

Press release: Somerset farmer ordered to pay nearly £4,000 for stream pollution

A Somerset farmer has been ordered to pay £3,996 in fines and costs for polluting a stream with contaminated water.

On December 4, 2017 Environment Agency officers paid a routine visit to Meare Green Farm, Stoke St Gregory to check the farm's pollution prevention measures. Before entering the site they noticed a nearby watercourse was heavily discoloured. Sewage fungus was clearly visible – a sign of organic pollution. A yellow pipe was discharging dirty water from the farm into the stream.

The pollution occurred near the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne that lies within a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area for Birds. The watercourse also joins the West Sedgemoor Main Drain, an important fishery.

The farmer, James Pine, explained the yellow pipe took roof water from the farm buildings and ran under a track between a slurry store and silage clamp. Officers saw a dark liquid leaching into the ground from the silage clamp. Dirty water then discharged into the stream via the rainwater pipe.

The defendant agreed to block off the pipe to prevent any further pollution. He explained the silage clamp had been extended over an area previously occupied by an old slurry lagoon. However, he had failed to install an impermeable base as required by the regulations and simply filled in the old lagoon and put down some hardstanding. This meant liquid silage waste could leak into the ground. He had also failed to remove a connecting pipe from the old slurry lagoon and this resulted in slurry overflowing into the ground when the new lagoon was full.

Magistrates heard the pollution had a 'significant impact' on several kilometres of watercourse.

Ian Withers at the Environment Agency said:

Farmers must ensure they have the correct pollution prevention measures in place and that their slurry stores and silage clamps are compliant with the regulations. The defendant had received two previous warnings before this latest pollution incident as well as guidance and advice from the Environment Agency. It was all the more regrettable the pollution occurred in a sensitive and highly designated part of the Somerset Levels.

Appearing before Taunton magistrates, James Pine was fined a total of £996

and ordered to pay £3,000 costs after pleading guilty to one offence under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 and two offences relating to the Silage Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil Storage Regulations. The case was heard on December 19.