

Environment Agency continues crucial work to protect fisheries amidst summer like no other

Environment Agency officers up and down the country were on high alert to manage the impacts of low water levels in rivers and fisheries, particularly low flowing rivers, and respond to reports of fish in distress as quickly as possible.

Action included deploying or loaning aeration equipment as well as using hydrogen peroxide to restore dissolved oxygen levels, providing expert advice to angling clubs and anglers and, as a last resort, relocating fish through fish rescues.

Teams working in the Kent, Surrey and London region responded to over 60 fish incidents and fish rescues, preventing large scale fish loss and damage to fragile river fish populations, while ensuring these incidents did not become larger, more serious events.

Heidi Stone, Environment Agency Fisheries Partnerships Manager said:

This summer's unprecedented dry weather saw our officers carrying out hugely important work to protect our fish populations, environment and surrounding wildlife, while also continuing to clamp down on illegal fishing through our annual enforcement campaign.

Anglers are our valuable eyes and ears and I want to thank all those reporting incidents so we are able to respond as quickly as possible and ensure angling continues to be a safe and enjoyable hobby for everyone".

The months of July and August also saw the Environment Agency continue its annual enforcement campaign, Operation Lungfish, which clamps down on illegal fishing by ensuring all anglers have a fishing licence.

Operation Lungfish plays a vital part of the Environment Agency's year-round efforts to keep river banks safe from crime and antisocial behaviour, and tackle the problems illegal fishing can bring including risks to vulnerable fish stocks such as salmon and eel.

Targeting poachers and those fishing without a licence remains a high priority and anglers caught and prosecuted for not having a fishing licence can face a day in court and a significant fine. The six week long campaign saw Environment Agency enforcement officers supported by Voluntary Bailiffs

from the Angling Trust and local police officers to conduct patrols on rivers, lakes and ponds, with 5,300 licences checked and over 200 people reported for fishing illegally.

Nino Brancato, the Angling Trust's National Enforcement Support Manager, said:

Protecting fish and fisheries from poachers and fish thieves and increasing rod licence compliance is of great importance to all anglers. The Voluntary Bailiff Service is an important partnership between the Angling Trust and Environment Agency, empowering anglers to support the police and the Environment Agency in fighting back against fisheries crime and protecting fish and fisheries especially during Operation Lungfish. The VBS initiative continues to be enormously successful, driving forward positive change.

Operation Lungfish activity included Fisheries Enforcement Officers in the North East targeting illegal angling taking place overnight at vulnerable locations such as weir and bridge pools. They combined patrols with other enforcement activities, including fish dealer checks to ensure no fish caught as a result of illegal activity were being offered for sale, and the seizure of illegal traps.

Warm weather incident responses and Operation Lungfish are vital to support fisheries, angling clubs and anglers and are funded purely by fishing licence income. Get a fishing licence on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) or go digital and help us invest more into fishing and improving the environment.

[Maintenance Loan payments reach £2.1bn as new academic year gets underway](#)

News story

As the 2022/23 academic year gets underway, SLC has been making Maintenance Loan payments to students across the country.



Monday (26th September) was its biggest payment day of this academic year, with £797m of funding paid into the bank accounts of 372k students. This brings the total paid out so far this term to £2.1bn.

SLC is able to release payments to students once they have enrolled or registered with their university or college, and we have received this confirmation. Students can quickly and easily check the status of their payment via their online account.

If a student has applied for student finance late, they may not get their full entitlement straight away, as it can take six to eight weeks to process an application. In these cases, once eligibility is confirmed, the minimum Maintenance Loan is paid first, followed by a top-up payment if the student is entitled to more funding. If more information is needed, SLC will get in touch. More information can be found here – [Find out more about applying late online.](#)

To provide support to students who have questions about their payment, SLC has made a 'common questions' area available within their online accounts and they can also access our [online guide to payment](#). Students can keep up with all the latest student finance information by following Student Finance England on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

*Please note these are provisional figures. Full year figures are published in SLC's Student Support for Higher Education statistical release, which will be published on 24 November.

