

Better regulation needed to protect environment and boost economy, says Environment Agency Chief Executive

The Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, is calling for a modern approach to regulation in order to protect air, land, and water from future threats, including the climate emergency.

Sir James' appeal comes as the UK contemplates its Covid-19 economic recovery with the freedom to determine its own laws outside the EU.

He says that better regulation, not deregulation, is needed to allow companies to thrive while protecting nature and communities from the effects of the climate change and other risks such as new technologies.

Sir James said:

The economic damage done by Coronavirus means we need rapid recovery and the kind of regulation to facilitate that. And after leaving the EU, the UK has the opportunity to set its own rules and modernise regulation.

But we must avoid false choices. Better regulation isn't code for deregulation. The test for any changes in legislation must be that they will deliver better environmental outcomes as well as being good for the economy.

Good regulation isn't complicated, bureaucratic, and costly; it is simple, impactful, and money-saving. The best regulation will stop environmental damage at the source, rather than the costly impact to the public purse and the environment of responding to damage after the event.

We also need the right resources, funded by operators and by Government, to deliver the high ambitions we all have in enhancing our environment. Ultimately we will get the environment we are prepared to pay for.

Sir James' words coincide with a new report that reveals the importance of environmental regulation in protecting air, water, and land from harmful pollution.

The EA's Regulating for People, Environment and Growth report (RPEG) shows how communities and ecosystems are currently being protected from existing risks posed by industrial activities.

The RPEG report, comprising data from regulatory activities in 2019, shows

many improving trends in environmental compliance, pollution incidents, crime, and emissions.

Since 2010, emissions of air pollutants have fallen significantly (nitrogen oxides by 63%, sulphur oxides by 81%, PM10 particulates by 34%); the number of serious pollution incidents fell 12% to 467 from 2018 to 2019; and waste recovery at permitted sites has improved to a record 74%.

The report also shows that, in 2019:

- The EA processed around 320,000 transactions for businesses and individuals
- The EA stopped illegal waste activity at 940 sites, 3% more than the previous year
- The EA inspected 1,889 containers to help prevent illegal waste exports
- Businesses and individuals were fined £4.4 million for environmental offences.

Sir James added:

This report shows that regulation works. And now we must look at how we use regulation to tackle the climate emergency – the biggest of all threats to our environment, our economy, and our planet.

We are already playing a significant role through regulation, by enabling the technologies needed to decarbonise the UK economy, including nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture, and we have launched the new UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

But as we and our world continue to change, we must not allow the environment to be left behind.

[The full Regulating for People, Environment and Growth report is available online.](#)

The Environment Agency's vision of promoting green growth and a sustainable future is a key strand of the ['EA2025' five-year action plan, which can be found online.](#)

[Court case and motor insurance](#)

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has undertaken a high-level review to explore the potential impacts of a court ruling on the scope of the compulsory motor insurance cover.

The [review was written for the Department for Transport \(DfT\)](#) which asked GAD

to look at the range of costs involved in extending insurance cover. The changes affected both existing vehicle types as well as new vehicles and activities, including the impact on UK motor sports.

Legal ruling

The legal ruling came about after a court case was brought by a Mr Vnuk, a farm worker in Slovenia. He was injured in an accident involving an insured tractor and a trailer, on farmland in 2007.

Domestic courts rejected the claim, but it was subsequently referred to the European Court of Justice who ruled in favour of the farm worker; the Vnuk Judgment.

This challenged the UK's interpretation of motor insurance requirements, potentially increasing both the types of vehicle that needed to be covered and the situations when insurance was needed.

GAD's expertise

GAD undertook the analysis between 2017 to 2019. We considered the impact of a number of different policy options that DfT could pursue in response to the legal ruling.

In further analysis in 2019, GAD revisited the assumptions relating to motor sport activity in the UK. This reflected new research which suggested the amount of unlicensed activity in motor sport was higher than originally anticipated. The updated UK motor sport exposure was considered in analysis presented to DfT in March 2019.

The tax and advisory firm Grant Thornton peer reviewed the analysis. It said: "GAD's methodology and assumptions as described in the GAD report are reasonable and fit for purpose given the data and information available".

Analysis and estimates

GAD actuary Matt Kirkpatrick undertook the research and wrote the report. He said: "This was an exciting but complex piece of work which looked to assess a wide range of motor activity, including new areas of cover where historical data did not exist.

"With the assistance of a number of industry stakeholders we helped DfT to examine the impact of several different policy options and looked at what these could mean for insurance.

"As part of this actuarial review, we also included additional analysis relating to the Personal Injury Discount Rate. This is used to calculate lump sum compensation payments for high value personal injury claims".

