

Speech: What you should really be worrying about: climate change

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Speech by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency

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Why you should worry about climate change

What keeps you awake at night? Fear of terrorism? Nuclear war? Economic collapse? If so, you're worrying about the wrong thing.

The Global Risk Report 2018, compiled by business leaders for last month's Davos meeting, put something else at the top of the list. The biggest risk now facing the world, they concluded, is none of the above – it's climate change. So if you have been worrying about the wrong thing, at least you are now at the right conference.

What it means for the UK

What does climate change mean for the UK? In 2009 the first UK Climate Projections brought together contributions from over 30 scientific organisations to model the likely changes to our climate out to the end of this century.

Those projections and more recent evidence suggest that average UK summer temperatures could rise by up to 4°C by 2080; that sea level will rise by up to 1 metre by the end of the century (more in some locations); and that we will see more extreme weather, including heavier, more intense rainfall.

Likely consequence: more frequent and more extreme flooding, greater coastal erosion and heightened risk of droughts. You don't need to be a genius to work out what that could mean for vulnerable communities up and down the country, rural as well as urban.

Why this matters for UK cities

We care about all communities in this country. But we're focusing today on cities. That makes sense. Over 83 per cent of the UK population now live in urban areas: that is expected to rise to over 90% by 2030. Our cities drive much of our economy and are engines for innovation. And they offer some of the biggest opportunities: if we get their future design right, they will play a crucial role in the transition to a low carbon and resilient future.

But our cities are also exposed to some of the greatest risks. It is an inconvenient truth that most of our cities, and therefore most of our

population, are located by coasts or rivers or in other low lying locations; and that wherever our cities are, every single one of them depends on water.

The Committee on Climate Change has identified six major climate-related risks for the UK. The biggest of all is increased flooding – from rivers, the sea and surface water. This will impact particularly on our cities. It will threaten our city homes and businesses; the power, water, communications and transport infrastructure on which our cities rely; and the broader supply chains on which our city economies depend.

Greater flood risk is not the only threat that climate change is bringing to our cities. The Committee identified others too: there will be heightened risks to health, wellbeing and productivity from high temperatures; risks of shortages in water supply (a risk that has already materialised in Cape Town right now); threats to our natural capital; to food production; and from pests and diseases.

The good news

That's the bad news. The good news is that we can successfully tackle these threats if we work together; and indeed that if we do this right, we can create even better cities that are life-enhancing places to live and work, an even stronger economy and an even better country.

What the EA is doing

The EA itself is directly engaged in trying to turn all this risk into opportunity. We're doing that in three main ways.

First, we're helping to reduce the causes of climate change.

We administer a number of the government's carbon reduction and energy efficiency schemes. We oversee the regulation of over half the UK's carbon emissions, and we're having some success – since 2000 greenhouse gas emissions from the industries we regulate have decreased by 39%. We're an energetic and positive regulator of the renewable technologies we need for the future, including hydropower and anaerobic digestion and, perhaps one day, tidal lagoons.

Gandhi said: "be the change you want to see in the world". So we also try and live low carbon in the Environment Agency's own daily operations. Over the last decade we have cut our emissions by over 40%. We have a travel hierarchy that encourages us away from carbon. We've invested in low emission technology and renewables across our estate and in our vehicle fleet.

We also ensure that our own Pension Fund makes sustainable and responsible investments, and it's been globally recognised for that. That includes investing in the Carbon Trust's Low Carbon Workplace partnership, in which businesses come together to acquire and refurbish office buildings to make them into modern city workplaces that minimise energy costs and carbon emissions.

Second, we're helping building long term resilience to climate change for our

cities.

Example: water. The biggest single influence on long term water availability is – you guessed – climate change. Water supplies are under further stress as our population rises. We are also seeing greater stress on the natural environment. Unless we take action now, demand for water in this country will eventually exceed supply.

Part of the answer is reforming the current system for taking water out of rivers and the ground. The Environment Agency regulates this through our abstraction licensing system. If you want to take more than 20 cubic metres a day, you will normally require an EA abstraction licence, many of which limit how much water can be taken. We actively manage thousands of those licences, working with the water companies, farmers and businesses who are their primary users to balance water availability and demand.

But this system of abstraction licensing was designed more than 50 years ago for a world with less demand for water, fewer people, almost no environmental protections and little awareness of climate change. That's why we are now working actively with water users and the government to reform it, so we can give abstractors what they need while protecting water supplies and the wider environment for the long term.

Second example of future proofing ourselves through resilience: flood defence. The Environment Agency's £2.6bn flood defence investment programme will better protect 300,000 homes – the majority in cities – by 2021. We have built climate change projections into all those schemes, to ensure they will continue to offer a high standard of protection over decades into the future as the climate changes. Those climate change projections are built into the present Thames Barrier not far from here, which we own and operate. And they are built into our thinking about what London will need to replace the present Barrier some time after 2070.

