

Press release: How to fish responsibly during Somerset's elver season

With the 2017 elver season under way, the Environment Agency is reminding Somerset's elver fishermen to stay the right side of the law.

Eels are an endangered species and recognised by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as in need of protection. Fishing for elvers is allowed in England and Wales, but under strict conditions to ensure stocks are not over-exploited.

The elver season runs from 15 February – 25 May inclusive and is largely limited to the Rivers Parrett and Tone. There are approximately 200 licenced elver fishermen in Somerset who must register with the Environment Agency at the start of the season.

Sustainable fishing includes the capture of elvers for re-stocking in countries across Northern Europe where eel stocks have declined and cannot be replenished naturally.

All elver fishing in Somerset is done with hand held nets known as 'dip nets'. They are restricted in size to 1m long, 0.8m wide and 0.45m deep. Handle lengths should be no longer than 4m. Fishing from boats is prohibited and no other large nets or traps are allowed. As a further precaution, all nets must be tagged and fishermen have photographic ID.

Elvers are attracted to fresh water so to protect stocks, no fishing is permitted within 10m of any river obstruction, dam, inlet, outlet or fish pass that hinders the passage of elvers. A full list of rules can be found in the elver fishing bylaws.

Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency said:

We recognise the majority of elver fishermen operate responsibly and respect the law. We work closely with the police in detecting illegal fishing and, where we have evidence, won't hesitate to prosecute offenders.

Any illegal or suspicious activity can be reported to the Environment Agency or Crimestoppers. If you would like to report information on environmental crime anonymously, call 0800 555111.

Pembrokeshire company awarded £5.8m contract for new fisheries patrol vessels

The awarding of the contract follows a competitive international bidding process and means the vessels will be built in Wales, by a local company and provide skilled employment in Pembrokeshire.

The new vessels will replace the current ageing boats, to effectively protect from illegal fishing activity in Welsh waters and safeguard Wales' fishing industry and coastal communities in the years ahead.

Since its inception in 2014, Mainstay Marine has safeguarded 30 jobs and created 50 new positions, with 98% of its employees based in Pembrokeshire. The company also employs 10% of its direct workforce as apprentices.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, announced the contracts during a visit to Mainstay Marine Solutions' facilities in Pembroke Dock to see the workshops where the vessels will be built.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“The Welsh Government takes very seriously its responsibility for managing and protecting Welsh seas and it's important we have the capability to do this. I am pleased we are replacing our ageing fleet and proud a Welsh company has been successful in winning the contract to complete this work.

“Mainstay Marine Solutions has shown a commitment to up-skilling and developing its workforce locally and it is anticipated the continued success of the company will help create further jobs locally, which is excellent news for the local economy.”

Philip Hilbert, Sales Director of Marine Specialised Technology Limited, based in Liverpool said:

“We are delighted to be part of this prestigious project supplying the Cabin RIB which is a flagship project for us. Fisheries enforcement is a key market for us and this craft will be the pinnacle of small craft technology.”

The awarding of the contract to Mainstay Marine Solutions follows a European-wide competitive procurement exercise.

The replacement vessels are expected to be in service by Autumn 2018. It will include a 26m Mono-hull Patrol Vessel, South Fisheries and a 19m Catamaran Patrol Vessel, North Fisheries.

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17 Feb 2017



A conference on how social media can help young people access mental health support in Scotland is to take place on Monday.

The event will bring together social media organisations, MSPs, experts and charities to explore how online firms can do more to assist those seeking information on psychological matters.

It has been co-organised by Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs and Twitter, and will be attended by both leader Ruth Davidson and mental health minister Maureen Watt.

The Edinburgh event was organised after Mr Briggs called on social media firms to offer free mental health advertising on their platforms last October.

That sparked contact between the Lothians MSP and Twitter, with the firm saying it will support the best campaign ideas which emerge on the day.

Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs said:

“Last year I called for social media companies to offer free advertising for mental health organisations so more of our young people would know where to access mental health information and support.

“Surveys have shown the vast majority of youngsters don’t know how or where to access such support.

“I am delighted Twitter took up my call and have worked with me to arrange this event.

“It will bring together mental health charities, youth organisations, academics, design experts, MSPs and the Scottish Government.

“It’s brilliant news that Twitter has pledged to support the best campaigns that come out of the day, ensuring they will reach young people across Scotland and potentially inspire other ideas around the UK and beyond.”

DAY – Monday, February 20, 2017

TIME – 10am-4pm

PLACE – The Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh EH1 2NE

All media are invited to attend. Both Miles and Ruth will be available for interview and photographs.