Surge testing to be deployed in New Addington, Croydon

Press release

Working in partnership with the local authority, additional testing and genomic sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas within the CR0 postcode in New Addington, Croydon



A further targeted area will have additional testing made available to control and suppress the potential spread of a COVID-19 variant.

Working in partnership with the local authority, additional testing and genomic sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas within the CR0 postcode in New Addington, Croydon, where the COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa has been found.

Extra testing is being introduced in addition to existing extensive testing, and in combination with following the current lockdown rules and remembering Hands Face Space advice, will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus. Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help understand COVID-19 variants and their spread within these areas.

People living within this targeted area are strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

People with symptoms should book a test in the usual way, and those without symptoms should visit their local authority website for more information.

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[File Self Assessment tax returns now to prevent penalties](#)

Self Assessment taxpayers have less than one week to submit their late tax returns to prevent a £100 penalty, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has urged.

While 10.7 million taxpayers filed their return by 31 January 2021, more than 1.5 million taxpayers missed this deadline and are still to file their tax return. They are accruing interest on any unpaid tax liabilities but still have time to file and pay without incurring penalty charges.

Taxpayers have until 28 February to file their return and prevent a Late Filing Penalty of £100. And those who owe tax have until midnight on 1 April to pay any outstanding tax or set up a payment plan to prevent a 5% Late Payment Penalty.

Jim Harra, HMRC's Chief Executive, said:

Self Assessment taxpayers have until 28 February to file their tax returns and prevent being charged a £100 late filing penalty.

Tax returns submitted during February have missed the 31 January Self Assessment deadline and are late. I'm urging anyone who is still to complete their return to not put it off any longer risking penalties and further interest on their outstanding liabilities.

Support is available on GOV.UK for anyone worried about how to complete their tax return or how to pay their tax bill.

HMRC has delayed late filing and late payment penalties this year for Self Assessment taxpayers to help anyone who may be struggling because of the coronavirus pandemic. Anyone who is worried about paying their tax can set up a payment plan online or contact HMRC for more help and support on 0300 200 3822.

Be aware of copycat HMRC websites and phishing scams. Taxpayers should search 'self assessment' on GOV.UK to get the correct link for their Self Assessment tax return online securely and free of charge.

They also need to be alert if someone calls, emails or texts claiming to be from HMRC, saying that they can claim financial help, are due a tax refund or owe tax. It might be a scam. Check GOV.UK for information on [how to recognise genuine HMRC contact](#).

Self Assessment timeline:

- 31 January – Self Assessment deadline (paying and filing)
- 1 February – interest accrues on any outstanding tax bills

- 28 February – last date to file any late tax returns to avoid a late filing penalty
- 1 April – last date to pay any outstanding tax or make a Time to Pay arrangement, to avoid a late payment penalty
- 1 April – last date to set up a self-serve Time to Pay arrangement online

Taxpayers can pay their tax bill or an estimated amount online, via their bank, or by post. Check GOV.UK for more information on [how to pay](#). Taxpayers should still pay in full if they can. This is the only way to stop interest accruing.

Alternatively, taxpayers who cannot afford to pay their tax bill on time can set up a Time to Pay arrangement to [spread payment of their tax bill into monthly instalments](#), online via GOV.UK.

If a taxpayer's Self Assessment debts are more than £30,000, or they need longer than 12 months to pay their debt in full, they cannot set up a Time to Pay plan online. But they may still be able to set up a Time to Pay arrangement by calling the Self Assessment Payment Helpline on 0300 200 3822.

Self Assessment taxpayers who are required to make Payments on Account, and know their 2020 to 2021 tax bill is going to be lower than in 2019 to 2020 – for example due to loss of earnings because of COVID-19, can reduce their Payments on Account. Visit GOV.UK to [find out more about Payments on Account and how to reduce them](#).

Follow the National Cyber Security Centre's 6 essential steps to keep yourself and your business secure online by visiting [CyberAware.gov.uk](#).

[United Nations Human Rights Council, 46th session: Foreign Secretary's statement](#)

Madam President, Excellencies.

The UK places the promotion and protection of human rights at the very top of our list of international priorities. So we are very pleased to return to the Human Rights Council. And we will continue to uphold and defend the international rule of law, and the rights and freedoms of people right around the world.

We place a particular focus on: championing freedom of religion and belief; defending media freedom; and also championing the values of liberal democracy. We will use all of the diplomatic and development levers available

to us to pursue these ends, support states to meet their human rights obligations, and uphold the values on which the United Nations was founded.

The Human Rights Council has a key role to play. And at this moment, when we see the democratic dominoes falling across the world, when we see appalling human rights violations, and when we see some governments using Covid as a pretext to row back on personal freedoms, the Council's role is even more important than ever.