Third example of future proofing: urban planning. The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee on most development. We work actively with city planners and developers to ensure that new housing, new infrastructure and other developments are sustainable, and will remain resilient to flooding and to the other, less obvious effects of climate change.

One of those effects is the risk of extreme temperatures in our cities due to urban heat island effects. The way we design and build our urban spaces can avoid those urban hotspots, and we are active in helping cities shape the right design.

The third contribution the Environment Agency is making to a successful low carbon future is helping to shape future policy,

We contribute data, analysis and advice to the government's Climate Change Risk Assessment and its National Adaptation Programme, an updated version of which is due this summer. We contribute to the UK Climate Projections, which will also be updated this year. We helped write the 25 Year Environment Plan launched last month by the Prime Minister, which commits the government to

“all possible action to mitigate climate change, while adapting to reduce its impact”. That Plan has our full support and we will have a major role in delivering it.

Finally, we are supporting the government’s Clean Growth strategy. Our Chair, Emma Howard Boyd, is actively involved in initiatives to shape a bright urban future, including the Future Cities Catapult and the Green Finance Task Force.

Conclusion: think big, act early, be visible

Let me conclude with these thoughts. The Environment Agency is not, as we are sometimes portrayed, anti-growth. On the contrary. Our primary purpose, spelt out in the 1995 Environment Act that established the Agency, is not actually protecting the environment: it is promoting sustainable development. Our job is to do both of those things: to protect and enhance the environment on the one hand, and ensure sustainable growth and development on the other. And there is no greater prize in sustainability than successfully tackling climate change.

The Environment Agency has a slogan for handling flood incidents: think big, act early, be visible. That’s not a bad strapline for tackling climate change. We have another slogan too for how we try to work: One Team. We try to be One Team both inside the Environment Agency and with our partners.

All of us are here because we care. We’re all pretty good at what we do. But none of us is as good as all of us. So let’s not worry about climate change, let’s do something about it. Let’s tackle it together, and build a better future for our cities and our country. The Environment Agency will be your partner in that great endeavour.

[Press release: Updated plans for major A2 improvements published](#)

Under the plans, the Bean and Ebbsfleet junctions will both see their capacity increased, improving journeys, boosting safety and preparing the road network for the transformative growth expected in north Kent in the coming decades.

Both junctions will see enlarged junction roundabouts, with new lanes and enhanced slip roads. At Bean, a new bridge will be built over the A2 dual carriageway providing two extra lanes between the two junction roundabouts, which will also be improved, and an additional slip road for eastbound traffic joining the A2.

The Ebbsfleet junction improvements include enlarging the existing

roundabouts, widening the road between the roundabouts to a dual carriageway and widening existing slip roads.

An initial consultation ran between January and March last year, before the preferred options were announced in August. Now, the public is being asked for views on the updated plans, which will form the basis of the project's formal planning application.

Highways England Senior Project Manager, Brian Gash said:

Bean and Ebbsfleet junctions serve Bluewater, Ebbsfleet International station and soon the new Garden City and these vital upgrades will help to make sure that the A2 stays fit for the future opportunities coming to Kent.

Demand is expected to grow by up to 200 per cent by 2027, so it is vital that the final proposals we end up taking forward for planning permission are the best we can possibly make them. People's input into the consultation will help us make sure that they are. There are important decisions still to be made about each junction, so I'd encourage anyone with an interest – drivers, residents, business owners and visitors – to get involved.

The announcement has been welcomed by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, who have also contributed £45m funding for the project.

Ian Piper, Chief Executive of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, said:

With up to 15,000 new homes in Ebbsfleet Garden City, it is important that local infrastructure is improved to accommodate this growth. With our support for the proposed scheme for the two A2 junctions and a commitment from us to improve public transport in the area through a new and upgraded Fastrack service, we are investing to ensure traffic continues to flow.

Details on the plans and feedback forms will be available online from 21 February until 11:45pm on 4 April 2018 on the [scheme web page](#). These pages also include details of the Public Information Events that are taking place throughout February and March.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: Devolution talks take a considerable step forward

Discussions between the UK Government and the devolved administrations on the EU Withdrawal Bill have taken 'a considerable step forward', the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington MP said today after chairing the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting in the Cabinet Office.

Mr Lidington said the Scottish and Welsh Government Ministers had acknowledged that the changes the UK Government is proposing to Clause 11 of the Bill represent good progress. Ministers agreed to meet again as soon as possible to try and reach an agreement.

Speaking after the Joint Ministerial Committee (European Negotiations) meeting in Whitehall, David Lidington said:

We had a constructive discussion today. We have not yet secured an agreement but have agreed to meet again in the very near future to crack this.

The Devolved Administrations acknowledged that the proposal we offered yesterday was a significant step forward.

We want to find an agreed way forward that respects and strengthens the devolution settlements and which also provides certainty for businesses and families as we depart the EU.

