

# Malian government and the Wagner Group: Minister for Africa's statement

News story

The UK is deeply concerned by the Malian government's discussions with Russian private military company Wagner Group.



Minister for Africa Vicky Ford's statement:

The UK is deeply concerned by consultations between the Malian government and the organisation known as the Wagner Group, in which Yevgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin holds a position of responsibility. Prigozhin is subject to UK sanctions for significant foreign mercenary activity in Libya and multiple breaches of the UN arms embargo.

The Wagner Group is a driver of conflict and capitalises on instability for its own interests, as we have seen in other countries affected by conflict such as Libya and the Central African Republic.

Wagner has committed human rights abuses, undermined the work of international peacekeepers, and sought control of mineral resources, to the detriment of local citizens and their economy. Wagner does not offer long-term security answers in Africa.

We support ECOWAS in urging the Malian government to reconsider their engagement with Wagner in light of the implications that any deal would have on stability within its own borders and the wider region. The UK also reiterates the importance of the political transition in Mali and of elections being held within the agreed time frame.

The UK contributes to security in Mali, in particular through our MINUSMA deployment and contribution to the French-led counter terrorism approach. With our allies and partners we will keep this

situation under close review.

Published 29 September 2021

---

## [Review of regulatory controls to strengthen protections for water environment](#)

The Government has today (29 September) unveiled proposals to improve water quality and regulate activities that affect our water supplies.

The changes are designed to:

- modernise the system of licensing water abstraction – when water is taken from the environment for use in farming, food manufacturing and public water supplies – by giving businesses and other licence holders access to a more streamlined service; and
- improve the management of activities that may impact groundwater quality through an updated risk-based approach to permitting

The system for regulating water abstraction was set up in the 1960s and still uses paper licences. Many licence holders also hold other environmental permits, meaning they have to operate under different definitions, processes and controls for different regulated activities.

A [consultation launched today](#) seeks views on proposals for amending regulations to include water abstraction and impounding licensing. This will bring the majority of environmental permits under one legal framework and allow people to manage all their permits in one place.

A more consolidated system will help the Environment Agency to manage water resources in a way that responds to a changing environment; making the best use of the available water for abstraction and continuing to protect, enhance and restore the environment.

Modernising the abstraction service is a key aspect of Defra and the EA's joint 2017 [Water Abstraction Plan](#), which sets out planned reforms for water abstraction management over the coming years and how these will contribute to the delivery of the goal in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan for clean and plentiful water.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

"Our 25 Year Environment Plan laid out our core commitment to ensuring the

provision of clean and plentiful water.

“To deliver on that pledge in a changing climate we need to look at how we can better support those who take water from our rivers and aquifers while building on existing protections for these resources and the ecosystems they support.

“I encourage anyone with an interest to take part in these consultations to help secure improvements that will benefit people, businesses and our precious water environment.”

A [separate consultation](#) proposes amending regulations to take a more practical approach to regulating activities that affect groundwater quality, for example returning treated water to the ground following the clean-up of a pollution incident and bringing in new protections for groundwater.

Groundwater plays an essential role in maintaining water supplies and is used in many industry sectors including food manufacturing and agriculture. It also supports important wetland habitats and sensitive surface water environments such as chalk streams.

The consultation proposes increasing the range of permitting controls available to the Environment Agency for activities that affect groundwater. These can currently be permitted only by the highest-tier permits, which are often disproportionate to the different levels of risk certain activities represent. A wider range of permits will remove unnecessary costs for businesses while still ensuring strong protections are in place for our water environment.

The new permits will also cover activities with the potential to introduce heat pollution or microbial pollution to groundwater, bringing them in line with the controls already in place for surface, bathing and drinking water.

The two consultations will run for 12 weeks until 22 December 2021.

---

## [North East fire risk waste site closed down](#)

A court order is now in place prohibiting anyone from entering or depositing more waste on the site at Shee Recycling at Durham Road, Birtley, after waste stored there became a fire risk.

It's the second time the powers have been used in the North East.

