

North Devon company fined for pollution that devastated fish population

The company, A J Sing and Son Ltd, of Pillavins Farm, near South Molton, pleaded guilty when they appeared at Exeter Magistrates Court on Wednesday 28 July 2021.

Ryan Adams, an employee of A J Sing and Son Ltd at the time of the incident, also pleaded guilty, and was fined £667 with costs of £2,000.

On Wednesday 31 July 2019, Environment Officers were called to a fish kill on the River Mole near South Molton. They recorded more than 9,000 dead fish, including salmon, brown trout, sea trout, bullheads, stone loach and minnows, in the 4.7 kilometre stretch of the Mole and estimate that the total number of dead fish was around 15,600. Whole populations of salmonids, from mature adults to fry, were wiped out.

Some of the thousands of dead fish recorded

Environment Officers found the cause of the fish kill to be anaerobic digestate that had been deposited onto fields the previous day by the company A J Sing and Son Ltd. The deposit of digestate was from a leaking pipe which had been spilt on 30 July 2019, during land spreading operations, and left on the land. The digestate made its way to the river after heavy rain washed it off the land into a tributary of the River Mole.

Alun and Amanda Sing are directors of A J Sing and Son Ltd, which grows crops to feed the anaerobic digestion plant operated nearby by Condate Biogas Ltd. The resulting digestate is then tankered back to Pillavins Farm by Condate, where it is stored in a lagoon.

Pillavins Farm lies on the south side of the A361 North Devon link road near South Molton and at the time of the incident digestate was being spread on fields lying more than 1 kilometre away from the lagoon, on the opposite side of the road.

To reach the fields, pipework took the digestate through a rainwater culvert under the A361 and pumps were used to maintain the pressure needed to push the digestate the long distance.

The pipework was left in place for several days and Mr Adams, the company's sole permanent employee, restarted the spreading operation on 30 July, assisted by two self-employed sub-contractors.

The court heard that A J Sing and Son Ltd were negligent in that they did not have systems in place to ensure that the proper checks had been made and to

ensure that spills were properly dealt with; they used a method of delivery of digestate and equipment that introduced avoidable risks and used equipment that leaked.

They also heard that Ryan Adams was negligent in spreading digestate when rain was forecast and in not cleaning up the spill.

In court the Judge DJ Matthews quoted an Environment Agency fisheries enforcement officer, who said "the fish kill was the worst he had seen in 30 years".

Environment Officer Nicola Rumsey said:

"This was a truly shocking fish kill, on a previously pristine salmon river. It was one of the largest fish kills ever recorded in Devon and Cornwall.

"The discharge of digestate into the river had a devastating effect on the fish population. It may take a number of years for the fish population to fully recover.

"Great care must be taken when applying digestate to land. Simple observation of the weather forecast and the forecast of rain should have been enough to halt the digestate spreading.

"Only the right amounts of digestate must be evenly spread over land at appropriate times and when there is a crop or soil need. It should not be spread on steeply sloping land, close to field ditches and watercourses, on saturated or waterlogged land or prior to heavy rain falling. No digestate should be allowed to discharge to a watercourse."

If you see pollution or dead fish in a river, contact our 24/7 incident hotline on 0800 807060.

Notes to editor

Anaerobic digestion (AD) is the breakdown of organic material by micro-organisms in the absence of oxygen. AD produces biogas, a methane-rich gas that can be used as a fuel, and digestate, a source of nutrients that can be used as a fertiliser.

The charges:

A J Sing and Son Ltd pleaded guilty to the following offence:

Between 29 July 2019 and 1 August 2019 on land at Gortonhill Moors, South Molton you caused a water discharge activity not under or to the extent authorised by an environmental permit, namely by the deposit of organic matter derived from an anaerobic digestion plant on to said land, which subsequently entered the river Mole. Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(1) (a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Ryan Adams pleaded guilty to the following offence:

Between 29 July 2019 and 1 August 2019 on land at Gortonhill Moors, South Molton A J Sing and Son Limited caused a water discharge activity not under or to the extent authorised by an environmental permit, namely by the deposit of organic matter derived from an anaerobic digestion plant onto said land, which subsequently entered the river Mole and said water discharge activity was caused by an act or default on your part. Contrary to regulations 12(1)(b) and 38(6) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

[Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 29 July 2021](#)

Thank you Madam Chair, as the anniversary of the fraudulent August 2020 Presidential election approaches, we reflect with profound regret that the crisis in Belarus spirals ever further towards a never-ending black hole of systematic and relentless state-led human rights violations.

