

England's 'national rainforests' to be protected by new rules

The government has today announced plans to bring forward legislation to prevent the burning of heather and other vegetation on protected blanket bog habitats.

The new regulations will prevent the burning of any specified vegetation on areas of deep peat (over 40cm depth) on a Site of Special Scientific Interest that is also a Special Area of Conservation or a Special Protection Area unless a licence has been granted or the land is steep or rocky.

'Rotational' burning is used as a management tool on moorland and blanket bog. Land managers use controlled burning on patches of heather during winter months typically on a 8-12 year rotation.

There is a consensus that burning of vegetation on blanket bog is damaging to peatland formation and habitat condition. It makes it more difficult or impossible to restore these habitats to their natural state and to restore their hydrology.

Restoring England's peatlands is a priority for the government. It will help achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 as well as protecting our valuable habitats, and the biodiversity those habitats support.

Blanket bog, a type of peatland, is a delicate habitat of international importance, with the UK having 13% of the world's blanket bog.

The government recognises that if moorland is unmanaged, there is a risk of wildfire which is most damaging of all and that these risks have grown due to climate change. Therefore, the government intends to work with land owners and managers to develop local wildfire control plans.

There will be specific circumstances where the ban does not apply, such as on steep land or where scree makes up half the land area. In addition, the Secretary of State may also issue licences for the burning of heather on blanket bog for the purposes of wildfire prevention, for a conservation purpose or where land is inaccessible to cutting or mowing machinery. These licences may cover several years so that they can be aligned with coherent management plans for sites.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Our peatlands have great potential as a natural store of carbon, as well as protecting habitats, providing a haven for rare wildlife and being a natural provider of water regulation.

We want to work with land owners to restore the natural hydrology of many of these sites through our new agricultural policy to

support our ambitions for the environment. The burning of heather on these sites makes it more difficult to restore their natural hydrology which is why we are taking this step today.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

This is a hugely welcome announcement which will see better protections for our globally important peatlands. Blanket bog is an amazing habitat that provides essential environmental benefits, including carbon storage, a home for wonderful wildlife, clean drinking water and flood mitigation. This is why it is vital we ensure these systems are healthy with peat-forming species, such as Sphagnum mosses, thriving in water-logged conditions.

We will continue to work with Defra and land managers to help with the successful implementation of these measures, including by providing advice on good upland management and leading a new peatland restoration grant scheme as part of the Nature for Climate programme.

This will provide funds to carry out restoration work on these precious ecosystems, ensuring their recovery and protection for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Today's move marks a key step for meeting the Government's nature and climate change mitigation and adaptation targets, and part of the Government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitment to bring 75% of SSSIs into favourable condition.

The Government will be setting out further measures to protect England's peatlands this year as part of a package of measures to protect England's landscapes and nature-based solutions. The government's £640m Nature for Climate Fund also includes funding to kick-start a programme of peatland restoration over the next 5 years.

The statutory instrument will be laid before Parliament for its approval before it comes into force.

[December 2020 Price Paid Data](#)

News story

HM Land Registry Price Paid Data tracks land and property sales in England and Wales submitted to us for registration.



Image credit: DrimaFilm/Shutterstock.com

This release contains updates to the releases we've made this year, as well as introducing the first release of data for December 2020.

As we will be adding to the November data in future releases, we would not recommend using it in isolation as an indication of market or HM Land Registry activity. However, when the full dataset is viewed alongside the data we've previously published, it adds to the overall picture of market activity.

There is a time difference between the sale of a property and its registration at HM Land Registry.

In the dataset you can find the date of sale for each property, its full address and sale price, its category (residential or commercial) and type (detached, semi-detached, terraced, flat or maisonette and other), whether or not it is new build and whether it is freehold or leasehold.

Published 29 January 2021

[International Affairs Appointments in No.10 and Cabinet Office](#)

The Prime Minister has appointed Lord Frost as his Representative for Brexit and International Policy and head of a new International Policy Unit in No.10. He has asked Lord Frost to lead the UK's institutional and strategic relationship with the EU, and to help drive through changes to maximise the opportunities of Brexit, including on international trade and economic issues. Lord Frost will work with Sir Stephen to finalise the Integrated Review and will continue to advise on foreign policy issues as necessary. He will take up this new role on 1 February.

