

[News story: Consultation on fees for marine licences](#)

Defra has today [launched a consultation](#) on proposals seeking to revise the marine licensing application fees applied to England and the Wales and Northern Ireland Offshore marine areas. Changes are needed in order to maintain marine licence applicant fee rates in-line with the costs incurred by the Marine Management Organisation in determining a marine licence application.

This is being proposed to make sure the cost burden associated with administering licences for development lies with beneficiaries and not taxpayers.

Detailed information on the proposals is included in Defra's consultation document, but includes:

- availability of self-service licences
- a simplification of charges for a routine marine licence
- an increase in the hourly rate charged for routine and complex marine licences (from £94 to £122 per hour)

The proposals were previously discussed by the MMO's Chief Executive, John Tuckett, during a hearing of the [Environment Audit Committee in the House of Commons](#) in January 2017. They are also part of a wider [programme of improvements in marine licensing](#) to make sure that the process it is as efficient as possible and proportionately manages risks to the marine environment.

Businesses and industry representatives have been involved in this work and their views are being used to develop appropriate processes and services, such as a [self-service approach for some marine licences](#), which is mentioned in the consultation document.

The consultation runs until 2 February 2018. If any changes are agreed it is anticipated they will come into effect in March 2018. Further details will be provided in advance of any changes taking place.

[Speech: New Year Message from British Ambassador to Maldives James Dauris](#)

The relationship that the Maldives and the UK enjoy is long-standing. We are connected through history, through shared interests and concerns and, perhaps

most importantly, through people.

This year British tourists have again made a very important contribution to Maldives' economy. This year around a hundred thousand British holiday makers have visited your extraordinary country and I'm sure they will have enjoyed it. Of course a few people fall sick or get into difficulties and we are again grateful to the Maldives police and coastguard for the consular support they have given us during the year.

Education has long been an important tie for us. I'm pleased that this year we have again been able to help talented young Maldivians to study at prestigious British universities through our Chevening scholarship scheme, and it's great that we were able to sponsor a local journalist to join journalists from around South Asia for some training.

On a quite different theme, the threat from terrorism is one that countries around the world face today, Maldives and the UK among them. We've done some great work this year with the Maldivian authorities on aviation security issues. And we've provided training for security managers of resorts all around the country. I'm looking forward to more of this sort of cooperation – sharing best practice and working together helps to keep us all safe.

We have continued to support important work that is being done in Maldives on women's issues. Through the year I've really enjoyed meeting lots of people, men and women, in Male and on other islands who share my belief that our societies are better off when women and girls are able and encouraged to participate in all sorts of activities, including in business and politics.

Both as British Ambassador and as someone who has grown fond of your country over the two plus years that I've been in my position, I've seen things that worry me happen too. The freedoms to speak, to write, to meet, to justice, to choose are ones that should really matter, to all of us. We are hoping that we will see these freedoms start to flourish again in the coming year.

Since I was young I've had a strong interest in the environment and in effective conservation. In Maldives, beauty and environmental fragility go hand in hand. Experiences of countries around the world show us that coral reefs destroyed are impossible to replace, areas of mangrove bulldozed almost impossible to re-establish. It's because the Maldives are so unspoiled that many people choose to visit. Going forwards I think that getting the balance between economic interest and conservation is one that will need careful thought and principled decision-taking.

Looking to 2018, everyone will agree that one of the most important events is going to be the presidential election. Almost every Maldivian I meet tells me of their hope that the election and the whole election process will be fair, and that voters will have a real choice and a free choice. In the UK, we share that hope.

I trust that you will share my wish that, in Maldives, in the UK and around the world, we will see values that make our societies peaceful and prosperous, tolerant and fair, prosper in the year ahead, and our communities grow stronger and happier for it.

May I wish you success and happiness in the coming year.

[Speech: Christmas and New Year Message from British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka James Dauris](#)

The relationship that Sri Lanka and the UK enjoy is long-standing, broad and enduring. We can see this reflected in what we've been doing in 2017. Take business for example. British Companies have been winning new business, investing in Sri Lanka and creating new jobs for Sri Lankans.

Our long-established links through education have continued to grow. Around 30 British universities now offer degrees in collaboration with local universities, making their internationally recognised qualifications affordable and accessible for more students. Each year I enjoy meeting the winners of our Chevening scholarships before they head off for their post-graduate studies in the UK. The British Council established a new teaching centre in Matara earlier this year and its digital programme now reaches a million people across Sri Lanka. That's a lot of people.

I'm proud of the work my team has been doing in so many different areas with the Sri Lankan government and authorities. We have been contributing in lots of ways to the work that is going on around the country to promote reconciliation. To give you two examples, we've been funding work in the east to bring leaders of different faiths together, and we have been continuing to fund important humanitarian demining work in the north. We've been continuing our work with the Sri Lanka Police force on community policing and police reform. Our armed forces have been working together – earlier this month I met Sri Lanka Navy participants in a Royal Navy run course on marine resource management.

