

# Press release: Flood-hit farm groups given £800,000

The focus of this round of the [Facilitation Fund](#) is on developing a new approach to natural flood management, to help communities hit by the winter storms of 2015 and early 2016.

Organisations such as the National Trust, Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Rivers Trust are joining forces with farmers. They will plant trees, create water meadows and restore rivers to their natural meanders within river catchments in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Northumberland, County Durham and Yorkshire.

In the 2 years since the scheme began 61 groups with 1218 land managers have been supported, covering more than 273,000 hectares of land.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

We are committed to helping farmers better protect their land, and surrounding communities, from flooding.

We're already investing £15 million in natural flood management schemes across the country, making sure we protect homes and businesses as well as protecting our precious wildlife.

This exciting scheme is a win-win and will see us build-up flood resilience while at the same time achieving some real benefits for our rich natural habitats including our ancient woodlands, grasslands and moorlands.

This is the latest in a series of natural flood management projects which demonstrate the government's commitment to using the best available mix of flood protection measures. It builds on £15m already committed to similar schemes across the country.

Chief Executive of Natural England James Cross said:

The Facilitation Fund is enabling farmers to use natural flood management techniques, such as slowing the flow through river restoration and tree planting, which not only help to cope with the extreme climatic events that the environment is throwing at us but also benefit nature.

We've relied heavily on local knowledge from our area advisers and the expertise of our partners to help groups put forward plans that will benefit nature at the same time as reducing the risk of flooding.

The scheme is designed to work with nature in [flood-hit communities](#), in response to priority actions identified in [Flood Action Plans](#).

The [projects funded this year](#) add to our learning around managing extreme climate events through natural flood management. This technique uses nature-based solutions to address flood management through activities such as:

- restoring ancient and native woodland
- creating more wet woodland
- management of grasslands, including traditional hay meadow
- management of moorlands to restore blanket bog and wet heathland
- restoration of river habitat
- improved soil management

Across England a total of £5.4 million has been committed through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund for groups of land managers to improve their local environment at a landscape-scale. This builds on the principles of partnership working to deliver ambitious, evidence-based actions that will deliver for the environment, business and local communities.

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## [News story: Pre-payment meter price cap comes into effect to protect millions of consumers](#)

Today the CMA's price cap on pre-payment meters has come into force to the benefit of around 4 million households.

Last June, following a [two-year investigation](#) into the energy market, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) decided to put in place a temporary price cap to protect some of the most vulnerable households in Britain.

The temporary cap is expected to reduce bills across Britain and will save the average household £80 a year. The CMA found that people using pre-payment meters had less choice and were paying disproportionately higher bills than customers paying by other means – including direct debit.

The price cap will remain in place until the end of 2020 when the smart meter roll-out – combined with other changes imposed on the industry by the CMA – is expected to tackle issues that prevent such customers accessing the better deals available to others.

Andrea Coscelli, Acting Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

Households across the UK deserve to get a fair deal on their energy bills.

On top of a number of measures to get competition working better, the CMA's pre-payment meter price cap means that more than 4 million consumers, many of whom are vulnerable, and who can't easily shop around for a better deal, will see their bills cut by around £80 a year each, saving British customers a total of £320 million per year.

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## [Press release: Energy reforms come into force today](#)

- Energy suppliers to focus help on vulnerable households
- Part of plan to improve energy efficiency of 1 million homes by 2020

Homes across Great Britain will get extra support to make their homes cheaper and easier to keep warm thanks to Government reforms that have come into force today.

Changes to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) will make sure energy companies give support to people struggling to meet their heating bills, with plans to extend the scheme from April 2017 to September 2018 also confirmed.

Consumer Minister, Margot James said:

The big energy firms already have to help households save gas and electricity bills, by improving homes so they are easier and cheaper to keep warm.

We're strengthening this obligation today and making sure they prioritise low income households as part of our plan to insulate 1 million homes by 2020.

The reforms, which were consulted on last year, will simplify the scheme, with energy companies required to provide struggling households with energy efficiency measures to make their homes warmer and bring their bills down.

As well as an increased focus on low income and vulnerable homes, eligibility will be extended to social housing tenants in EPC bands E, F and G, and local authorities will also be able to help match people with energy suppliers.

Suppliers will also be required to install a minimum 21,000 solid wall insulations per year, up from the earlier proposal of 17,000.

There will be continuing protection for the delivery of energy efficiency measures in rural areas, with a requirement that 15% of suppliers' Carbon Emissions Reduction Obligation be delivered in these areas.

ECO has proved a very effective delivery mechanism with around 2.2 million measures installed in around 1.7 million properties between 2013 and the end of January 2017.

