

Better regulation needed to protect environment and boost economy, says Environment Agency Chief Executive

The Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, is calling for a modern approach to regulation in order to protect air, land, and water from future threats, including the climate emergency.

Sir James' appeal comes as the UK contemplates its Covid-19 economic recovery with the freedom to determine its own laws outside the EU.

He says that better regulation, not deregulation, is needed to allow companies to thrive while protecting nature and communities from the effects of the climate change and other risks such as new technologies.

Sir James said:

The economic damage done by Coronavirus means we need rapid recovery and the kind of regulation to facilitate that. And after leaving the EU, the UK has the opportunity to set its own rules and modernise regulation.

But we must avoid false choices. Better regulation isn't code for deregulation. The test for any changes in legislation must be that they will deliver better environmental outcomes as well as being good for the economy.

Good regulation isn't complicated, bureaucratic, and costly; it is simple, impactful, and money-saving. The best regulation will stop environmental damage at the source, rather than the costly impact to the public purse and the environment of responding to damage after the event.

We also need the right resources, funded by operators and by Government, to deliver the high ambitions we all have in enhancing our environment. Ultimately we will get the environment we are prepared to pay for.

Sir James' words coincide with a new report that reveals the importance of environmental regulation in protecting air, water, and land from harmful pollution.

The EA's Regulating for People, Environment and Growth report (RPEG) shows how communities and ecosystems are currently being protected from existing risks posed by industrial activities.

The RPEG report, comprising data from regulatory activities in 2019, shows

many improving trends in environmental compliance, pollution incidents, crime, and emissions.

Since 2010, emissions of air pollutants have fallen significantly (nitrogen oxides by 63%, sulphur oxides by 81%, PM10 particulates by 34%); the number of serious pollution incidents fell 12% to 467 from 2018 to 2019; and waste recovery at permitted sites has improved to a record 74%.

The report also shows that, in 2019:

- The EA processed around 320,000 transactions for businesses and individuals
- The EA stopped illegal waste activity at 940 sites, 3% more than the previous year
- The EA inspected 1,889 containers to help prevent illegal waste exports
- Businesses and individuals were fined £4.4 million for environmental offences.

Sir James added:

This report shows that regulation works. And now we must look at how we use regulation to tackle the climate emergency – the biggest of all threats to our environment, our economy, and our planet.

We are already playing a significant role through regulation, by enabling the technologies needed to decarbonise the UK economy, including nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture, and we have launched the new UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

But as we and our world continue to change, we must not allow the environment to be left behind.

[The full Regulating for People, Environment and Growth report is available online.](#)

The Environment Agency's vision of promoting green growth and a sustainable future is a key strand of the ['EA2025' five-year action plan, which can be found online.](#)