Let us remind ourselves of what took place nearly 12 months ago. Belarus held Presidential elections on 9 August 2020. There is a wealth of evidence to show that the Belarusian authorities contrived to manipulate the processes of that election to ensure Aleksander Lukashenko retained his grip on the power he has held since 1994.

As a consequence, tens of thousands of courageous Belarusians took to the streets in peaceful protest to voice their right to determine how they are governed. The response from Lukashenko's regime was to launch a brutal and sustained crackdown against peaceful protestors, democratic opposition leaders and supporters, independent media and journalists, and civil society. A assault on democratic principles and the rule of law continues to this day.

Nearly 12 months on there are nearly 600 political prisoners in Belarus, according to human rights organisations. Thousands of criminal cases have been brought for violating the procedure for holding mass events and protests. Arbitrary arrest has continued and prisoners report that conditions in detention centres include the horrors of torture, inhumane treatment and degrading conditions. And there have been systematic attempts to extinguish civil society and independent media.

There are no signs from the authorities that they intend to de-escalate the situation. In fact, in the past few weeks, security forces have stepped up their measures. We have witnessed non-governmental organisations and non-state media being systematically targeted across the country. Over 40 journalists and NGO employees have been detained in the past 3 weeks alone with five of them still remaining in custody facing criminal charges. Bank accounts have been frozen and the websites of independent news portals blocked.

The Ministry of Justice and the Minsk City Executive Authority have set in motion plans to administratively liquidate over 50 NGOs that have been working tirelessly to preserve and promote human rights, disability support, as well as cultural, educational, ecological and independent media initiatives. This cold, methodical approach to crush any opposing view amounts to nothing short of a purge – a term recently used by Lukashenko himself.

Madam Chair, civil society and independent media are key for democracy and should be able to grow and flourish in line with our OSCE principles and commitments; and their advocates should be free from the threat of arrest. Civil society groups should be allowed to work in engaging the most marginalised people. It should not be illegal for civil society groups to carry out their essential and trusted role in developing and protecting democracy and upholding human rights and the rule of law.

Over the last 12 months there have been continued reports, including from Professor Wolfgang Benedek, the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which describe a “systematic crackdown against dissent”, “hundreds of allegations of torture and mistreatment” and an assault against fundamental rights and freedoms “of an unprecedented dimension in the country’s history.”

Not only for what happened 12 months ago and what has been happening over the previous year, but also for what continues to take place in Belarus – I urge all members of this Permanent Council to condemn such appalling violations of even the most basic human rights. To call upon the Belarusian authorities to change its corrosive course; release political prisoners; engage with the recommendations in the [Moscow Mechanism report](#); open dialogue with civic society and the opposition; and enter into negotiations as a step towards resolving the crisis. That is the roadmap out for the Belarusian authorities.

Madam Chair, in these extraordinarily difficult times, the scale of the suffering of the Belarusian people cannot be overstated or ignored. We need to stand up as a Permanent Council to uphold our shared values and our shared OSCE commitments on human rights and democracy when we see such egregious challenge to it. And to support the Belarusian people.

Thank you.

[Students going through Clearing urged to apply now for student finance](#)

Students going through Clearing should not wait for their exam results before applying for student finance. That’s the message from the Student Loans Company (SLC) ahead of A-Level results day on 10 August.

SLC, which expects to process a record number of applications this year, says that any student who thinks they might be going to university or college and who has not applied for funding should do so now to ensure they receive their funding as close to term start as possible. Even if they are not certain what course they will be doing, it is best to apply now and update their online application later if they need to.

To help students who are applying for student finance during Clearing, SLC has produced a [new guide](#) containing useful resources including steps they can take to ensure their application can be processed quickly.

Those students who have already applied for funding do not need to take any action unless they are asked to [provide evidence](#), in which case they should supply it promptly, or unless their university, college or course details change, in which case they should update their details on their online accounts.

Student finance applications can take 6 to 8 weeks to process and eligible students who apply now may not receive their full funding entitlement at term start. However, they should still be awarded the minimum maintenance loan amount first; followed by a top-up payment if they are eligible for more funding. Students can keep track of their applications and view their [application status](#) via their online accounts.

Chris Larmer, SLC Executive Director of Operations, said:

“SLC exists to enable people to invest in their futures through further and higher education. This year we anticipate supporting more students than ever before and we are urging any prospective student, who has not applied for student finance, to do so now to ensure they have some funding in place at the start of term.

“We appreciate that now more than ever, attending university for the first time can be daunting, and we hope students will take advantage of the new guide we have made available online to help them as they go through Clearing.”