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[Avian influenza prevention zone declared in Norfolk, Suffolk and parts](#)

of Essex

Following a number of detections of avian influenza in both poultry and wild birds across Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex, the United Kingdom's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer has declared an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) across the region to mitigate the risk of further outbreaks of disease occurring.

This means that from midday on Tuesday 27 September it will be a legal requirement for all bird keepers in Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex to follow strict biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks, of whatever type or size. Bird keepers are advised to consult the [interactive map](#) to check if they are impacted and should then read the [AIPZ declaration](#) which sets out the requirements in a regional AIPZ.

All bird keepers, including hobby and backyard poultry keepers and anyone who keeps chickens, ducks and geese as pets must take [steps](#) to limit the risk of the disease spreading to their animals.

Additionally, keepers with more than 500 birds will need to restrict access for non-essential people on their sites, workers will need to change clothing and footwear before entering bird enclosures and site vehicles will need to be cleaned and disinfected regularly to limit the risk of the disease spreading. There is also a mandatory requirement to keep records and to make them available on request.

The UK Health Security Agency continue to advise that the risk to public health from the virus is very low and the Food Standards Agency advice remains unchanged, that avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

The UK has faced its largest ever outbreak of bird flu with over 150 cases confirmed across the country since late October 2021. The introduction of this regional AIPZ comes after the disease was detected in kept birds at 10 premises in the affected regions since the beginning of September, as well as several reports in wild birds.

The United Kingdom's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer Richard Irvine said:

Following an increased number of detections of avian influenza we have declared an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone across Suffolk, Norfolk and parts of Essex. This means that all bird keepers in the region must urgently take action now to both prevent disease getting in to flocks and it spreading any further.

Whether you keep just a few birds or thousands, you are now legally required to introduce stricter biosecurity standards on your farm

or small holding. It is in your interests to do so in order to protect your birds from this highly infectious and devastating disease.

The introduction of an AIPZ follows the recent increase in cases of bird flu in poultry and other captive birds in the area and increased reports of mass mortality in wild birds.

The regionalised AIPZ now in force does not include a requirement to house birds. However, this is being kept under constant review. Further disease control measures will be based on the latest scientific evidence and veterinary advice.

The Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) means bird keepers in the affected regions must:

- Cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds – if practical, use disposable protective clothing
- reduce the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, to minimise contamination from manure, slurry and other products, and use effective vermin control
- keep records of mortality, movement of poultry and poultry products and any changes in production
- thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a continuous basis
- keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points
- minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds
- prevent access by poultry to ponds and watercourses and ensure that birds are kept in fenced or enclosed areas

The AIPZ will be in place until further notice, and will be kept under regular review as part of the government's work to monitor and manage the risks of bird flu.

Bird keepers and members of the public should report dead wild birds to Defra's national dead wild bird helpline on 03459 33 55 77 and keepers should report suspicion of disease in their birds to APHA on 03000 200 301. Keepers should familiarise themselves with our [avian influenza advice](#).

Defra has also set out practical guidance to support land managers, the public and ornithological and environmental organisations in their response to the growing threat of avian influenza to wild birds. The ['Mitigation Strategy for Avian Influenza in Wild Birds in England and Wales'](#) sets out how these groups, together with the government and its delivery partners, can mitigate the impact of avian influenza on wild bird populations whilst protecting public health, the wider environment and the rural economy.

The UK is concerned about democratic backsliding across the OSCE region

Thank you, Madam Moderator,

The United Kingdom believes that inclusive, democratic institutions and accountable governments are the foundations on which open, stable and prosperous societies thrive. Societies with the full participation of women and marginalised groups and equal rights for all. Resilient, responsive, and representative.

And yet, we have seen authoritarian influence on the rise in states across the OSCE region leading to democratic backsliding, restrictions to civic space and the rollback of rights.

Where human rights abuses go unchecked, we see the seeds of conflict sown, often with devastating consequences for communities and nations. The absence of democratic freedoms and equality, good governance and the rule of law also impedes nations' prosperity, deters international investment, restricts innovation, and reduces opportunities.

The work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is vital to strengthening democracy and fostering long-term security. We fully support ODIHR's election observation methodology – its impartial and objective approach to elections has helped improve electoral processes across the OSCE region.

