

[Press release: Xylella fastidiosa: UK secures added EU protections](#)

The European Commission's Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCOPAFF) has approved (Thursday 19 October) increased protections against *Xylella fastidiosa*. The plant disease has devastated olive plantations in southern Italy and is killing plants and trees in areas across Europe.

Last month the Environment Secretary Michael Gove [wrote to the European Commission](#) stressing that if EU protections were not increased, we would consider our own national measures, which could include a suspension of high risk imports. The disease, which could be deadly to our oak trees, would be difficult to eradicate if it was to arrive, which is why the UK has pushed hard for these increased protections to help keep it out.

The new measures incorporate key proposals from the UK and include strengthened movement requirements on high risk plants and require quicker responses to potential findings of the disease.

Following the vote Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Xylella poses a serious threat to our plants, trees and horticulture sector and as I made clear to Commissioner Andriukaitis last month, we need to see robust action by the EU against the disease.

I am therefore pleased this has been taken forward. These increased protections will add to our own efforts to protect our horticulture sector and our famous ancient oaks which have stood tall and proud for centuries as a national symbol of strength and survival.

While the measures we pressed for will come into force, we will keep the risk level under continuous review to determine if further measures are needed to keep the disease out of the UK.

When we leave the EU we will have an opportunity to examine all our national biosecurity measures on plant imports to ensure they are as robust as possible and we are doing everything we can to protect the UK against diseases like Xylella.

The new measures will take effect around the end of November, following a formal adoption process in the European Commission and will supplement measures already in place in the UK which require certain plants to be notified to the plant health authorities when they are brought into the country. This enables the Animal and Plant Health Agency to carry out targeted inspections as well as surveillance for disease in the wider environment.

Scientific ocean drilling expedition explores continental rift development in Greece

The Corinth Rift, located in the Gulf of Corinth in Central Greece is one of the most seismically active areas in Europe. It is here that one of the Earth's tectonic plates is being ripped apart causing geological hazards including earthquakes. This rifting process is the focus of the International Ocean Discovery Program (IODP) Expedition 381 "Corinth Active Rift Development".

Press release: River restoration project wins national conservation award

A partnership project between the Environment Agency and the Box Moor Trust in Hemel Hempstead has been recognised with a national award.

The project has transformed a 1 kilometre stretch of the River Bulbourne in Hemel Hempstead from a straight, wide and silty river into a meandering chalk stream, which is a globally rare habitat.

The 'Bringing Back the Bulbourne' project scooped the 'best medium scale' award at The Wild Trout Trust Conservation Awards held at the Savile Club in London. The awards seek to recognise and encourage excellence in habitat management and conservation and celebrate effort, ingenuity and imagination.

Nancy Baume from the Environment Agency said:

We are delighted that our work to restore the River Bulbourne has been recognised by the Wild Trout Trust. This project represents years of hard work for us and our partners.

The Environment Agency is committed to working with partners to protect and restore our chalk streams for the benefit of wildlife so future generations are able to enjoy these unique resources.

The £60,000 project has breathed new life into the river. The natural meander of the river has now been restored, creating new habitats for plants and wildlife. Removing a weir has allowed fish to move along the river, while cutting back trees has allowed more light to reach the river.



An aerial photo showing the straight river before the project works started.



An aerial photo showing the restored river after the project works.

Volunteers have installed woody habitat features along the channel which create refuge areas for fish and other wildlife.

Other works include installing fencing to reduce bank erosion from livestock, creation of kingfisher banks to increase nesting opportunities, and improving ford crossing points across the river. The project has been designed to incorporate natural flood management techniques, and the final phase of the project, to create wetland scrapes, will take place later this year.

People walking through the moors can now appreciate a rare and iconic chalk stream with all of the rich diversity of wildlife that it supports.

The River Bulbourne is an example of a chalk stream, which is a watercourse that flows from chalk-fed groundwater. Chalk streams are a very rare habitat globally, with more than 85% of all the chalk streams in the world found in England.