Lord Frost has been the Prime Minister's Chief Negotiator with the EU since July 2019.

The Cabinet Secretary, with the approval of the Prime Minister, has appointed Sir Stephen Lovegrove as National Security Adviser. He will be responsible for managing the foreign, international economic and national security teams within the Cabinet Secretariat and advising the Prime Minister on all matters of international and domestic security. Stephen will take up the role at the end of March.

Sir Stephen Lovegrove has been Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence since April 2016. Prior to MoD, he was Permanent Secretary to the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

"I am hugely grateful to Lord Frost for his herculean efforts in securing a deal with the EU, and I am thrilled that he has agreed to be my representative for Brexit and International Policy as we seize the opportunities from our departure from the EU.

"I am also delighted to appoint Sir Stephen Lovegrove as my National Security Adviser. Stephen brings with him a wealth of experience from across Whitehall and in National Security and I look forward to working closely together to deliver this Government's vision for the UK in the world."

Lord Frost said:

"I am delighted to take up this new role as the Prime Minister's Representative on Brexit and International Policy. With a new agreement with the EU in place, we have huge opportunities to boost our wealth and define what we stand for as a country internationally, and I very much look forward to supporting the Prime Minister on this."

Sir Stephen Lovegrove said:

"It has been an immense privilege to serve as the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence for the past five years. Working with the whole force – our armed forces, both regular and reserve, civil servants, our suppliers and everyone that makes up the Defence community – has been an honour.

"I am delighted now to be taking up the role of the National Security Adviser. On this broader canvas I aim to deliver the Prime Minister's vision for an enhanced and more engaged role for the UK in the world, leading the national security community to embrace the opportunities now available to us, while ensuring we are well prepared to deal with the challenges we face."

Notes to Editors:

- These arrangements represent a change to those provisionally announced in July 2020.
- Lord Frost will continue to be a Special Adviser. He is on leave of absence from the House of Lords.

CMA warns firms over price-fixing of supplies to disabled students

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has sent advisory letters to a number of firms, reminding them of their obligations under competition law, after learning of allegations that some suppliers colluded over the price of key services and equipment. Price-fixing is a serious breach of competition law and can cheat people out of a lower price, which could have been available if competition was working properly.

Disabled students who are eligible can receive funding through the Disabled Student Allowances grant scheme, managed by the Student Loans Company (SLC), which acts on behalf of the UK and Welsh governments' education departments. Under the current system, an independent needs assessor will provide SLC with recommendations for products and services along with quotations from suppliers, and SLC will work with the student to put the support in place.

The CMA is concerned that SLC – and so ultimately the taxpayer – may have paid over the odds for certain goods and services because some suppliers agreed prices before providing quotations. This alleged activity could also have reduced the overall amount which disabled students have available for purchasing equipment through the scheme.

While the CMA has been considering these allegations, SLC has told the CMA that it is making a number of changes to the way it procures goods and services for disabled students. The changes will increase price transparency and competition amongst companies, and should therefore limit the potential for anti-competitive behaviour to take place.

Michael Grenfell, the CMA's Executive Director of Enforcement, said:

"Healthy competition is the cornerstone of getting the best deal so we are concerned if companies might be doing something to threaten that. It is particularly troubling in this case if the interests of disabled students are affected, and if public funding is hit.

"We trust that the letters we have issued, and today's announcement, send a clear message. Any suppliers engaging in price fixing with competitors, or other illegal collusion, need to review their practices and make changes now."

The CMA has not made a legal finding as to whether competition law has been broken at this stage, but it will keep this sector under review, remaining open to the possibility of further action if these concerns are not fully addressed.

The CMA runs a '[Cheating or competing?](#)' campaign, which aims to educate

businesses about which practices are illegal and urges people to come forward if they suspect a business has taken part in cartel behaviour, such as rigging contracts or price fixing. It has also issued a range of guidance to help businesses understand more about how to comply with competition law.

