

EU's cities and regions share European Commission concerns over Polish government's changes to laws on the judiciary

□The European Committee of the Region has voiced its support for a decision by the European Commission to invoke Article 7 of the EU treaty against Poland, as there is “a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law”. In a resolution adopted on 1 February, the EU's assembly of local and regional politicians noted that the concerns raised by the Commission – about the adoption of laws that it believes have resulted in the lack of an independent and legitimate constitutional review and judicial independence – are of “direct and immediate relevance” to local and regional authorities.

At the same time, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) urged the EU's decision-making bodies not to suspend EU funding for Poland's cities and regions if the national government fails to address the EU's concerns. The CoR said that local and regional authorities should not “be held hostage to policies pursued by national governments”.

Under Article 7 of the EU treaty, and with the support of 22 of 27 member states and two-thirds of the European Parliament, the EU could strip Poland of its voting rights.

The CoR's resolution called on Poland and the Commission to engage in a “constructive dialogue”, warning of potentially “harmful spill-over” into debate about the future of EU spending after 2020. Polish cities and regions are major beneficiaries of the EU's cohesion policy and its associated structural and investment funds.

The resolution was adopted at the first plenary of the CoR since the European Commission invoked Article 7 on 20 December 2017. The Commission has given Poland three months to address its concerns.

The eight-point resolution, which was passed with 77 votes in favour, 39 against and 26 abstentions, will now be sent to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

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Our action to support nurses

Nurses are the superheroes of our healthcare system. They are there for us when we're at our most vulnerable, are entrusted to care for our loved ones and even help us bring our children into the world.

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Press release: 50th Promising

Innovative Medicine (PIM) designation granted

The scheme, which launched in 2014, helps to give patients with life threatening or seriously debilitating conditions earlier access to new and innovative treatments.

Medicines developers, including research organisations, can apply for a PIM designation if they have evidence to support that a medicinal product is likely to offer major advantage for patients. Upon designation, the application can then proceed to a scientific opinion assessment which leads to patient access in the NHS.

EAMS is a key part of our commitment to accelerating patient access to innovative treatments and supporting the UK life sciences environment. Between April 2014 and December 2017, 18 positive scientific opinions have been awarded in a number of different clinical areas with unmet medical need.

Dr Ian Hudson, Chief Executive Officer at MHRA said:

Reaching this milestone means 50 new indications from promising medicinal products have emerged in the last four years alone. As a result, current and future patients will be able to access potentially life-saving drugs that they may not have otherwise had the chance to have.

We are delighted with the success of the scheme, to date, which is part of our priority to ensure, new, good quality, safe and efficacious innovative treatments are available to patients at the earliest opportunity.

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Press release: Camera footage helps secure fisheries conviction

Body worn camera footage captured by Environment Agency officers on patrol has been used to support a conviction for the first time.

Callum Bell, 26, of Lyndsey Street in Houghton-Le-Spring, was fined for obstructing Fisheries Enforcement officers during an incident at Ouston near Chester-le-Street in June last year.

The footage shows Bell using insulting and threatening behaviour towards the two officers as they investigated an illegal fishing offence.

He appeared at Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court on Wednesday, 31 January, where he pleaded guilty to two offences of wilfully obstructing the officers in the execution of their duty, and two offences of using threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour towards the two officers. He was fined £534 and ordered to pay costs of £530.

In a separate offence from the same incident, David Daniel Bilverstone, 23, of Northlands in Chester-le-Street was charged with fishing without a licence. He failed to appear and the case was proved in his absence. He was fined £110 and ordered to pay costs of £180.

Threatening towards officers

Acting on behalf of the Environment Agency, Chris Bunting told the court that on 18 June last year, the enforcement officers were carrying out a patrol of the freshwater lake Ouston Springs. They saw Bilverstone fishing with a rod and Bell seemingly asleep on the bankside.

One of the enforcement officers took Bilverstone aside to fill in an offence report form. He said he goes sea fishing and claimed he didn't know he needed a licence.

At this point Bell awoke and walked towards where the officers were standing

by the lake side. It was apparent he was affected by alcohol. He quickly became aggressive and threatening towards the two officers.

He tried to grab the offence report book, threatened to push them in the lake and twice lunged towards one of the officers, trying to grab the officer's baton from its holster. Over the course of several minutes he continued to be verbally abusive, repeatedly swearing and making threats.

Even after the officers had finished dealing with the illegal fishing offence, he continued to shout abuse towards them from across the lake.

When interviewed, Bell said he was drunk and hadn't meant to obstruct the officers. In court, he offered an unreserved apology for his actions.

'Safety of staff is paramount'

Rachael Caldwell, Environment Agency Enforcement Team Leader for the north east, said:

Bell was told on more than one occasion that he was being recorded by the cameras but he continued to be threatening and abusive.

Our officers are doing an important job to ensure people are fishing legally and taking action against those that aren't. The safety of our staff is paramount and they shouldn't have to put up with any kind of abusive or threatening behaviour.

This is the first time cameras worn by our officers have been used to support a conviction. Our preference is to prevent hostility in the first place and I hope this serves as a warning to others that their actions are being recorded and will be used in future court proceedings. Hopefully people will think twice before acting in such a way.

Environment Agency enforcement officers in the north east first trialled the use of body worn cameras last year to help reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour, assaults and threats against staff. It's expected they will be rolled out to teams elsewhere in the country in the coming months.

The cameras – which are the norm among many enforcement agencies – can be used in a variety of ways, including at visits to poor performing waste sites, illegal waste sites, during fisheries and navigation patrols and even during incident response.

Officers must follow clear guidelines on use of the cameras, including telling people they are being filmed, and deleting any footage after a month unless it is used for evidential purposes.

Fishing is free for children under 16, although those aged between 12 and 16 still need a junior licence. For anyone over 16, a full annual licence costs

from just £30, with some short term and concessionary licences also available. [You can buy your rod licence online](#)