

Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the resignation of the First Minister

News story

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The decision by the DUP to withdraw the First Minister from the Northern Ireland Executive is extremely disappointing. I urge them to reinstate the First Minister immediately to ensure the necessary delivery of public services for the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The UK Government's priority is to see a strong functioning Northern Ireland Executive delivering a better, more prosperous, shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

We want to continue to build on the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement's promise of a stable, cooperative and respectful power sharing Executive.

The last two years since the New Decade, New Approach Agreement was reached has demonstrated the potential that can be unlocked when the Northern Ireland parties work together. We must not return to a state of political deadlock and inertia.

I recognise the impact the Northern Ireland Protocol is having on the ground. The UK Government has been clear for some time that the Protocol has been causing serious problems, unbalancing the delicate and hard-won political stability in Northern Ireland.

We remain fully committed to fixing the problems with the Protocol and to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions. We will continue our intensive talks with the EU in order to resolve these.

I will be speaking to the leaders of the five parties of the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Irish Government, to encourage a return to stable devolved

government in Northern Ireland.

I hope that Northern Ireland's political leaders will take the necessary steps to restore the stability in the devolved institutions that the people of Northern Ireland deserve.

Published 3 February 2022

Ministerial Appointment: 3 February 2022

Press release

The Queen has been pleased to approve the appointment of Andrew Griffith MP as Parliamentary Secretary (Minister for Policy and Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit) in the Cabinet Office.



The Queen has been pleased to approve the appointment of Andrew Griffith MP as an unpaid Parliamentary Secretary (Minister for Policy and Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit) in the Cabinet Office.

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Sellafield Product and Residue Store

Retreatment Plant banks first major project contract

News story

A major project contract has recently been awarded on the Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant.



The Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant under construction on the Sellafield site.

A £40 million heating, ventilation and air conditioning contract has been awarded on the Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant.

Balfour Beatty Kilpatrick has been awarded the first Programme and Project Partners major project procurement contract which will enable the start of production, manufacturing, design, installation and testing of a key aspect of the retreatment plant's main building.

It's an important step and marks the first time a major project delivered through our Programme and Project Partners has awarded a material contract via its major project procurement framework agreement.

When completed the facility will repackage special nuclear material for long term safe and secure storage and having the right heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems in place is vital.

Richard Milliken, commercial manager for the Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant, said:

This is a key procurement for the Programme and Project Partners as it reflects the essence of the partners model. Collaboration was key.

For the team it has been a long journey involving development, challenges, input by many and much learning from experience.

I believe through a lot of collaboration across Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant Project Team, Programme and Project Partners Services, Sellafield Ltd Intelligent Client and Balfour Beatty Kilpatrick we got there. On this basis I would like to say a big thank you to all involved in this success.

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Rochdale food wholesaler harvests fresh government funding

- £500,000 General Export Facility from UK Export Finance helped overcome coronavirus (COVID-19) supply chain challenges
- Family-run Forrest Fresh's export operations have increased eight-fold as a result, safeguarding local jobs
- The business, which supplies Cadbury and Walkers, is now pursuing bigger contracts across Europe, the Middle East and South-East Asia

One of the UK's leading food and drink distribution specialists, Forrest Fresh Foods Ltd, has secured a half million pound cash injection from Barclays, backed by UK Export Finance (UKEF), to finance its global growth.

Rochdale-based Forrest Fresh Foods Ltd, a family run business, supplies over 5,000 lines of Britain's best-loved food, drink, confectionary and household products to retail and leisure outlets across the UK and to over 50 countries worldwide. Brands supplied by the business include Cadbury, Robinsons Juice and Walkers.

Thanks to UK government support, the company has increased its sales by 70%, overcome COVID-19 supply chain disruption and continued selling its British produce to the world.

Chris Craven, Managing Director of Forrest Fresh Foods Ltd, said:

Demand for our products has never been so high – and we've seen international interest in some of the UK's most renowned brands rise over the last few years. The UKEF support has been a breath of fresh air in what has been a difficult 12 months to navigate, enabling us to sustain our buying power and continue to price products competitively for our customers.

Mike Freer MP, Minister for Exports, said:

There's a world of opportunity for UK exporters, and global demand for Britain's best-loved food and drink brands continues to grow at an impressive pace. UKEF is committed to helping UK business such as Forrest Fresh Foods to seize this demand, as we aim to reach £1 trillion in exports annually.

The General Export Facility (GEF) was first available to UK businesses in March 2021 to support exporters through the pandemic. It was designed to provide exporting SMEs access to working capital support to make UKEF's support more flexible and accessible. Over £120 million worth of loans have been issued in the first nine months.