Miles urged social media firms to do more to help youngsters coping with mental health challenges last year:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/10/social-media-firms-should-offer-free-mental-health-adverts/>

For more information on the event visit:

<https://blog.twitter.com/en-gb/2017/how-can-social-media-help-address-mental-health-public-policy-goals>

Press release: West Midlands company director handed penalty by court for waste offences

On 16 February 2017, Jaskaran Bhandal, Director of Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd, Oak Farm, Kingswinford, West Midlands pleaded guilty at Wolverhampton Magistrates’ Court to 1 count of failing to remove waste from the site, and 1 count of operating a waste site without an authorised environmental permit.

Mr Bhandal was fined £1,332, ordered to pay £3,265 in costs, along with a £120 victim surcharge and disqualified from being a company director for 5 years.

The charges were brought by the Environment Agency under Section 59(5) and 157 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and contrary to Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(1)(a) and 41 (1)(b) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Environment Agency Officers had been working with Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd to bring the site into compliance under their environmental permit until it was revoked. This decision was upheld at an appeal made to the Planning Inspectorate, and the company was ordered to remove all the

waste from the site by 2 July 2014.

Officers visited the site in November 2015 and saw that significant amounts of new waste had been deposited at the site. Officers made a number of enquires and determined that the waste had been deposited by Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd, after their permit had been revoked.

Officers served a Notice to Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd in May 2016 to remove all the illegally deposited waste by 19 November 2016. Officers visited the site on 22 November 2016 and noted some attempts had been made to remove the waste but the vast majority remained in situ.

Mr Bhandal was interviewed and admitted to knowing the site did not hold the relevant permits to carry out the work undertaken, he also accepted he was unable to comply with the Notice served but this was due to financial reasons.

Speaking after the case, the Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

The successful prosecution of this case should send out a clear message that the Environment Agency is adopting a robust approach to ensuring those who flout the law are brought to justice. Despite extensive previous efforts to work with the company and seek compliance, it became apparent that prosecution remained the only option to deal with this matter appropriately.

In mitigation, the court heard that the defendant had pleaded guilty at the first available opportunity, had co-operated with the Environment Agency during the interview and that he was sorry for the offences committed.

Mark Drakeford announces details of High Street Rates Relief Scheme

The scheme will support almost 15,000 shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes, including those which have seen their rates increase as a result of the independent Valuation Office Agency's (VOA) revaluation, which comes into effect on April 1.

The high street rates relief scheme will also provide support to other retailers – some of whom have seen their rates decrease as a result of revaluation – who are struggling in the face of economic conditions and competition from online and out-of-town providers.

Eligible retailers will receive up to £1,500 off their non-domestic rates

bill if they have a rateable value of £50,000 or less in the 2017 18 financial year.

To maximise the amount of support which can be provided and ensure it is targeted at areas and businesses most in need, there will be two tiers of relief available.

The first tier of relief will apply to high street retailers with a rateable value of between £6,001 and £12,000 who are already receiving either small business rates relief (SBRR) or transitional rates relief. They will receive a reduction in their rates bill of £500 or, if their bill is less than £500, it will be reduced to nil.

The second tier of relief will apply to eligible high street retailers with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £50,000 which are experiencing a rates increase from April 1. These ratepayers will receive a reduction in their rates bill of £1,500.

They will receive a higher level of support to reflect the fact they are not receiving other support, such as SBRR, and may be facing large increases in their rates following the revaluation.

High street rates relief is unique to Wales and will provide crucial support to small and medium businesses at this time – it is estimated that this will benefit almost 15,000 businesses.

The targeted rates relief scheme will be provided through a special grant made to each local authority.

Announcing the details today, Professor Drakeford said:

“Some retailers across Wales are concerned about increases in their rates as a result of the VOA’s revaluation.

“We are therefore providing a further £10m to help businesses in those communities which have been adversely affected.

“This new scheme is in addition to the £10m transitional relief scheme, which will also be available from April 1 and the £100m tax cut for small businesses in Wales provided by small business rates relief. It will provide vital support to ratepayers on high streets across Wales and offer these businesses extra support.

“Work is already underway to develop a new permanent small business rates relief scheme for 2018. We are listening to the feedback we have received so we can make the scheme as fair, reasonable and transparent as possible.”

The Welsh Government has been working closely with local authorities to develop the scheme and prepare for its implementation.

Retailers can find out whether they are eligible for the high street rates relief scheme in 2017-18 by contacting their local authority. Accompanying guidance will be provided to local authorities to support the effective administration of the relief.

Ben Cottam, Head of External Affairs for FSB Wales, said:

“We welcome that the Welsh Government has made good on its commitment to easing the pressure on high street businesses affected by the introduction of new levels of business rates. We also welcome the Government’s engagement with FSB on this issue in recent months. We would now encourage local authorities to engage quickly with businesses to ensure that all those who are entitled to this relief receive it as quickly and simply as possible.

“This will go some way to providing breathing space for many businesses whom we know have been concerned about the impact of new rates bills on their business.”