- The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is focused on insulation measures (e.g. solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft and room in roof insulation amongst others).
- Under the part of the part of ECO focused on fuel poverty, households can also receive heating measures, including first time central heating and more efficient boilers.
- The energy companies obligated are British Gas, The Co-operative, EDF Energy, EON Energy, First Utility, npower, OVO Energy, Scottish power, SSE, Utilita, Utility Warehouse, Extra Energy, Spark Energy, Flow Energy, Economy Energy.
- There are three ways to qualify under the Affordable Warmth element of the scheme: i) those in receipt of certain means tested benefits ii) those living in social housing with an EPC of E,F or G and iii) those referred to suppliers by local authorities under the newly-introduced flexible eligibility. Suppliers can also refer households who are in or at risk of fuel poverty or vulnerable to living in a cold home.
- The 18-month extension will provide industry with time to adapt their IT and delivery models to deliver insulation rather than boilers to fuel poor households.
- Eligibility for certain measures under Affordable Warmth is extended to social housing in Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) bands E, F and G in order to allow measures to be provided to social tenants who are most in need and more likely to be fuel poor.
- Households are usually identified by the installation companies who fit the energy efficiency measures on behalf of energy companies.
- A small proportion of customers are also referred via the Energy Saving Advice Service.
- For independent, expert advice and to find out if you are eligible for support, contact the Energy Saving Advice Service on 0300 123 1234. Calling hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. (Calls cost no more than a national rate call)

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**[Buying a new car? Vehicle tax rates have changed](#)**



Vehicle tax rates are changing for cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA from today. These changes do not affect cars registered before 1 April 2017 – but their rate of tax has increased today in line with the Retail Price Index.

If you're thinking about buying a new car or motorhome, read on because this will affect you.

For the last 12 months we've been working hard to make sure that you get the facts about the changes before you buy a new car.

We've been busy communicating this message on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) since last November and have updated GOV.UK information about the changes. Our press office has been issuing press releases to national, local and specialist publications.

In January, we launched a digital advertising campaign to new car buyers with simple messages driving people to GOV.UK to read the facts. As a result of all our combined digital communications, almost 700,000 people have visited the information.

We've been [blogging regularly](#), as well as putting messages on our printed literature. Over at our contact centre we have an automated telephone service to quickly answer your questions. This has been really effective so far with almost all of the calls relating to the changes using the service.

We've also been working closely with our stakeholders in the motor industry to help them get ready behind the scenes for the new rates. This includes updating the existing first registration service, creating a specially designed toolkit to use with their customers and running webinars in January and February.

So if you are thinking about buying a new car or motorhome from today, you're probably aware of the changes by now. But make sure you have a look at [new vehicle tax rates](#) information to see how it affects you.

Follow DVLA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and subscribe to our [Digital](#)

[Services Blog](#).

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## [UN calls for recognizing the rights of people with autism to make their own decisions](#)

31 March 2017 – Ahead of World Autism Awareness Day, the United Nations today called for recognizing the rights of people with the spectrum neurological condition, which is believed to affect 70 million people around the world.

“Let us ensure that we make available the necessary accommodations and support to persons with [autism](#),” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in his message for the [Day](#).”

“With access to the support they need and choose, they will be empowered to face the key milestones in every person’s life,” he added, making decisions such as where and with whom to live, what type of work to pursue and how to manage their personal finances.

One in 160 children has an autism spectrum disorder, according to estimates by the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)). Around the world, one per cent of the entire population – possibly two per cent – is on the spectrum.

In a special event in New York ahead of the Day, marked annually on 2 April, the UN and the international community gathered to renew their commitment to raising awareness about autism and the need for people with the disorder to have equal opportunity and full participation in society on equal basis with other citizens.

Cristina Gallach, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, which co-organized the event along with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said in her opening remarks that to achieve an inclusive society, “we must ensure that the fundamental rights enshrined in the Convention on the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) are known and respected.”



Photo: CARE/David Rochkind, Design: Kim Conger

The Convention entered into force in 2008, to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people with disabilities, and to promote their dignity.

In his statement, the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson said that awareness events, such as the one being held today, are important to helping people and their families lead more enjoyable lives.

“A lack of understanding of the causes, symptoms and effects of autism has in many cases led to a proliferation of misinformation, anxiety and confusion,” Mr. Thomson said in a statement delivered by Masud Bin Momen, Assembly Vice-President.

He called for early intervention programmes, health programmes and support services to ensure that people with autism can access education, training and jobs. “So that ultimately autism does not define them,” Mr. Thomson said, and they are seen “as who they are, people with ideas, capacities and contributions to make.”

Autism is mainly characterized by its unique social interactions, non-standard ways of learning, keen interests in specific subjects, inclination to routines, challenges in typical communications and particular ways of processing sensory information.

The stigmatization and discrimination associated with neurological differences remain substantial obstacles to diagnosis and therapies.

*‘We are failing to protect the rights of people with autism’ – Keynote address*

“Autonomy and self-determination for people with autism cannot be separated from a discussion of their human rights,” said Simon Baron-Cohen, Director of the Autism Research Center at the University of Cambridge, in his keynote address.

Having studied autism for decades, Dr. Baron-Cohen said that many people on the spectrum have excellent attention to detail and the ability to spot patterns, for example, but need safeguarding because they trust people’s words as facts and have a hard time fitting in socially.

Referencing statistics, such as that half of people with autism are too afraid to leave their homes for fear that they will be taken advantage of, Dr. Baron-Cohen chided the international community.

“On the first human right, the right to dignity, as civilized nations, we are failing to protect the rights of people with autism.”

He defined autism as “an example of neurodiversity”, saying that “differently wired brains lead to different profiles of strengths and challenges, and should not be judged as better or worse. They’re just different. People with autism are asking for acceptance and respect.”

**AUDIO:** In terms of civil liberties for people with autism, the international community overall is living in “the Dark Ages,” Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, the Director of the Autism Research Centre at the University of Cambridge told a special event at UN Headquarters.