When the pandemic and global lockdowns started to hit supply chains, Forrest Fresh Foods encountered delays which threatened to make the time-sensitive goods supplied by the business unsuitable for sale. To bolster operations and ease cash flow, it was successful in securing a GEF of £500,000 in funding from Barclays with an 80% guarantee from UKEF.

The support has allowed the business to pursue and fulfil more ambitious exporting contracts, with Europe, the Middle East and South-East Asia set to be target markets in 2022 and beyond.

UKEF's GEF support for the business builds on an existing relationship, with the export credit agency having previously provided £500,000 in funding to Forrest Fresh Foods. As a result of the UK government backing, export operations have increased from 3% of overall revenue in 2017 to over 25% in 2021.

Forrest Fresh Foods Ltd now turns over in excess of £60 million per year, with more revenue streams to be unlocked in different markets in the next 12 months. The business is planning to increase its headcount by 27% in 2022, as a result of UKEF support bolstering job prospects in the region.

About UKEF's General Export Facility

For full details of GEF, please visit the website [here](#).

About UK Export Finance

[UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working along-side the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

Established in 1919, it exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for a lack of finance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

Update on investigation into the deaths of crabs and lobster in the North East

Defra and partner agencies have completed a thorough investigation of the cause of dead crabs and lobsters which were found washed up on the North East coast between October and December 2021.

Following significant testing and modelling to rule out possible causes, Defra and partner agencies consider that the deaths of the crabs and lobsters potentially resulted from a naturally occurring harmful algal bloom.

From the evidence found during the investigation it is unlikely that chemical pollution, sewage or infectious aquatic animal diseases were the cause of the deaths. No traces of chemical contaminants have been found that could have caused an event of this scale. Follow up survey work carried out by the Environment Agency on the 18th and 19th of January 2022 has also shown live healthy crabs present in the area, albeit in reduced numbers.

A review of dredging activity and water samples found no evidence of a link between the disposal of dredged sediment and the deaths. The sampling of sediment that has been licenced by the MMO for disposal to the designated sites off the Tees confirmed that no chemical determinants exceeded concentrations ('Action Levels') that would be harmful to marine life. A further review of dredging, disposal activity and water samples found no evidence of a link between the disposal of dredged sediment and the mass crustacean deaths.

This investigation was a multi-agency response, involving Defra, the Environment Agency, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NEIFCA), the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Food Standards Agency (FSA), UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), to identify what could have caused the event.

Evidence gathered by Government scientists and multiple agencies throughout this investigation will continue to be collated and studied. While this is no longer an active investigation, the agencies will continue to work with local fishers and remain on standby to respond if further events occur.

The in-depth investigation considered evidence from:

- Surveys by an EA boat, Humber Guardian, and shore-based monitoring teams.

- Traditional and innovative screening methods of samples of water, surface sediments, and crab which looked for over 1,000 potential chemical contaminants.
- Follow up on any indicative chemical signals, including pyridine, involving further testing of water, sediment, blue mussels and crabs.
- Washup events reported by the public and fishers.
- An analysis of crab samples for signs of infectious disease and naturally occurring marine harmful algal toxins.
- A review of environmental permits and industrial sites for evidence of abnormal discharges.
- A review of licenced marine activity in the local area (or deemed licence).
- Satellite imagery and phytoplankton samples.

While the chemical pyridine was initially identified in crab from impacted areas, further investigations by the EA established that pyridine was not present in water and surface sediment samples collected off the Tees, and that pyridine is found in crabs taken from non-impacted areas. As such, the presence of pyridine in crab is likely to be linked to biological processes.

Results from cyanide analysis were below the detection limit of the test.

There is no evidence linking any reports of dead seals around the UK coasts to the investigation on crab and lobster deaths in the North East.

The joint investigation has not found any evidence of a food safety risk from healthy fish and crustacea, including crabs and lobsters caught off the North East coast. While there is no food safety risk from eating crabs that have been caught in waters off the North East coast, it is unsafe to eat dead or dying crabs found on the affected coast.

The public are encouraged to continue report any incidents of concern to the EA helpline on 0800 80 70 60 and industry are encouraged to contact NE IFCA on 01482 393 515 or ne.ifca@eastriding.gov.uk.

Further information:

- Dredged sediment must be tested before it can be disposed to sea in accordance with international obligations under the London Convention, London Protocol and OSPAR convention. Sediment disposed at the Tees was previously tested and met necessary requirements.

Specific roles of each agency include:

- EA – Investigating pollution related incidents.
- Cefas – Investigating disease, harmful toxins and hydrodynamic modelling.
- MMO – Investigating whether licensable activity, including dredging and disposal, cabling and offshore windfarm activity, might have caused the mortality event.
- NEIFCA – Liaison with local fishing community and intelligence on stranding.

- FSA – Advising on food safety implications
- UKSHA – Advising on any threat to human health.
- Local councils – local outreach and advice on local areas.