcomed hundreds of boats and thousands of visitors to the River Great Ouse over the bank holiday weekend.

Since 1963, the Best Working Boat award has been presented to working vessels, and this year it went to two EA boats – the Ouse II Know and Ouseabout.

Irven Forbes, the Environment Agency's Anglian waterways manager, said:

We're delighted with this recognition of our teams' hard work to maintain our waterways for people and wildlife.

This summer, the hot, dry weather presented some challenges like weed growth, fallen trees and lower levels on some of our navigations, so we're extremely pleased to have made a contribution to a very successful festival.

We've had so many great comments from visitors about the Great Ouse and the River Nene – it's given us a real boost to help people enjoy them while getting closer to nature.

The IWA award recognises the efforts of the team over many months to make sure boaters had smooth sailing on the region's waterways.

Just days before the event, for example, it was all hands on deck to make sure a broken lock didn't hamper visitors reaching the festivities.

Hemingford Lock on the River Great Ouse suffered a mechanical failure – the drive shaft had separated, meaning the lock couldn't be operated even by hand. Getting the lock up and running again as soon as possible became a priority, and the team dropped everything to repair it in under 48 hours.

And over the previous months, EA teams really pushed the boat out to make sure Anglian waterways were in tip-top condition for both local boaters and visitors to enjoy.

This included refurbishing 8 of the region's busiest locks used by around 7,000 boaters every year, revamping 10 landings, clearing a number of large fallen trees, de-shoaling on the rivers Great Ouse and Nene, and spending an extra £60k on de-silting the tidal Great Ouse at Denver, Salters Lode and the Old Bedford on top of the regular annual de-silting and weed-clearance.

To make it easier for boats to navigate, teams also made half a dozen passes to clear duckweed from the Old West channel – work that must be done carefully in hot summer conditions to avoid having a negative impact on the environment and wildlife.

The work is part of the Environment Agency's £2.5m investment in the 353 miles of navigable Anglian waterways, protecting them for the future as an important part of the nation's rich heritage and beauty, and recognising all

they contribute to our environment, health and wellbeing and economy.

The festival also saw the IWA, Lincolnshire County Council and the Environment Agency launch a new initiative – the Boston to Peterborough Wetland Corridor, which will see all three organisations working in partnership to progress a wetland corridor from the Black Sluice at Boston to the River Nene near Peterborough.

The proposal would bring a huge boost to Anglian waterways with new recreational access for boaters, cyclists, fishermen and walkers, a significant section of wetland habitat for flora and fauna, and economic opportunities for local communities – especially in connection with the proposed Bedford to Milton Keynes waterway park, a new 16 mile link from the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes to the River Great Ouse in Bedford.

You can find more information on Anglian Waterways [here](#).

Press release: Community order for operating an illegal waste site in Walsall

In the case brought by the Environment Agency, Stephen Wayne Morgan (aged 52) had pleaded guilty to one offence of operating a waste storage and treatment facility without an environmental permit, at an earlier hearing. He was sentenced to a 2 year community order with a requirement to complete 250 hours of unpaid work, and ordered to pay £17,000 in prosecution costs, along with a £60 victim surcharge. Morgan must also pay £54,415.33 under a confiscation order depriving him of the criminal benefit from the illegal operation.

The case relates to an offence between 6 April 2015 and 29 August 2015 committed on Middlemore Lane, Aldridge, Walsall, where Morgan had operated under the trading name Aldridge Aggregates & Recycling. Over the period of offending, Morgan allowed the deposit of waste on site, that was later shredded and crushed, before being sold as processed products. The site contained thousands of tonnes of waste including construction and demolition waste, wood waste, and waste soils.

The activities at the site posed a nuisance local residents and a local business. On one occasion (15 June 2015), waste on the site was deliberately burned, subjecting employees of a nearby business to excessive amounts of smoke and forcing them to shut the doors and windows of their business premises.

Complaints were made by local residents, who were subjected to problems of

excessive dust blowing towards their homes and settling, and excessive noise from machinery crushing and shredding waste on the site. One resident described the noise as “incredibly loud” and said it could be heard every day from Monday to Friday over a period of months.

Mr Morgan was provided with advice and guidance from the Environment Agency but failed to obtain planning permission or an environmental permit to legitimise the operation. He continued to receive and process waste on the site despite being advised that the activities were illegal, that the activities were having an effect on the local community, and that enforcement action could follow. Waste operations continued even after the Environment Agency served a legal notice on Mr Morgan on 1 July 2015 requiring removal of the waste.

Morgan was ultimately evicted from the premises by the site landlords on 29 August 2015. Thousands of tonnes of waste had to be removed from the site in the ensuing clean-up.

In mitigation, Mr Morgan’s barrister stated that he had no relevant previous convictions and had pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity. He stated that Mr Morgan had expressed remorse for his offending and had made some attempt to reduce the quantities of waste from the site. He further stated that Mr Morgan was suffering with a number of health conditions.

Speaking after the case, an Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

The operation of illegal waste sites undermine legitimate businesses along with the investment and economic growth that go with it.

This case demonstrates that we will act upon information given to us regarding suspected illegal or nuisance waste activity and will not hesitate to prosecute when circumstances warrant it.

If you see pollution or a waste crime incident, report it on our incident hotline on 0800 807060.

Press release: Extended jail sentence handed to waste criminal

John Bruce (aged 46) is already serving 26 months imprisonment for dumping, burying and burning hazardous waste at Ridgeway Park Farm, Throckmorton Airfield, Worcestershire.

On Tuesday 4 September, Bruce pleaded guilty to a charge in relation to operating a regulated facility at Ridgeway Park Farm without an Environmental Permit. Worcester Crown Court handed Bruce a 22 week custodial sentence to run concurrently to his existing 26 month sentence.

The case, brought by the Environment Agency, concerned illegal waste operations at Ridgeway Park Farm in 2016. Bruce had accepted over 60 tonnes of redundant kitchen and bathroom materials onto his site. When Environment Agency officers visited the farm, they saw that in addition to these materials, flat pack furniture and packaging materials were being burnt on site.

In mitigation, the Judge noted that Bruce had pleaded guilty and therefore avoided the need for a full trial.

An Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

Mr Bruce has shown a blatant disregard for the environment and local community by operating a large scale illegal waste site at his farm. His actions undermine legitimate business also the investment and economic growth that go with it.

The Environment Agency will use all its enforcement powers, where we believe environmental offences have been committed. In cases where we believe monies have been unlawfully gained, we will investigate under the proceeds of crime act and confiscate assets.

The Environment Agency urge people to report waste crime on our Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.