Notes to Editor

1. For more information on CMA advisory letters, what they are and when they are used, look at the CMA's [Warning and Advisory Letters page](#).
2. The Students Loan Company provides funding to disabled students through [Disabled Students' Allowances](#).

New Chair appointed to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Defra Ministers have appointed Professor Colin Galbraith as Chair of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Colin Galbraith's appointment is for three years and will run from 25 January 2021 to 24 January 2024. Remuneration is £40,059 per annum based on a time commitment of 2.5 days per week.

Professor Colin Galbraith is the Director of his own environmental consultancy, which deals with a range of environmental issues in the UK and at the global level. Colin has been Deputy Chairman of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) from 2017 and Independent member of the Committee since 2014. Until early 2010, Colin was the Director of Policy and Advice in Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot). In this capacity he was the principal adviser on policy, scientific and technical matters for the organisation for over 12 years.

Colin has been involved with the United Nations for a number of years and has made contributions through the Convention on Migratory Species and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in particular. This work involved Colin in high profile nature conservation issues, including the development of international agreements on the conservation of birds of prey across Europe and the Middle East and separately, on the conservation of Albatross. More recently, his work has focussed on reviewing the impact of global climate change on protected areas and on the ecology of threatened species. Colin has been the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and is presently the Appointed Councillor on Climate Change issues for the Convention.

Professor Melanie Austen, Charles Banner QC and Professor Marian Scott OBE have all been reappointed as Independent Members for second terms of two years and ten months. Their second terms will run from 15 February 2021 until

14 December 2023. Remuneration is £9,836 per annum based on a time commitment of 2.5 days per month.

The new appointment and reappointments have all been made in accordance with the Ministerial Governance Code on Public Appointments published by the Cabinet Office. All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process.

There is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if significant) to be declared. The appointees have declared that they have not taken part in any significant political activity in the past five years. The JNCC was established in 1991 and reconstituted in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) as a non-departmental public body. The JNCC advises the UK Government and Devolved Administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on UK-wide and international nature conservation

Biographical details

Professor Melanie Austen

Melanie is Professor of Ocean and Society at the University of Plymouth. She is an interdisciplinary marine research leader with a strong background in marine ecology. She was on the Government's Natural Capital Committee and served a three-year term as the first Chief Scientific Advisor to the UK's Marine Management Organisation. She is currently Chair of the Partnership of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in North Devon, a member of the Board of Canadian Healthy Oceans Network (CHONe2), and a member of the Strategic Advisory Group of the UKRI Sustainable Management of UK Marine Resources Programme. She has previously been a member of various EU and UK Expert Advisory Groups including chairing an EU Marine Board ecosystem valuation working group.

Melanie's research focuses on developing interdisciplinary understanding of marine systems, their natural capital and ecosystem services, and their use and governance to improve social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Charles Banner QC

Charles is a barrister at Keating Chambers. He was called to the Bar of England and Wales in 2004 and to the Bar of Northern Ireland in 2010. He practices across both jurisdictions and internationally, specialising in environment & planning law, commercial dispute resolution and public & regulatory law. He is regularly recognised by the legal press as one of the leading barristers in his fields of practice, and he has been the recipient of multiple legal industry awards. He sits judicially on a part-time basis as a Justice of the Astana International Finance Centre Court in Kazakhstan and is an independent member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' Global Standards and Regulation Board. He was previously a Trustee and Council Member of the UK Environmental Law Association (2016–2020) and the Independent UK Member of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's Management Board (2017–2020).

Professor Marian Scott OBE

Marian is Professor of Environmental Statistics in the School of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Glasgow; an elected member of the International Statistical Institute (ISI), a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) and a chartered statistician of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). Marian's research interests include model uncertainty and sensitivity analysis; modelling the dispersal of pollutants in the environment, radiocarbon dating and assessment of animal welfare. She was awarded an OBE in 2009 for services to social science.