The Restriction Order was secured at Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court last week (Thursday 23 September) after Environment Agency solicitor Chris Bunting

outlined the case.

Environment Agency and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service officers have visited the site numerous times during 2021 to encourage the operators to bring the site into compliance with fire prevention guidance, including reducing waste volumes and introducing fire breaks between piles of waste.

Items being stored at the site include large oil drums containing hazardous waste, cutting equipment, batteries and fuel canisters all of which increase the risk of fire. The site had been at a high risk of a fire breaking out if activities continued.

The Environment Agency has now locked the site's access gate, placing a warning notice at the entrance. Anyone entering the land without reasonable excuse or written permission from the Environment Agency will be committing a criminal offence, as will anyone who tampers with the lock or notice.

Some of the waste stored on site.

## **Concerns over waste storage**

John Crowl, Environment Agency Enforcement Team Leader in the North East, said:

Our priority is protecting the local community and environment. This order has been secured following concerns about the storage of waste at the site and its potential fire risk and after extensive work together with our partners at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

The site is close to other commercial properties, the east coast mainline and Rowletch Burn, and poses a significant environmental risk.

Unfortunately, despite repeated visits and action from the Environment Agency, the company has consistently failed to adequately address the issues raised.

This is the second time these powers have been used in the North East and it demonstrates the robust steps we will take to put a stop to illegal waste activity and to protect the environment and communities.

While most waste sites are operated responsibly, we will take action against those who flout the law.

## **Work with fire and rescue service**

The Environment Agency is working alongside Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue

Service as enquiries continue.

Each of the 17 community fire stations at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service has the responsibility of assessing which sites in the local area pose the highest potential fire risk to local residents.

After visiting Shee Recycling, crews from Birtley Community Fire Station identified the risk being created by the excessive amounts of recycling materials being stored on the site by the owners.

Paul Thompson, Group Manager West District at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, said:

This case is a perfect example of how the Fire Service is creating the safest community by working in partnership with organisations like the Environment Agency.

Our assessment focussed on the hazards and probable danger to life if a major incident were to occur on the business premises at Durham Road. This included the need to evacuate residential homes in the surrounding area, the risk to transport links, and the overall threat to the environment.

The court's decision to block access to the site shows how seriously all parties have taken this case, and the potential consequences it could've had on the local community if a large fire or major incident had occurred.

We hope this conveys to other businesses in Tyne and Wear that the powers and authority are in place to successfully bring cases like this to court.

To report waste crime call the Environment Agency's 24-hour Incident Hotline on 0800 807060.

---

## [Employers welcome SMC guidance to tackle 'class crisis' in the creative industries](#)

A new toolkit aimed at widening access to the creative industries for people from working class backgrounds has been launched today in an attempt to tackle a 'class crisis' in the sector.

The [Socio-economic Diversity and Inclusion: toolkit for the creative industries](#) – developed by the Social Mobility Commission in partnership with businesses across the creative industries – offers practical support and guidance to creative employers on how to identify and remove invisible barriers that arise at every stage of the employee journey.

According to new research, just 27% of the creative industries workforce comes from a working class background, compared with 39% of the wider UK workforce. For the ‘advertising & marketing’ and ‘music and performing arts sub-sectors’, the percentage of the workforce from a working class background falls to just 23%.

The unique structures of the creative industries workforce are cited as driving this imbalance, with factors including the high numbers of ‘professional’ jobs within the sector, an entrenched reliance on freelance workers as well as an abundance of unpaid internships creating additional barriers to entry for those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Disproportionate numbers of those in senior roles who attended private school or Oxbridge may also have served to perpetuate understandings of cultural ‘fit’ and accepted behavioural codes within the creative industries, presenting an additional barrier to those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Employers and industry groups from across the creative industries’ sub-sectors have welcomed the toolkit. Those who have contributed or endorsed the toolkit include: The BBC, BFI, UK Screen Alliance, Youth Music British Fashion Council, Museums Association, British Institute of Interior Design and the Publishers Association.

