

Press release: Climate change means more frequent flooding, warns Environment Agency

Intense bouts of flooding are set to become more frequent, the Environment Agency has warned today (Friday 16 February).

The warning follows a pattern of severe flooding over the past 10 years linked to an increase in extreme weather events as the country's climate changes. Met Office records show that since 1910 there have been 17 record breaking rainfall months or seasons – with 9 of them since 2000. As intense storms are becoming more frequent, sea levels are also rising because of climate change.

The Environment Agency has today launched its [Flood Action Campaign](#), targeting younger people through social media and online advertising to encourage them to check their flood risk at GOV.UK, sign up for free warnings and be prepared to take action when flooding hits. Research shows that 18 to 34 year olds are least likely to perceive flood risk to their area, know how to protect their homes or where to go for information. They are also at highest risk of fatality as they are less likely to perceive their personal risk.

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said:

Climate change is likely to mean more frequent and intense flooding. Floods destroy – lives, livelihoods, and property.

Our flood defences reduce the risk of flooding, and our flood warnings help keep communities safe when it threatens. But we can never entirely eliminate the risk of flooding. Checking your flood risk is the first step to protecting yourself, your loved ones and your home.

In summer 2012, the lengthy period of drought the country had experienced came to an abrupt end when prolonged and intense rainfall increased the risk of flooding from rivers and surface water for long periods. Almost 8,000 homes and businesses were flooded across the country, particularly in the south west.

The winter of 2013 to 2014 started with a coastal surge and record sea levels on the north and east coasts. This was followed by 12 storms in succession and became the wettest winter for 250 years – 11,000 homes were flooded.

Winter 2015 to 2016 brought widespread flooding to 17,000 properties across the north of England, with named storms Desmond, Eva and Frank causing December 2015 to be the wettest month ever recorded.

The threat of flooding is real and increasing – as is also demonstrated by its listing as one of the [nation's major threats](#).

Last year, the Met Office published new innovative research which found that for England and Wales there is a 1 in 3 chance of a new monthly rainfall record in at least one region each winter.

By their very nature extreme events are rare and a novel research method was needed to quantify the risk of extreme rainfall within the current climate.

Professor Adam Scaife, who leads this area of research at the Met Office, said:

“The Met Office supercomputer was used to simulate thousands of possible winters, some of them much more extreme than we’ve yet witnessed. This gave many more extreme events than have happened in the real world, helping us work out how severe things could get.”

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[Press release: New measures to help farmers and growers in the food supply](#)

chain

A 'collaboration fund' of up to £10 million has been announced today (16 February) as part of a series of measures to help farmers and small producers compete and thrive alongside larger businesses in the food supply chain.

The fund will be designed in consultation with the farming industry and will work by bringing together those interested in co-operation. These groups will be supported by the funding to formally establish, develop or expand, so that farmers and growers can take advantage of new market opportunities to help their businesses thrive. Collaboration between farmers can bring substantial economic benefits, enabling farmers to benefit from economies of scale, share knowledge and jointly market their produce.

The move was announced today in the [Government response](#) to the consultation on the remit of the [Groceries Code Adjudicator](#), along with a range of other measures which will come into force to help protect the rights of farmers and small producers, including:

- Introducing compulsory milk contracts between producers and purchasers to help protect dairy farmers by setting out clear terms, including the price for the delivery of milk, the timing of deliveries, the duration of the contract, details of payment procedures, and arrangements for collecting and delivering raw milk
- A requirement that slaughterhouses use a standard grid for the classification of sheep carcasses to help ensure farmers are paid per carcass in a more transparent manner, providing more certainty for farmers in the price they will get for their animals
- A commitment to work with industry to explore improving transparency and access to prices along the supply chain, to help farmers and small producers see if they are getting a fair deal for their produce
- An assessment from the Competition and Markets Authority into whether more grocery retailers could come under the remit of the GCA
- Tackling late payments by highlighting to farmers and small producers the role of the [Small Business Commissioner](#)

Announcing the measures Farming Minister George Eustice said:

This package of measures is designed to improve transparency and integrity within the food supply chain and to support collaborative business models where producers can come together to strengthen their position or work jointly on specific areas of work.

Too often in the past, farmers have ended up being price takers and there have been too many instances where a lack of transparency in prices and charges by some processors has undermined the market. If we want a successful farming industry in the future then it is essential that we have properly functioning markets and that farmers receive a fair share of the value of the food they produce.

Business Minister Andrew Griffiths said:

This Government's Industrial Strategy is building a Britain in which suppliers of all sizes can get a fair deal. The Groceries Code Adjudicator has already made a significant impact, with suppliers reporting retailers' improved compliance with the Code.

Today's announcement will build on this good work, protecting suppliers and ensuring their rights are enforced when it comes to late payments.