Students can stay up to date with all the latest student finance information, including information about Clearing 2021 by following Student Finance England on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

[Students in Clearing urged to apply now for student finance](#)

Last year, the Student Loans Company (SLC) saw its largest ever year-on-year increase in new student finance applications, and the number of applications

we have received this year has again increased. It is widely anticipated that record numbers of students will attend university or college this academic year.

SLC exists to enable people to invest in their futures by providing access to further and higher education and our absolute priority is to ensure that we have as many student finance applications as possible processed and ready to pay at the start of term, including those that applied late (after the deadline).

Still to apply for student finance?

We are pleased that the majority of students followed our advice and got their applications in before the deadline, ensuring that they will have funding in place for term start. However, we also recognise that some students may be going through Clearing or waiting for exam results before making a decision about their next steps.

If this is you, or someone you know, our message is clear: you don't have to wait on your exam results to apply for student finance. If you think you may be attending university or college this academic year, then we strongly advise that you apply now to ensure that you have some funding in place as close to term start as possible. You can do this even if you are not certain of your course or institution, it is better to apply now and update your university or course details later if you need to.

To help, we have produced a [new guide](#) containing lots of useful resources including information on how you can help us process your application quickly.

If you are applying now then you should be aware that student finance applications can take 6-8 weeks to process which means applications may not be fully processed by term start. We will do our best to ensure that all eligible applicants have some money in place by awarding the minimum maintenance loan amount first, followed by a top-up payment if students are entitled to more funding.

Already applied for student finance?

If you have already applied for student finance you don't need to contact us, we will contact you if we need anything further. If we ask you to [provide evidence](#) please submit it promptly and only send the specific evidence we ask for. You can check your [application status](#) online and view a 'to do list' of any outstanding actions you need to take.

If you change your course, university or college details during clearing you should update the details in your online account. Our [Clearing guide](#) includes information explaining how to do this.

Need an answer to a question?

The high volume of applications means our phone lines are particularly busy

right now and you might find it harder to contact us. Answers to the most common student finance questions are available at www.gov.uk/student-finance and www.studentfinancewales.co.uk and we would always advise that you try online for an answer first before calling us – some useful resources are listed below. If you do need to call then our quietest times tend to be at the weekend, whereas Mondays are our busiest days and best avoided.

Students in England can also contact us via Student Finance England's Facebook and Twitter channels and of course social media is a great way to stay up to date on the latest student finance information.

Over the next few weeks, our priority will be ensuring that as many students as possible start the new term with some funding in place. Applying now if you haven't already done so will help us achieve this.

Chris Larmer, Executive Director, Operations

Useful Links

[Engineers of the future impress the professionals at virtual work experience week](#)

The aim of the week was to provide young people aged 14-18 insights into construction and engineering within the highways sector, through a blended mix of learning that would encourage them to consider a future in the industry. The recent pilot featured 21 students from across England and 12 of the group's 17 member companies as well as Traffic for Greater Manchester.

Throughout the week the students met a series of experts, covering insights such as engineering, social value, quality, design, and how to win contracts.

Every afternoon they met with their assigned mentors who supported the students as they formed their own construction companies, and used what they had learned, along with their own research, to put together a tender presentation, based on a potential road project to a panel of industry experts.

Based on the knowledge survey results from the week, 100% of the students agreed that they see themselves working in the industry in the future, understood a variety of careers they could pursue and how the different professions worked with each other to deliver a project.

Poppy, a student on the work experience from Lord Lawson of Beamish High School in Gateshead, said:

I had a fantastic week and am so glad that I took this opportunity. I was the only student from my school to join the event and in doing so it has opened many doors for my final year in high school as well as helped me to understand where my future career lies. Thank-you to Highways England and all of the companies I met.

Highways England Education Group Lead Kevin Hutchinson, Social Value Manager at Warrington-based John Sisk and Son, said:

Every student was a willing participant, asking and answering questions as well as providing informative feedback and insights. I was amazed by the level of understanding they demonstrated. We threw a lot of information at them but they absorbed and presented it back to our judges like seasoned professionals.

I am also proud of the collaborative approach demonstrated across our Education Group to pull together and deliver this week.

Events like this help to attract the next generation of talent to our industry and I can see fantastic opportunities for future collaboration across Highways England, their supply chain and the rest of industry through this group.

The Highways England Education Group currently consists of the following construction companies and designers and is always looking to welcome new members from the industry: AECOM, Amey, Balfour Beatty, BAM Nuttall, Connect Plus M25, Costain, Graham Construction, Highways England, John Sisk and Son, Kier Construction, Morgan Sindall, Morrison Construction, Mott Macdonald, NMCN Construction, Osbourne Construction, Skanska, Volker Fitzpatrick and WSP.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.