

## **Press release: Applications for permits received at Holmwood oilfield**

The Environment Agency has received 3 applications for environmental permits at the Holmwood oil and gas site, off Coldharbour Lane, Surrey.

These applications are for 1 bespoke Environmental Permit and 2 Standard Rules Permits. They have been submitted by the site Europa Oil and Gas Limited to begin exploration drilling for oil or gas at the site.

In deciding whether or not to issue the permits, the Environment Agency will take into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

You can view and comment on the [application](#).

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

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.

We are in the process of determining the applications to permit this site and we want to hear from the public and understand peoples' views. Everybody has the chance to see what the bespoke permit may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

For all media enquiries please contact 0800 141 2743 or email [Southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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## **Press release: Government helps dementia sufferers as part of next step in fight against nuisance calls**

Rogue traders who bombard the elderly and vulnerable with nuisance phone calls are to be stopped in their tracks by a targeted Government scheme designed to protect those with dementia.

Every year, thousands of complaints are made about nuisance phone calls and

in February last year, one firm alone was fined £350,000 for making more than 46 million automated calls.

To help tackle the problem, Prime Minister Theresa May, has today announced the launch of a half-a-million-pound project which will see hi-tech call blocking devices installed in the homes of some of the most vulnerable people across the UK who have been identified by doctors, Trading Standards officials and local councils as being at risk from nuisance callers.

The trueCall devices will completely block all recorded messages, silent calls and calls from numbers not already pre-identified by the home owner – offering particular protection to those with dementia.

The Prime Minister said:

We want to create a fairer society by cracking down on unscrupulous practices which target the most vulnerable.

This new, targeted scheme is the latest step in the government's fight against nuisance calls, protecting those who are most at risk, including those with dementia.

We have seen people tricked out of thousands of pounds by scam callers and this government is determined to clamp down on their activities once and for all.

The project, which is being funded by DCMS, co-ordinated by the National Trading Standards Scams Team and supported by local Trading Standards departments, is the latest of a series of Government crackdowns on nuisance callers

A similar trial scheme run by the National Trading Standards Scams Team last year resulted in 93% of participants feeling safer in their homes. This included one person who had previously paid £150,000 to a scam caller.

The chief executive of Dementia UK, Hilda Hayo, said:

We welcome this project as some people living with dementia are vulnerable to nuisance callers who offer bogus services and financial schemes.

These calls can not only have a negative financial impact but can also lead to psychological affects such as anxiety, depression and a loss of self-esteem. We frequently receive calls to our national helpline from family members who are concerned that their relative with dementia has fallen prey to rogue traders.

This scheme will see the special devices installed in 1,500 homes. They will screen calls and can either ask callers to enter a security code which only

genuine callers will know, or direct them to instead call a friend or relative of the home owner.

Lord Toby Harris, the Chair of National Trading Standards, said:

The impact of nuisance calls – both emotional and financial – cannot be underestimated. We know that these call blockers can make a real difference to people's lives and give those in vulnerable situations, such as those with dementia, and their families a greater sense of protection and security.

Working with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the Government has already forced companies to display their caller ID when cold calling and given out a series of hefty fines – totalling almost £7 million.

The Government will shortly implement plans to slap company bosses and firms with fines of up to £1 million if they are found to be in breach of Privacy and Electronics Communications Regulations.

ENDS

#### **Notes to Editors:**

- The funding for this scheme includes £300,000 to supply call blocking machines with the remaining budget spent on the management of the service and raising public awareness of scam and nuisance calls.
  - Plans to make company bosses liable follows previous legislation where only businesses were liable for fines. Many of the businesses tried to escape paying nuisance call penalties by declaring bankruptcy – only to open up again under a different name.
  - The ICO has issued fines totalling almost £7 million since 2012.
  - In 2015, the ICO received almost 170,000 complaints about nuisance calls.
  - To report a nuisance call visit: [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)
  - See what else Government is doing to combat nuisance calls by searching for: #NoNuisance on social media.
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# Have your say on reforming local government in Wales

Under the plans set out in a Welsh Government White Paper councils would work with each other, on a regional and mandatory basis, to deliver a range of different services such as economic development – including certain planning functions and transport.

Councils would also decide how they would work together on other services like education improvement, social services, additional learning needs, public protection, substance misuse and promotion of the Welsh language.

Together with these proposals, views are also being sought on reducing the voting age at local government elections to 16 and enabling local authorities to adopt either 'first past the post' or 'single transferable vote' election systems.

The White Paper also sets out how the Welsh Government would strengthen the role of community councils and encourage democratic participation.

The Local Government Secretary said:

"These proposals are not about change for change's sake.

"Our councils are working against a backdrop of extraordinary austerity and some services are facing a great deal of pressure. Local government reform is essential if we're to make these services stronger and more resilient to cope with the demands of the future.

"We also want people to be more engaged and involved in the decisions that affect their communities. That's why it's so important that the public and those involved in delivering council services, at every level, have their say in this consultation. Your views matter and will shape the way we take these proposals forward."

The consultation on reforming local government closes on 11th April.

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## Peter Dowd response to Public Accounts

## Committee report into Concentrix

**Peter**

**Dowd MP, Labour's Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury**, commenting on the Public Accounts Committee report into Concentrix, said:

"The findings by the Public Accounts Committee reaffirms the Government's continued inability to take responsibility for the shambolic decision to contract out tax credits to Concentrix. It is now crystal clear that Concentrix should never have been awarded the contract.

"This damning report reveals what many of us have long suspected, first that neither HMRC nor Concentrix bothered to check for error or fraud before suspending tax credits to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

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Secondly, that Concentrix's claims of mass savings were inflated from the start; they have barely recouped one fifth of their initial savings figure. Third, that HMRC is woefully ill-equipped to outsource such important decisions to the private sector, instead of penalising Concentrix for mistakes HMRC tripled its commission.

"This whole saga makes a mockery of the current tendering process. Given these damning findings, Concentrix should be banned from any future Government contracts and the Government should seek to recoup the majority of its commission."

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