The measures will be designed with the farming industry and apply to farmers and smaller producers in England and are expected to be brought in later this year. The collaboration fund will open for applications later this year.

Background:

1. The Groceries Code Adjudicator is the independent regulator ensuring that the UK's largest grocery retailers treat their direct suppliers lawfully and fairly
2. Small Business Commissioner was launched in December 2017 to support small businesses in resolving payment disputes and tackle unfair payment practices. The Commissioner handles complaints between small business suppliers (with fewer than 50 staff) and their larger customers
3. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy introduced a regulatory amendment on 5 February clarifying business representatives' right to legally challenge unfair payment behaviour, such as late payment, on behalf of their members.

Detailed guide: Owning a watercourse

Find out if you own a watercourse

You normally own a stretch of watercourse:

- that runs on or under your land
- on the boundary of your land, up to its centre

The deeds for your property or land will tell you if this is not the case. Check your deeds if you're not clear about ownership.

A watercourse can be a:

- river
- brook

- beck
- ditch
- stream
- leat
- goyle
- rhyne
- culvert

A culvert is an underground structure that a watercourse can flow through.

Owners: your responsibilities

You have responsibilities for the stretch of watercourse you own.

Report an incident

Call the Environment Agency [Incident hotline](#) to report:

- flooding
- blockages which could cause flooding to main rivers
- pollution
- unusual changes in the flow of water
- collapsed or badly damaged banks

Let water flow naturally

You must let water flow naturally.

You should leave fallen trees and branches unless they could cause flooding to other landowners' property. They can help prevent flooding by varying the shape and the flow of the channel. Ask your [risk management authority](#) for advice.

You should remove blockages that could cause flooding. If a blockage on your stretch of watercourse reduces the flow or causes flooding to other landowners' property, you may have to pay damages.

You should:

- cut back trees and shrubs only if they could cause flooding – they can help stop the banks eroding
- keep any trash screen, weir, mill gate or other structure clear

Don't go inside a culvert. You could get trapped or poisoned by gases. If it needs clearing or repairing contact [your risk management authority](#) for advice.

Prevent pollution

You must not pollute the water. Don't throw waste water, chemicals or anything else which could cause pollution on the banks or in the water.

You must [apply to use herbicides within one metre from the top of the bank of](#)

[the watercourse](#).

Find out how to prevent rainwater carrying topsoil into the watercourse and polluting it in the [Think Soils publication](#).

You should:

- remove litter from the banks
- remove animal carcasses – contact your [local council](#) if you need advice
- not put garden waste, including grass cuttings, on the banks or into the water

Protect wildlife

You must:

- [not disturb certain species or their habitats](#), including the bed and banks
- [not disturb birds and their nests](#)
- not disturb the spawning or eggs of salmon, trout or other fish
- [prevent invasive species](#) such as japanese knotweed from spreading into the wild or onto neighbours' land

Get advice about owning a watercourse

For advice about what you must do if you own a stretch of watercourse, contact your risk management authority.

If it's about:

- a [main river](#), your risk management authority is the [Environment Agency](#)
- any other watercourse, your risk management authority is your [lead local flood authority](#) (either unitary authorities or county councils) or the [internal drainage board](#)

These organisations control work carried out in and around watercourses. They can help you understand what you can and can't do.

Manage flood risk: rules and responsibilities

You have the right to protect your property from flooding and erosion, but you must:

- [get permissions to build anything in or around the watercourse](#)
- not build anything which could divert water and increase flood risk to other people's property, or you may have to pay damages

Flood defences on your land

Something on your land, such as a wall, may be important to prevent flooding and be listed as a [flood defence asset](#).

You must [ask permission](#) before you:

- change, remove or build any flood defence on your land
- do any work within 8 metres of a flood defence, or within 16 metres of a tidal flood defence

On a [main river](#), the authority is the [Environment Agency](#).

On any other watercourse, the authority will be either your [lead local flood authority](#) or the [internal drainage board](#).

You may be responsible for maintaining and repairing a flood defence on your land. Check with the authority.

When an authority stops maintaining a flood defence on your land

On a main river, find out [what to do if the Environment Agency stops maintaining a flood defence](#).

On any other watercourse, contact your [lead local flood authority](#) or [internal drainage board](#).

Check your flood risk

You can:

- [check your immediate and long-term flood risk](#)
- [sign up to get flood warnings by phone or text](#) if your property is at risk of flooding

Get permission to do work in or around a watercourse

You must find out which permissions and licences you need to maintain, repair, build or remove anything in or around a watercourse. This includes:

- creating or changing a mooring, mill, fence, dam, weir, bridge or culvert
- changing the banks
- removing material from the bed

You're responsible for getting the permissions and licences you need. You may get a fine or go to prison if you don't do this.