As we have always been clear, it is our intention that the Devolved Administrations will have more powers as a result of this process.

It is also very important that we protect the UK internal market and ensure that companies all across the UK are able to buy and sell freely.

Joint Ministerial Committee (EU negotiations) communique, 22 February 2018

The seventh Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) met today in 70 Whitehall. The meeting was chaired by the Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK Government:

- the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Rt Hon David Lidington MP
- the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Rt Hon David Davis MP
- the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
- the Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Alun Cairns MP
- the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon David Mundell MP

From the Welsh Government:

- Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford AM

From the Scottish Government:

- the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Michael Russell MSP

In the absence of Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive, a senior civil servant from the Northern Ireland Civil Service was in attendance.

The Chair opened the meeting by summarising the constructive bilateral engagement with the Scottish and Welsh governments, including political developments that had taken place since JMC(EN) last met. The Secretary of State for Exiting the EU provided an update on the previous rounds of negotiations with the EU. The Committee discussed forthcoming priorities, including the implementation period and the future relationship with the EU.

The Committee discussed the role of the Devolved Administrations in contributing to the process of developing the UK position in the next phase of negotiations with the EU on the future relationship. The Committee noted the engagement that had taken place between UK Government and Devolved Administration officials since the previous meeting to open discussion on the future economic and security partnerships. Engagement would continue with the aim of ensuring the Devolved Administrations were fully involved in developing the UK's negotiating position, while respecting the UK Government's role as negotiator.

The Committee discussed the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, including the proposal to amend clause 11. It was noted that progress had been made, but agreement had not yet been reached between the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government on the form of an amendment. Discussions on further detail would continue in the coming weeks.

The Committee discussed progress on common frameworks. Multilateral official level discussions had explored a range of areas where common frameworks may be required, including where legislative and non-legislative approaches could be appropriate. These discussions were ongoing.

Press release: Aquilon Medical

Nebulisers: people urged to stop use immediately

Following withdrawal of CE certification for the Aquilon series of nebulisers, the manufacturer has continued to place the nebulisers on the market. We have issued a [Medical Device Alert](#) today to all relevant healthcare professionals.

The affected nebulisers and packaging do have a CE mark placed on them, however this has not been obtained through appropriate regulatory oversight and therefore, their safety cannot be assured.

A medical device cannot be marketed in Europe without carrying a CE mark. It is applied by the manufacturer and means that the device meets the relevant regulatory requirements and, when used as intended, works properly and is acceptably safe.

This issue affects Aquilon2, Aquilon, Aquilon+ and Aquilon Pro series medical nebulisers manufactured since 01 April 2015. MHRA believes that more than 8,000 Aquilon nebulisers, which have been on the market since 2015 are affected in the UK.

If there is suspicion that a nebuliser is affected, people are advised to stop using immediately, dispose of the device and to use an alternative nebuliser where available. It is advisable that you speak to your healthcare professional or GP who can help you find out if your device is affected, give you advice on how to dispose of it and provide a replacement.

John Wilkinson, MHRA's Director of Medical Devices said:

We have been made aware that the manufacturer has continued to sell nebulisers even after their CE certification was withdrawn. We cannot guarantee they have been manufactured to an appropriate standard.

These devices deliver potential life-saving treatment and it is vital they operate correctly when needed.

We are taking action, as a matter of priority, to make sure people are aware the CE mark has been withdrawn and that these devices should not be used and should be disposed of.

Patient safety is our highest priority and we urge anyone with questions to speak to a healthcare professional as soon as possible.

Media enquiries

News centre
MHRA

151 Buckingham Palace Road

Victoria
London
SW1W 9SZ

Email
newscentre@mhra.gov.uk

During office hours:
020 3080 7651 (08:30 – 17:00)

Out of office hours:
07770 446 189 (17:00 – 08:30)

Office hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm. For real-time updates including the latest press releases and news statements, see our Twitter channel at <https://www.twitter.com/mhrapress>

[Press release: Child sex offenders sent to prison after Solicitor General's action](#)

Two men who sexually abused two 14 year old girls have been sent to prison after the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, appealed their sentences.

Lee Pollard and Marc Allen were each originally sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment suspended for 24 months at Exeter Crown Court for the offence of sexual activity with a child.

Pollard and Allen who were both 24 at the time knew their victims were under-age when they had sex with them but they later denied this. The offences took place while the young girls were under the influence of alcohol and drugs at a party in Dawlish.

Today, after the action of the Solicitor General, the Court of Appeal quashed the original sentences and replaced them with immediate prison terms. Pollard has been sentenced to 2 years 9 months imprisonment and Allen 3 years 6

months imprisonment.

Commenting after the hearing today, the Solicitor General said:

Despite knowing that the girls were only 14 years old Pollard and Allen engaged them in sexual activity and provided them both with alcohol and drugs. They have no excuse for their behaviour. I hope that the increased sentences will bring some comfort to the girls' families.