

# UK statement on UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet

Thank you Mr President.

Madam High Commissioner, we wish to join others in putting on record our sincere appreciation for your work over these last four years. You have been the UN's leading voice on human rights at an incredibly challenging time. And perhaps the most challenging time since the position of High Commissioner was created.

When you took up your mandate no one could have predicted the huge global challenges that we have collectively faced in recent times. It was essential that the international system shone a light on the many human rights challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we thank you for being at the forefront of that effort.

Regrettably, we have seen many more serious problems which could have been avoided.

The aggression against Ukraine remains, appalling, an ongoing deliberately-made crisis which has clearly been driven by one party – Russia. We thank you for your recent comments calling on the Russian President to halt the armed attack against Ukraine and for accountability for the violations which have occurred.

In all regions, we have seen persistent attacks against human rights defenders; we have witnessed dramatic set-backs on women's rights; and we have observed with great alarm that persons belonging to minorities have come under attack.

It is vital that your successor continues to keep these issues firmly in focus.

Madam High Commissioner, we remain hopeful that in your final days in office, one piece of business, which remains as yet unfinished, will be dealt with. The UK has been among those at the forefront in calling for violations in Xinjiang, China to be properly investigated. It is essential for all of us, that no state is free from objective scrutiny on its human rights record, and that no state can be allowed to stifle the High Commissioner's independent voice. We therefore urge you to publish your report on China.

Madam High Commissioner, we wish you well in the next chapter of your hugely distinguished life and career and thank you for everything you have done to advance human rights over these last 4 years. Thank you Mr President.

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# Fast-track planning route to speed up major infrastructure projects

Press release

Major infrastructure projects such road improvements and offshore wind farms will be delivered more quickly through a new fast-track planning route.



- New fast-track planning route for major infrastructure projects in England and Wales
- Changes will support economic growth, improve transport links and enhance our energy security
- More than £750,000 for 10 projects to help councils get better outcomes for local communities in major infrastructure projects

Major infrastructure projects such road improvements and offshore wind farms will be delivered more quickly through a new fast-track planning route, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up Greg Clark announced today (30 August).

New powers will mean shorter deadlines can be set for examinations of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects – speeding up decisions and getting projects built more quickly. The relevant Secretary of the State – for example for Energy, Transport, Environment or Levelling Up – will decide whether to put the shorter deadline in place.

This also means decisions on smaller (non-material) changes to projects that have already been approved can be made much more quickly – currently these can take up to 16 months, sometimes causing significant delays to delivery.

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark said:

Particularly in a time of high inflation, things need to be done more quickly or costs of major infrastructure projects will rise.

These changes will help deliver new infrastructure more quickly, by speeding up the planning process often moves too slowly.

The government will make the changes to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects process through amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

Today's announcement is part of plans to speed up the planning process for large-scale projects and builds on efforts in the government's Energy Security Strategy to make sure the country is building the infrastructure it needs faster than before.

More than £750,000 has also today been awarded to 10 council-led projects to support innovation in ensuring the needs of local communities are reflected in the process.

Councils and local communities will continue to play a key role in the planning process, including by producing local impact reports that represent the views of residents and must be taken into account. Only suitable projects will go through the new fast track process.

- The [policy statement](#), including a full list of the local authority projects receiving funding, has been published.
- The government intends to publish a full Action Plan, as well as consultation on the national policy statements and on further regulatory and guidance changes to improve the operation of the system, over the coming months. This will include more details about possible timeframes and how the process would work.
- The funding for 10 council-led projects will go to councils in Somerset, Cumbria, Essex, Suffolk, Leicestershire, North Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, West Sussex and Norfolk:
  - Norfolk County Council are building a virtual system that will log information about local NSIPs including timelines, deadlines, contacts and meetings for other local authorities and applicants to see.
  - Cambridgeshire County Council and Suffolk County Council are each producing a centre of excellence, helping to capture and disseminate best practice – allowing other authorities to benefit from their considerable experience.
  - Selby District Council and North Yorkshire County Council are collaborating to develop a multi-disciplinary environmental framework which sets out the local authority requirements for submitting an NSIP application. These will be around landscape, biodiversity, environmental health and heritage. This framework will help to bring forward multiple NSIPs in one place and could be used by applicants, the council and the Planning Inspectorate at application and examination stages.
- To accommodate parliamentary printing times, the amendments will be available for MPs to read when they return from recess on 5 September 2022.

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## Appointment of four members to the Civil Justice Council

The Lord Chancellor has appointed Dr Natalie Byrom, Kate Pasfield, John Sorabji, and James Walker as members of the Civil Justice Council for three years from 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2025.

The CJC is a statutory advisory body established by the Civil Procedure Act 97.

The CJC brings together members of the judiciary, civil servants, legal professionals and others representative of the varied perspectives, sectoral interests, specialist and professional expertise found across the civil justice system.

The CJC has a statutory role in keeping the civil justice system under review. It advises the judiciary, government, and rule makers on the development of the civil justice system, especially how it can be more accessible, fair and efficient. It is empowered to make proposals for change and propose and undertake research.

### **Biographies:**

#### **Dr Natalie Byrom – Information Architecture and Econometrics CJC Member**

Dr Natalie Byrom is Director of Research at The Legal Education Foundation and founding Director of their Justice Lab initiative. She sits on the Administrative Justice Council as a member of the steering group and is data advisor to the President of the Family Division's Transparency Implementation Group. Between 2018 and 2020 she served as an Expert Advisor on Open Data to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, where she made a series of recommendations to improve data collection, architecture and governance in the context of the ongoing programme of digital court reform.