It is crucial that ODIHR has a proper budget to continue delivering on its mandate and ensure democratic progress is sustained.

We also recognise that the information people need to participate democratically is increasingly moving online. Collectively, we need to ensure that journalists are able to operate safely and to hold the powerful to account. We must also remain vigilant of disinformation by malign actors.

Madam Moderator – Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows that it is critical that we work even harder to strengthen democratic resilience. Internal repression in Russia and Belarus is tied to external aggression. We stand totally and firmly with Ukraine.

Madam Chair – in conclusion, societies that govern themselves democratically, where all groups meaningfully participate in political and economic processes, are safer, stronger and more secure. We call on all OSCE participating states to recognise the importance of democracy in underpinning collective security, to work together to combat democratic backsliding in the OSCE region and to fully support the vital work of ODIHR.

Thank you very much.

Need to do a tax return for the first time? Tell HMRC by 5 October

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding customers who need to complete a tax return for the 2021 to 2022 tax year to let HMRC know by 5 October 2022. They can do this by registering for Self Assessment.

Before customers can complete their first tax return, they need to register with HMRC to receive their Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR). Customers need their UTR to file a return. The tax return deadline for the 2021 to 2022 tax year is 31 October 2022 for those completed on paper forms, and 31 January 2023 for online returns.

HMRC is encouraging customers to plan ahead to give themselves the best chance to complete their Self Assessment on time. Customers who file early will benefit from knowing what they owe, allowing them to budget and pay at a time that suits them. If customers are due a refund, they could get it back quicker. Customers have until 31 January to pay any tax owed.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

By registering early, Self Assessment customers will have plenty of time to prepare and access all the help available to them before they start their first tax return.

Help and support is available to anyone completing a return, just search 'Self Assessment' on GOV.UK.

Customers can [check if they need to complete a tax return](#) by using the free online tool on GOV.UK. Customers who are new to Self Assessment for the 2021 to 2022 tax year may include:

- those who are newly self-employed and earned more than £1,000
- a new partner in a business partnership
- those who have received any untaxed income
- those claiming Child Benefit but they or their partner have an income above £50,000

Self-employed customers must also register for Class 2 National Insurance contributions.

The easiest way to complete a tax return is online. Once a customer is registered for Self Assessment, they can use their UTR to access their tax

return, as well as details of their income or earnings and other financial records. Detailed information on [what documents are needed for Self Assessment](#) are on GOV.UK.

For customers who have already filed their tax return but still need to pay any tax owed, they can visit GOV.UK to find out more about [the payment options](#). Customers can now make Self Assessment payments quickly and securely through the [free HMRC app](#). If anyone is worried about paying their tax bill, support is available on GOV.UK, for example if customers are unable to pay in full, they may be able to set up a monthly payment plan online if the tax owed is less than £30,000.

All Self Assessment customers need to be alert to the risk of criminals emailing, calling or texting claiming to be from HMRC. Scams come in many forms – some threaten immediate arrest for tax evasion, others offer a tax rebate. Contacts like these should set alarm bells ringing and HMRC advises customers to take their time and check scams advice by searching for ‘HMRC scams’ on GOV.UK. HMRC also urges customers never to share their HMRC login details. Someone using them could steal from the customer or make a fraudulent claim in their name.

Find out more about [Self Assessment](#).

The Time to Pay service allows any individual or business who needs it, the option to [spread their tax payments over time](#). Self Assessment customers with up to £30,000 of tax debt can do this online once you have filed your return.

To [download the free HMRC app](#), customers can visit the App Store from their iPhone or Google Play for Android and follow the download and set up instructions from there.

You can pay your Self Assessment bill through your PAYE tax code as long as:

- you owe less than £3,000 on your tax bill
- you already pay tax through PAYE, for example you’re an employee or you get a company pension
- you submitted your paper tax return by 31 October or your online tax return online by 30 December

If you received coronavirus support scheme payments, including from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme or Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, you will need to include details of all the payments you received during the 2021 to 2022 tax year on this year’s tax return.

The government is offering [help for households](#). Check GOV.UK to find out what cost of living support you could be eligible for.