

Somerset farmer fined for second time for polluting watercourse

Hembrow, of Huntham Farm, Stoke St Gregory, pleaded guilty to polluting a watercourse, a tributary of Sedgemoor Old Rhyne, 3 times.

A short distance downstream the watercourse enters the West Sedgemoor Site of Special Scientific, the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area and RAMSAR site.

The case was heard at Taunton Magistrates' Court on 6 October 2021, when the 33-year-old was ordered to pay the Environment Agency costs of £9,567.38, fines totalling £1,689 and a victim surcharge of £168.

On 19 June 2019, following a report of low dissolved oxygen levels on the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne, Environment Officers found a tributary polluted with slurry. They traced the pollution back to Huntham Farm, where a slurry lagoon had overtopped. Slurry had run across a farm track, collected in the orchard, and made its way to the watercourse, polluting more than 1.5 kilometres.

A week later, although the farmer had taken action to try and prevent further pollution, slurry was still visible on the bed of the watercourse.

On 29 October 2019, Environment Officers again attended a report of pollution to the same tributary of the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne. Their investigations found a surface water drain discharging to the tributary, and using dye tracing confirmed the drain was contaminated with run off from from dirty yards.

On 30 January 2020 following reports of further pollution to the tributary of the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne, Environment Officers found the tributary polluted with slurry due to slurry spreading activity on nearby fields. Slurry had been applied at a rate which caused run off in to the ditch.

In 2016 Hembrow was found guilty of polluting this same tributary of the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne.

Jo Masters, of the Environment Agency, said:

It was disappointing to find continual pollution from Huntham Farm following a previous prosecution in 2016.

We always strive to work with farmers to reduce the risk of pollution, protect the environment, and ensure they are compliant with the regulations.

If you are concerned about pollution to water or land, contact our 24-hour incident line on 0800-807060.

###Offences

Causing an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter from Huntham Farm, Stoke St Gregory, Somerset into inland fresh waters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

- June 2019 pollution: fine £921.00
- October 2019 pollution: fine £384
- January 2021 pollution: fine £384

Previous offence

In August 2016 Hembrow was fined £410 after he pleaded guilty to causing an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter from Huntham Farm, Stoke St Gregory, Somerset into inland fresh waters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

He was fined a further £410 with a £41 victim surcharge after admitting failing to ensure that silage was made and stored in accordance with Regulation 3(1) contrary to Regulation 10(1) of the Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010.

John Hembrow pleaded guilty to breaching condition B (I)(II) and B(II) (III) of a Consent to Discharge dated December 1, 1970 in that it permitted a water discharge activity, namely discharged effluent from the land and premises at Huntham Farm, Stoke St Gregory, into the tributary of the West Sedgemoor Main Drain containing silage liquor and which exceeded the limit of the biological oxygen demand of 200 parts per million not in accordance with its Consent to Discharge contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. He was fined £330 with a £33 victim surcharge.