#### **Kate Pasfield – Other areas of expertise relevant to civil justice CJC Member**

Kate Pasfield is Director of Legal Aid Policy and Member Services for the Legal Aid Practitioners Group. She previously spent 17 years in private practice and the not-for-profit sector as a legal aid solicitor specialising in housing and community care work.

#### **John Sorabji – Barrister Role CJC Member**

Dr John Sorabji is a barrister at Nine St John Street Chambers and an associate professor within the law faculty at University College London (UCL). In 2021 he was appointed Legal Adviser to the Independent Review of the Human Rights Act. He has previously advised the Lord Chief Justice,

Master of the Rolls and other senior members of the judiciary on various legal and constitutional matters. He is General Editor of The White Book.

### **James Walker – Small and medium size enterprises (SME) CJC Member**

James Walker is Chief Executive of Rightly, an organisation which helps consumers manage and own their data footprint. He is also the founder and Chief Executive of JamDoughnut, an App that assists consumers to save money. James is also a Non-Executive of Consumer Scotland. He is a Non-Executive Director advising the Dispute Resolution Ombudsman and the Collaboration Network and sits on the Consumer Panels for the Office of Road and Rail and the Civil Aviation Authority. He formally founded and grew Resolver, a free consumer tool to assist consumers in resolving complaints and disputes and built an online dispute resolution platform

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## **Appointment of 2 legal members of the Civil Procedure Rules Committee**

News story

The Lord Chancellor has approved the appointment of Ben Roe and Virginia Jones as legal members of the Civil Procedure Rules Committee.



The Lord Chancellor has approved the appointment of Ben Roe and Virginia Jones as legal members of the Civil Procedure Rules Committee (CPRC) for 3 years commencing 10 June 2022.

The CPRC is the statutory body that governs the practice and procedure to be followed in the Civil Division of the Court of Appeal, the High Court, and the County Court.

The appointment of legal members of the CPRC are made by the Lord Chancellor Appointments after consulting the Master of the Rolls and the relevant professional body.

Appointments are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and recruitment processes comply with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

## Biographies

Ben Roe is a solicitor who is the Lead Knowledge Lawyer for Baker McKenzie's Global Disputes and Compliance Group, responsible for knowledge management and training for litigation, arbitration and compliance lawyers. He is a member of the Association of Litigation Professional Support Lawyers and the Quality Assurance Board overseeing the Witness Intermediary Scheme.

Virginia Jones is the Head of Learning, Knowledge and Development at Stewarts Law, London. She is a solicitor with over ten years' client-facing experience in general commercial disputes and a further ten in a 'knowledge' setting, helping to ensure civil disputes lawyers remain up to date on and able to apply current law, procedure and best practice. Virginia is also a committee member of the London Circuit Commercial Court Users Group.

Published 30 August 2022

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## [All of England's South West region now in drought](#)

- Public and businesses in drought affected areas urged to use water wisely as the dry summer impacts the environment.

The Environment Agency has today agreed that all of the South West of England is now in drought following some of the driest conditions in nearly 90 years.

Bristol, Somerset, Dorset, south Gloucestershire and parts of Wiltshire (referred to in the Environment Agency as the Wessex area) have all today moved to drought status. Earlier this month Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were also declared to be in a drought.

The triggers used to confirm today's move to drought status for the area include the hydrological position (including rainfall, river flows, groundwater levels, reservoir levels, and the dryness of soils), as well as the impacts these conditions have on the environment and abstractions. While the area has had some rainfall over the last 2 weeks, this has not been sufficient to compensate for the long dry period in recent months, but by waiting until now to declare a drought, it has given our response team time to consider the effects of the rainfall.

This change in status to drought is a change in categorisation, indicating the impact prolonged dry weather is having primarily on the environment and

in addition on water resources. Essential water supplies are safe, but Defra and the Environment Agency are urging water companies to continue with their precautionary planning to protect essential supplies in the event of a dry autumn.

In the Wessex area, the effects of drought are resulting in low river flows impacting the environment in and around rivers. So, we will work with companies and individuals who have abstraction licences allowing them to take water from rivers and groundwater boreholes, and with the public, to try to lower demand and therefore reduce the impact on the environment.

While there is an important role for people to sustainably manage their usage, Government expects water companies to act to reduce leakage and fix leaking pipes as quickly as possible and take wider action alongside government policy.

Chris Paul, the Environment Agency's area drought lead, said:

Despite some heavy rain over the past 2 weeks, it has not been enough to refill our rivers and aquifers.

River levels across our Wessex area are exceptionally low – many showing the lowest flows on record. This places incredible strain on local wildlife and this is why we are moving to drought status. We are prioritising our local operations to minimise impacts on the environment.

Action being taken across the area includes additional monitoring of the effects of the dry weather on rivers and responding to environmental emergencies, such as rescuing stranded fish, wherever possible. We will also be ensuring people and companies who have water abstraction licences only operate within the terms of their licence and taking legal action against those who fail to comply or against anyone who abstracts water without a licence.

The [Environment Agency's water situation national report for July](#) provides a picture of the rainfall, soil moisture deficit, river flows, groundwater levels and reservoir levels over the last month. The report highlights that it was the driest July across England since 1935, with monthly rainfall totals for the majority of river catchments classed as exceptionally low for the time of year.

There have been 5 consecutive months of below average rainfall across all geographic regions in England and above average temperatures. River flows, groundwater levels and reservoir stocks all decreased during July.

With Wessex now declaring a drought, 11 of the 14 Environment Agency areas in England are now in drought status.

## **Notes to editors**

The Environment Agency uses 4 stages to describe and manage drought conditions:

- Prolonged dry weather
- Drought
- Severe drought
- Recovering drought