Main rivers

Find out if you need to apply for an [environmental permit](#) from the

Environment Agency.

On the River Thames you must also [apply for a River Thames accommodation licence](#).

Other watercourses

If your work is in or around any other watercourse, find out if you need permissions and licences from your [lead local flood authority](#) or [internal drainage board](#).

If the tide affects your watercourse

Find out if you need a [marine licence](#) from the Marine Management Organisation.

Culverts

The risk management authorities are unlikely to give you permission to build a culvert – an underground structure that a watercourse can flow through. Culverts can increase flood risk and damage the environment.

Planning permission

Contact your [local planning authority](#) to check whether you need planning permission.

If you need to access other people's land

You must contact other owners and get their permission before you start work.

Removing water, or building or altering a dam or weir

You may need to [apply for an abstraction or impoundment licence](#) if you want to:

- remove water, temporarily or permanently
- build something to restrict or impound water
- alter, rebuild or remove a dam or weir

On a main river, you may need to [apply for an environmental permit](#).

On any other watercourse, you may need a Land Drainage Act consent from one of the following:

- your [lead local flood authority](#)
- the [internal drainage board](#)

[To build a hydropower scheme, find out which licences and permissions you need.](#)

Work affecting protected areas and species

You must not harm protected species or their habitats. Read guidance on [which species are protected and what you must do if your work may affect them](#).

[Check if you need permission from Natural England](#) for work on or near a protected site.

You can check if your site is [on or near a protected site](#), such as a:

- Special Area of Conservation
- Special Protection Area
- site of special scientific interest

If you apply for an environmental permit because you're on a main river, the Environment Agency will contact Natural England for you.

If you make any changes to the watercourse you must make sure that [fish](#) and [eels](#) can pass freely.

Deal with waste

If you're going to treat or dispose of waste from your work, find out if you need to:

- get an [environmental permit](#)
- register a [waste exemption](#)

Registering an exemption means you don't need an environmental permit for your activities with waste.

Discharging water or effluent

You must [apply for a water discharge activity permit](#) to discharge contaminated water including trade or sewage effluent into:

- any watercourse
- some lakes and ponds
- canals
- reservoirs

To discharge to groundwater you must [apply for a groundwater activity permit](#).

East Anglia: drainage charges

If you live in the [pre-2014 Environment Agency Anglian region](#), you'll need to pay [land drainage charges](#).

Fishing and boating

You can usually fish in the stretch of water that you own. You need to check your deeds to find out if fishing rights have been sold or leased.

You must [buy a rod licence](#) to fish, including in the stretch of watercourse that you own.

You'll need to [register your boat](#) if you want to keep it or use it on any waterway or canal.

Government response: Update on disposal of dredged material at Sprey Point, Devon

The MMO granted a marine licence to Exmouth Marina in August 2017 for maintenance dredging of Exmouth Marina and disposal of materials at the Sprey Point disposal site. The dredging is due to take place in February 2018.

Information about the marine activities and licence documents are available online via the [MMO's public register](#) (case reference MLA/2016/00372). The MMO is in the process of updating this with additional information requested by local residents.

Consultation on licence application

A public consultation on the application was held in November 2016. As part of this process views were also sought from the local planning and harbour authority which covers the marina, and the MMO's primary advisors including Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Crown Estate and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. Trinity House were also consulted on navigational issues.

We resolved issues raised as part of the consultation process.

The [public consultation process](#) for marine licence applications is explained in further detail on the MMO's blog.

Managing adverse impact on the marine area

The MMO is aware of the local concern about the potential impact on the marine environment after a pollution incident occurred following previous disposal activity in 2012, although there is no evidence which directly links the two events. Following full consideration of all information, including the responses from our primary and scientific advisors, we have applied additional licence conditions, in particular regarding tide working and seasonality to mitigate the risk of any material being washed ashore and impacting on bathing water quality.

Potential contamination arising as a result of the disposal activity was also addressed as part of the application process. The assessment, which was carried out in line with the OSPAR Guidelines, has shown that the material is suitable for disposal at sea.

The MMO's coastal office will monitor and inspect the activity as appropriate to ensure that the licence conditions are adhered to and will work with other relevant agencies to look at any further concerns.

Disposal sites

It is up to applicants to nominate the disposal site as part of their marine licence application. The MMO then makes a decision based on the suitability of the material.

Where a marine licensable process involves any waste management activity then the provisions of the Waste Hierarchy of the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) (Directive 2008/98/EC) directive have to be considered. Applicants are required to submit evidence that they have considered alternatives to disposal under all aspects of the Waste Hierarchy (Reduce, Re-use, Recycle, Recovery, and Disposal). However the MMO accepts that in some cases disposal at sea is appropriate.