

News story: Environment Minister visits North America to turn tide on marine plastic

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has joined forces with Canada and the USA in the fight against marine plastic.

During a visit to Washington D.C. and Ottawa this week, the Minister met her international counterparts to discuss the UK's priorities for the marine environment ahead of the G7 Environment meetings to be held later this year.

Like the UK, Canada has already banned microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics, and the Minister met the country's Environment and Climate Change Minister, Catherine McKenna, and Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, to look at how the two countries can unite in further tackling the threats facing our oceans.

Through its presidency of the G7, which includes a focus on climate change, oceans and clean energy, Canada will be pushing member states to take action to deal with plastic pollution, ocean acidification, and develop the blue economy.

Following her visit, the Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

There is no greater asset than our blue planet, and it is only by working together we can address the multitude of threats facing our marine life.

In the UK we have already banned microbeads and cracked down on plastic bags, and in 25 years' time we will have eliminated all avoidable plastic waste. I look forward to working with my international counterparts to do all we can to protect our oceans for future generations.

Minister McKenna and Minister Coffey also discussed the crucial role industry can play in turning the tide on plastic. And with businesses across the UK pledging to ban straws, cut plastic packaging and roll out water refills, the Minister met Mars and Coca Cola to see first-hand how big producers in the USA are tackling waste.

While in Washington D.C. the Minister also met Judy Garber, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the American Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, who was supportive of moving forward work on oceans – especially on improved data and marine mapping.

Minister Coffey also used a meeting with stakeholders from Pew Environmental Trust and the High Seas Alliance as an opportunity to discuss improving

biodiversity in the marine environment.

Consultation outcome: BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker review

Updated: Government response published.

The quarterly BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker provides a valuable source of evidence for the department in its development of energy policy. It originated in DECC in 2012, and to date there have been 24 waves of data collection.

However with the creation of BEIS, the department's priorities are now broader and include other policy areas where data on public attitudes would benefit policy formation, so we are considering whether to extend the survey to cover this wider range.

The review covers:

- the survey topic areas
- the frequency of the survey
- the sample size
- its outputs

To inform this review we would like to understand how the statistics are currently used and their value to users, as well as the impact of any proposed changes.

Press release: Holmwood drilling site consultation extended and new date for drop-in event

Updated: New date for drop-in event in Holmwood.

The Environment Agency invites residents living near the Holmwood oil and gas exploratory site in Dorking, Surrey, to a re-scheduled 'drop-in' event as part of its consultation on a permit application.

The public information event (cancelled last week due to safety concerns caused by the bad weather) will take place between 2.00pm and 7.30pm, Thursday 15 March 2018 at:

Dorking Halls (Martineau Hall)

Reigate Road

Dorking

RH4 1SG

Visitors will be able to discuss the application and the process being followed to determine it, and talk to Environment Agency representatives about how they regulate oil and gas activities.

The consultation period has also been extended by 2 weeks with a new closing date of 29 March 2018 (formerly 15 March). Consultation is on the application by Europa Oil & Gas Limited for a bespoke environmental permit, which is currently being considered by the Environment Agency.

Further information on the applications, a copy of our draft decision document and details of how to comment can be found [online](#).

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

We were disappointed to have to postpone the event last week, due to bad weather. Our aim is to give everyone a chance to understand the proposed activity and to be able to attend, but without putting themselves at risk through travelling in hazardous conditions. This is an opportunity for local people to find out more about the operations at Holmwood and how we regulate these activities.

An environmental permit sets out stringent conditions that a site must adhere to. We will not issue an environmental permit for a site if we consider that activities taking place will cause significant pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

Although we are minded to approve the applications for the bespoke and standard rules permit, we are still in the determination process and a final decision has not yet been made. We want to hear from the public and understand people's views on the application. Everybody has the chance to see what the permits may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

Consultation outcome: Bovine TB: introducing licensed badger controls in the Low Risk Area of England

Updated: This revised consultation response document has been updated to reflect additional feedback from the Animal Welfare Group (AWG). The AWG felt that our description of their consultation response did not fully reflect their point so this has been amended accordingly. (Paragraph 2.9 updated).

We want to know what you think about our proposal to update the TB strategy to allow licensed badger control in the Low Risk Area of England. It would apply on the rare occasion that bovine TB is present in badgers and is linked with infection in cattle herds. These badger control measures would help stop the disease spreading further.

The proposal is part of the government's [TB Strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis \(TB\) in England](#).

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.”