We share the welcome given by people in every community in Sri Lanka to all the steps taken over the year to help achieve and advance reconciliation between communities. It's to the government's credit that the Right to Information Act came into force in February, that Sri Lanka again committed itself to advancing reconciliation and accountability at the United Nations in Geneva in March, that President Sirisena approved the Act establishing the Office of Missing Persons in July, that it deposited its accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture at the UN in New York earlier this month, and that it has signed up to the Ottawa Convention that prohibits the use of anti-personnel mines.

I'm mentioning these things because I believe, and my government believes, that reconciliation really matters. With it will come the confidence and trust that will help to bring sustained and enduring peace and prosperity to

all Sri Lanka and to Sri Lankans of every faith and identity.

Looking towards the coming year, I'm encouraged that there will be local elections in February. Lots more women than before are going to be standing – something for us all to welcome. It's going to be important for the government to push forward with steps that will move on its Geneva commitments quickly. I'm also looking forward to seeing the government take more of the sorts of steps that we saw in last month's budget that will make Sri Lanka an easier place for everyone to do business and help to attract investors and win their confidence.

Meanwhile, in the UK we are looking forward to hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in London in the spring. Sri Lanka hosted the summit in 2013, and the London meeting will allow us to commit with the Commonwealth's other fifty members to a shared ambition for a vibrant grouping that serves the needs of future generations. Whatever our faith, whether we are Christian or Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim, each year Christmas brings us a message based on values that most of us share: a message of peace, joy and new beginnings, of tolerance, community and forgiveness. I'm sure you will share my hope that we will see these values prosper in the year ahead, and our communities grow stronger and happier for it.

I wish you a joyful Christmas, and success in the coming year.

News story: Announcement of the UK Independent Member of the Fundamental Rights Agency

Charles Banner has been appointed as the UK Independent Member of the Management Board of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) from 25 September 2017 to 31 July 2022. However, the term of office but may be truncated at the point when the United Kingdom ceases to be a Member of the European Union.

The Agency provides European Union institutions with assistance and expertise on fundamental rights in liaison with the Council of Europe as well as other international human rights organisations. It is also empowered to provide assistance and guidance to Member States but only when they are implementing Union law.

The Management Board is composed of one independent person appointed by each Member State, one independent person appointed by the Council of Europe and two representatives of the European Commission.

Members of the Management Board of the FRA are appointed by the Secretary of

State and are not regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Biography

Charles Banner was called to the Bar of England & Wales in 2004 and to the Bar of Northern Ireland in 2010. He practices across both jurisdictions as well as internationally, based at Landmark Chambers in London. His practice principally falls within two sectors: (i) Urban development, infrastructure and energy, and (ii) Government and regulation. EU law and human rights feature heavily in his work and he has appeared in several cases before the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights. He is co-founder and Deputy Head of Landmark International (the international brand of Landmark Chambers), a Council Member of the UK Environmental Law Association and (with effect from April 2018) an Independent Non-Executive Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' UK and Ireland Regulatory Sub-Board.

[Press release: PM announces landmark new package of defence and security cooperation with Poland](#)

The Prime Minister will travel to Warsaw today for an annual summit designed to strengthen the relationship between the UK and Poland as Britain prepares to leave the EU.

The UK-Poland bilateral summit will bring together both Prime Ministers along with a number of senior Cabinet ministers, including the Chancellor, Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Home Secretary and Business Secretary.

As an integral part of the summit, the Prime Minister is expected to announce a new joint UK-Poland Treaty on Defence and Security Co-operation. The only other European Union country we have such a treaty with is France.

It will provide a framework for defence cooperation on areas such as training, exercises, information sharing, defence industry cooperation and capability development, building on the deployment of British troops to Poland under Enhanced Forward Presence following the last UK-Poland summit held in London in November 2016.

The Prime Minister is also set to agree improved UK-Poland cooperation to counter Russian disinformation in the region, including through new joint strategic communications projects. The UK will provide £5 million for the projects, with Poland expected to contribute a similar amount. The projects will aim to build both of our capacities to detect and counter Russian information operations, and deliver valuable support to Belsat, a Polish-

funded TV channel providing unbiased, free and frank reporting for Belarussians.

And she will announce that we will enhance our cyber security cooperation with Poland, including by hosting a Polish cyber delegation at our National Cyber Security Centre in March next year to share the UK's world-leading expertise and best practice in this area.

Speaking ahead of the summit, the Prime Minister said:

Poland matters greatly to the UK: our partnership is broad, vibrant and diverse and we both share a steadfast commitment to Europe's security and defence.

I am determined that Brexit will not weaken our relationship with Poland. Rather, it will serve as a catalyst to strengthen it.

And that is why I am in Warsaw today, to ensure that we can work even more closely together to ensure the security and prosperity of our nations in the years ahead.

Although the UK is leaving the European Union, we are not leaving Europe. And I will reaffirm to Prime Minister Morawiecki that we want to work with Poland and the other member states in the future to protect our shared values, people and interests.

We are building a strategic partnership from a base of shared history and deep ties of friendship that will continue to flourish long after our departure from the EU.

The bilateral defence treaty we are signing today is a powerful symbol of our continued close cooperation.