But, like any institution, we know the Council is not perfect. Some members do not meet the human rights standards we vow to uphold. And the Council's agenda does not consistently reflect where the most pressing human rights issues are. We need to address that, as well as other institutional concerns. For our part, the UK will continue to engage with all sides to find ways to do so. For example, we must find ways to reduce the practical barriers to small island developing states engaging fully.

This Council lives up to the best traditions of the United Nations when it shines a spotlight on the very worst violations of human rights, and demands accountability for those responsible. So let me highlight some of the most pressing human rights situations that we see today.

The position in Myanmar gets worse. The violations and abuses are well-documented, including arbitrary detention and draconian restrictions on freedom of expression. That crisis presents an increased risk to the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. That's why the UK and the EU led a special session of the Council on this issue earlier in the month. It resulted in a consensus resolution demonstrating the strength of feeling in the Council about the actions of the military.

The UK has also led strong statements from the G7 and the UN Security Council condemning the situation. The UK is sanctioning individuals for serious human rights violations that took place during the coup. The military must step aside. Civilian leaders must be released. And the democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar must be respected. That's why at this session we will again cosponsor the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, so he can continue his essential work.

Let me now turn to Belarus. Last year's rigged Presidential elections and Mr Lukashenko's brutal crackdown against those calling for change has resulted in a human rights crisis. There is no other way to describe it.

The UK has been at the vanguard of the international response. This includes an OSCE investigation, an urgent debate at the Council in September, and greater support for civil society and the independent media. With Canada, we acted decisively in implementing sanctions against Lukashenko and his inner circle.

Now, this Council must continue with a comprehensive investigation of human rights violations, including accusations of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Belarusian authorities must stop their campaign of repression, agree to meaningful dialogue and now hold new elections. The UK

will support initiatives to keep Belarus on the Council's agenda for as long as it is necessary, and until the Belarusian people are able to enjoy their democratic rights and their fundamental freedoms.

Now turning to Russia, where we face a truly dire and shocking situation from a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council. The authorities there must respect citizens' human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and the freedom from torture.

We are deeply concerned by the legislative amendments and constitutional changes which amount to a wholesale attack on individual rights and freedoms. That includes allowing ordinary individuals to be treated as foreign agents. It is disgraceful that Alexey Navalny, himself the victim of a despicable crime, has now been sentenced on arbitrary charges.

The UK has sanctioned six individuals and an entity responsible for Mr Navalny's poisoning. His treatment and the violence inflicted on peaceful protesters can only further reinforce the world's concerns that Russia is failing to meet its international obligations. We've made our concerns clear here in this Council as well as at the G7, at the OSCE and in the Council of Europe. And we call on other members of the Council to consider whether Russia's actions are in line with its international human rights obligations and the values that we seek and that we have pledged to uphold.

Now, I must address China. We stand with the growing number of international partners, UN experts and NGOs concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation that we see in China. No one can ignore the evidence anymore.

In Hong Kong, the rights of the people are being systematically violated. The National Security Law is a clear breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and is having a chilling effect on personal freedoms. Free and fair legislative elections must take place, with a range of opposition voices allowed to take part.

In Tibet the situation remains deeply concerning, with access still heavily restricted. Meanwhile, we see almost daily reports now that shine a new light on China's systematic human rights violations perpetrated against Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in Xinjiang. The situation in Xinjiang is beyond the pale. The reported abuses – which include torture, forced labour and forced sterilisation of women – are extreme and they are extensive. They are taking place on an industrial scale. It must be our collective duty to ensure this does not go unanswered.

UN mechanisms must respond. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or another independent fact-finding expert, must – and I repeat must – be given urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang. If members of this Human Rights Council are to live up to our responsibilities, there must be a resolution which secures this access.

The UK will live up to our responsibilities. So last month, I announced measures aimed at ensuring that no company profiting from forced labour in Xinjiang can do business in the UK, and that no UK businesses are involved in

their supply chains. We will continue to raise our voice for the people of Hong Kong and for minorities in China suffering this appalling treatment. And we urge others who share our commitment to open societies and universal human rights to speak up.

Finally, we will continue to lead action in this Council: on Syria, as we do at each session; on South Sudan; and on Sri Lanka, where we will present a new resolution to maintain the focus on reconciliation and on accountability.

Madam President, we want to see an effective international human rights system that holds to account those who systematically violate human rights. The Human Rights Council must be ready to play its role in full, or I fear we will see its reputation sorely damaged.

The UK wants the Council to succeed. And we will work with our international partners. We will continue to speak up in this Council for what is right. And we will continue to back up our words with actions.

Thank you.