David Kirk the Chairman of the The Box Moor Trust said:

The Box Moor Trust would like to thank all of those involved at the Environment Agency, in particular Nancy Baume and Jack Herriot, for all of their hard work and dedication over the last few years. The Trust would also like to thank Allen Beechey of the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project for his help and our dedicated team of volunteers whose tireless work has been integral to the success of the project.

This project is part of a wider programme of works which the Environment Agency are working on, alongside partners, to deliver improvements to chalk streams in the Hertfordshire and North London area. These works include river restoration improvements and abstraction reductions.

For more information contact: HNLenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

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Press release: Melksham Metals boss to pay £1.99 million or be jailed for 8 years

The owner of a Wiltshire scrapyards and recycling company has been ordered to pay almost £2 million he made from running an illegal waste site in Melksham.

In July, Lee Hazel appeared before Swindon Crown Court where he was warned he'd face an 8-year prison sentence if he failed to pay the full amount owed under a confiscation order made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The ruling marked the culmination of a 5-year investigation into Lee Hazel and Melksham Metals Recycling Ltd by the Environment Agency and Wiltshire

Police. Wiltshire Police conducted the financial aspects of the investigation

The original confiscation order was for £2.74 million, but this figure was reduced at Swindon Crown Court following an application to amend the earlier judgement under a legal clause known as the 'Slip Rule.'

Hazel's lawyers successfully argued it had been wrong to include a figure for VAT when calculating how much their client had benefited from crime. They also alleged that, in preparing its prosecution, the Environment Agency had mistakenly included invoices for ferrous metals.

After hearing evidence for the defence, Judge Tim Mousley QC, reduced the confiscation order to £1.99 million from the original figure of £2.74 million.

Hazel was warned on several occasions about unlawful waste activities including the illegal disposal of waste on farmland and depositing and processing waste without an environmental permit. He is both the owner and sole director of the company.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

These were serious offences committed by a waste operator who has little respect for the law and the environment. He was motivated by financial gain and carried out unauthorised activities over a number of years.

This case should serve as a warning to anyone in the waste industry who thinks they can flout the law. Where we have the evidence, we won't hesitate to prosecute offenders.

Investigations revealed that he and his company dumped stone off-cuts and sludge at a farm on the outskirts of Melksham beside an old canal, as well as carrying out unauthorised activities at his Station Yard premises in Bath Road, Melksham.

In February 2016, [Hazel received an 18-month prison sentence, suspended for two years, for running an illegal waste operation](#) at Station Yard and for the dumping of waste at a farm. The court heard the Environment Agency had revoked Melksham Metals' operating licence and the site had closed down.

Hazel was caught after an enforcement officer from Wiltshire Council found various waste materials including chalky stone, tarmac road planings and concrete pipes dumped in fields at Queenfield Farm beside the disused Wiltshire to Berkshire Canal. The officer followed a line of 'chalky liquid' in the road outside the farm back to Station Yard. He reported the incident to the Environment Agency.

Last year's hearing followed 2 earlier trials at Swindon Crown Court in June 2014 when Hazel and the company were found guilty of 4 charges in relation to the dumping of waste at Queenfield Farm, Melksham.

The court heard Melksham Metals had a contract to remove waste stone from a local stonemasons yard. The waste should have been taken to a licensed site, but was dumped at Queenfield Farm instead.

In November 2015 Lee Hazel and the company pleaded guilty to a further 5 charges each relating to unauthorised waste activities at his Station Yard premises.

They admitted the unauthorised treatment of controlled waste at Station Yard from 2004 to 2008, breaching a waste control licence, operating a regulated facility without a permit and having waste without authorisation. Hazel was warned that even if he was sent to prison, he would still have the debt hanging over him.

In addition, Melksham Metals Recycling Ltd was ordered to pay a £100 fine for each of the 7 offences it pleaded guilty to. Only a nominal fine was imposed on the company because of the size of the confiscation order.