Responding to the release of the toolkit, Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

A working class background should never be a barrier to a successful career in the creative Industries. We want to increase access to opportunities across the board as part of our plan to level up. This new toolkit will help support creative firms become more inclusive and give people the chance to forge a successful career in these exciting sectors.

Caroline Norbury, CEO, Creative Industries Federation, said:

If creativity is to shape a better future for all, then it has to reflect the diversity and breadth of experience found across the country. Ensuring opportunities exist for creative individuals to thrive, no matter their background, is an important step towards achieving this. The Social Mobility Commission’s toolkit is a critical resource for addressing the unacceptable imbalance of socio-economic backgrounds found in the UK’s creative industries

Farrah Storr, Social Mobility Commissioner and Editor-in-Chief, Elle UK said:

It's been great to see so many within the industry collaborate on the development of this toolkit. For the whole creative sector to remain vibrant, it is vital that we tap into the full potential of the whole population, not just a privileged few.

The creative industries create the culture of the nation, which in turn necessitates full participation from the entire nation. As organisations adopt the actions set out within this toolkit to make socio-economic inclusion a reality, we will become an industry that is both rich in diverse viewpoints, experiences and stories as well as an industry that is built to last.

Heather Carey, from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre and Work Advance said:

As we rebuild following the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that we widen access to opportunities created in high-growth, high-skill parts of the UK economy, like the Creative Industries. Our research provides definitive evidence on the causes of class imbalances and sets out an ambitious and wide-ranging programme of change to enhance social mobility into the Creative Economy. Government and Industry must seize this moment, as we emerge from an unprecedented crisis, to address the long-standing inequalities in the Creative sector and to grasp the potential offered by diverse talent in the UK to cement our creative excellence and competitive advantage, globally.

The Social Mobility Commission is hosting a public launch event on Monday 11 October, to be chaired by Farrah Storr, SMC Commissioner and Editor-in-Chief of Elle and featuring a discussion with industry insiders: Jamie Gill, CEO ROKSANDA and Executive Board, British Fashion Council; Della Hill, Creative Lead at Literature Wales and Emily Jones, Senior Producer at Sage Gateshead. [Register for the event at SocialMobilityWorks.org](https://www.socialmobilityworks.org)

Heather Carey from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre will present the findings of PEC's new research report: [Social mobility in the Creative Economy: Rebuilding and levelling up?](#)

---

## **[GFSL Hidden Heroes announced](#)**

Press release

Gov Facility Services Ltd (GFSL) is proud to announce the winners of its own Hidden Heroes today (29 September 2021).



Hidden Heroes are being celebrated across the UK today – so GFSL has created new awards of its own to celebrate those who truly deserve recognition in the Facilities Management industry.

These awards are not associated or endorsed by the main Butler Trust awards to be announced in December. These individuals have been nominated by GFSL Site Managers and judged by GFSL CEO, Paul Ryder.

There were some inspirational nominations in the line up, but the final 13 were those who stood out as having gone ‘above and beyond’ during the recent pandemic. This was evident in the written testimonials from both GFSL managers and HMPPS customers who paid tribute to their performance, such as working extra shifts and duties to support colleagues who were absent due to COVID.

The GFSL Hidden Heroes Star is Andrew Whale – Escort and Safety Manager

Location: HMP Coldingley

Andrew will be presented with a £150.00 reward voucher by Coldingley Site Manager, Adrian Page.

The 12 winners below nominated as GFSL Hidden Heroes will each be presented with a company certificate, a £25.00 reward voucher, and a special notice of thanks to be shared in the company communications.

- Keith McMurtry
- Terry Wisniewski
- James Spooner
- Justin Turner
- Jacob Godkin
- Harriet Allen-Miles
- Martin Roberts
- Darren Hartley-Morgan
- Paul Newman
- Robert Ward
- Suzanne Deaves
- Aaron Watson



GFSL CEO Paul Ryder said:

It was a difficult award to judge these awards as there are countless people who deserve one. Today is about showing our appreciation for the loyalty and resilience shown during an extremely difficult period. These awards recognise the important contribution people have made, whether large or small, to maintaining the prison service.

Published 29 September 2021