

Government launches review into future offshore oil and gas licensing regime

The Government today announced it will review its policy on the future UK offshore oil and gas licensing regime as part of the wider aim of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

The review will ensure the Government has the information needed to plan for future oil and gas production in the UK, in a way that is aligned with tackling climate change. Initial findings and next steps will be published in the upcoming Energy White Paper.

Over half of the UK's electricity comes from clean sources including wind and solar energy. However, oil and natural gas are still required for heating, cooking and transport, and vital to the production of many everyday essentials like medicines, plastics, cosmetics and household appliances. This is likely to remain the case over the coming decades as the UK transitions to low carbon solutions.

The independent Committee on Climate Change has recognised the ongoing demand for oil and natural gas, including it in all scenarios it proposed for how the UK meets its target for achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

The oil and gas sector supports 270,000 jobs across the UK and plays a key role in developing the infrastructure and capability for green technologies such as carbon capture and storage and hydrogen power. The oil and gas sector is also a major source of tax revenue for public services and has provided over £330 billion to the UK Government from production taxation alone in today's prices.

The review comes as the Oil and Gas Authority announces the outcome of the 32nd licensing round for North Sea exploration. This is important for the country's ongoing energy security and economy, while ensuring that much-needed supplies are maintained even as the UK cuts carbon emissions.

Business and Energy Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Over half of our electricity now comes from low-carbon sources, power from coal is at an all-time low, and we have more installed offshore wind capacity than any other country in the world.

While we have decarbonised our economy faster than any other major country over the past two decades, the oil and gas sector will continue to be needed for the foreseeable future as we move toward net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Our review into future oil and gas licensing rounds will ensure we are able to meet our net zero target, while protecting jobs across the country as part of our plan to build back better with a

greener, cleaner economy.

The review is in keeping with the future direction of the Government's regulation of oil and gas in the UK.

The Oil and Gas Authority is currently reviewing its core strategy to ensure that it can assist in working with industry to support the UK's climate change goals.

Alongside this, the upcoming North Sea Transition Deal will be published within this Parliament, and will also set out more details later this year of how Government plans to work with the sector and key stakeholders to achieve the aim of supporting a transition to low carbon energy sources, while getting the benefit from the limited reserves in the North Sea and protecting highly skilled jobs.

£500 million funding for quick result COVID-19 test trials

- Government commits £500 million for COVID-19 test trials using latest technology
- New community-wide testing pilot launched in Salford and existing pilots expanded in Southampton and Hampshire
- Funding will also support the scaling up of testing capacity ahead of winter

A new £500 million funding package will be invested in next generation testing technology and increased testing capacity, the Health and Social Care Secretary announced today.

To date, our large-scale COVID-19 testing system has carried out more than 16 million tests and this new funding for quick result test trials and repeat population testing will help take the programme to the next level.

A new, community-wide trial in Salford will launch imminently to assess the benefits of repeat population testing. Existing, promising trials in Southampton and Hampshire, using a saliva test and a rapid 20-minute test, will also be expanded using the new funding.

By using this cutting-edge technology to widely roll out rapid tests, chains of transmission will be broken almost immediately by delivering on-the-spot results. Successful trials will then be expanded and rolled out more widely.

The funding will also be used to further extend capacity for existing polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing across the country. All positive results will be passed to the NHS Test and Trace system, to trace contacts,

prevent further transmission, and save lives.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Testing is a vital line of defence in combating this pandemic. Over the past 6 months we have built almost from scratch one of the biggest testing systems in the world. We need to use every new innovation at our disposal to expand the use of testing, and build the mass testing capability that can help suppress the virus and enable more of the things that make life worth living. We are backing innovative new tests that are fast, accurate and easier to use and will maximise the impact and scale of testing, helping us to get back to a more normal way of life.

I am hugely grateful for the work being done on this national effort to strengthen our ability to tackle this virus. While we work on a vaccine we must innovate our way out of this crisis.

New technology will be the driving force to break the chains of transmission, aiming for tests that are easy to complete, or can give results in minutes. New tests will be limited to certain settings as trials continue. Trials will also look at the benefits of mass testing, and how the testing programme can be improved and scaled up ahead of winter.

Trials across the country will now be launched or extended, with the latest starting in Salford today.

Salford

Saliva-based testing will be used to test the community in Salford, Greater Manchester, in the coming weeks. Working with Salford Council, local health partners and voluntary and community-based networks, some people living in Salford will be invited for a weekly test. The pilot will explore how regular repeat testing can be made as accessible as possible and will inform how to scale community testing across the country.

The pilot will begin with a select number of participants and up to 250 tests a day, to be scaled to the whole area. Initially, the pilot will focus on a specific high footfall location in the city, which includes retail, public services, transport and faith spaces. Weekly tests will help to identify cases early, including for those with no or minor symptoms, allowing those testing positive to self-isolate.

Southampton

Phase 2 of the no-swab saliva test pilot in Southampton will also start this week. The second phase of the pilot will trial the weekly testing model in educational settings, with participation from staff and students at the University of Southampton and 4 Southampton schools. Over 2,100 pupils and staff across 4 schools will be invited to have a test as part of the pilot,

which is led by a partnership of the University of Southampton, Southampton City Council and the NHS.

Hampshire

The pilot of the rapid 20-minute test in Hampshire will also continue to expand to further explore the applications of mobile testing in different settings.

Baroness Dido Harding, Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, said:

New testing technologies and methods are vital to keep the system evolving and improving, especially as we assess how routine testing could help pick up cases of the virus earlier.

We will continue to scale up our testing capacity by expanding our network of testing sites and investing in new technologies to reach even more people through NHS Test and Trace.

I urge everyone to use NHS Test and Trace to help everyone get back to a more normal way of life. If you have symptoms, book a test immediately, and if you are contacted by the service, follow the advice you receive.

City Mayor of Salford Paul Dennett said:

I am pleased that Salford is working with government to introduce community testing. We are clear that community testing is the way forward to find, isolate and contain the virus to break transmission. It will support us taking a more targeted approach.

I have been saying from the start of the pandemic that the government needs to entrust resources and control to local authorities to test, track and trace the spread of the virus. We understand our communities better at a local level.

This work is both an opportunity to develop community testing locally and to support our residents to stay safe, while allowing our economy, schools and social life to stay open.

The best way to control the pandemic is at a local level while there is no vaccine available. Our overarching priority is to protect the people of Salford and the lives of vulnerable members of our community.

Background information

- Initially the Salford initiative will aim to process up to 250 tests a day.
 - Almost 10,000 people took part in the first phase of the Southampton pilot, where GP staff, other essential key workers, university employees and members of their households were delivered tests to their home or place of work and completed tests by putting their saliva in a pot. The pilot showed the at-home saliva sampling kit to be a reliable means of testing for large-scale, regular testing.
 - 5,000 DNA 'Nudgebox' machines, supplied by DnaNudge, to be rolled out across NHS Hospitals in the UK to analyse DNA in nose swabs, providing a positive or negative result for COVID-19 in 90 minutes, at the point of care.
 - [New rapid LamPORE tests](#), processing swab and saliva samples to detect the presence of COVID-19 in 60 to 90 minutes.
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[A record-breaking year for hen harrier breeding](#)

Natural England has recorded the best year for hen harrier breeding in England since [Natural England's hen harrier recovery project](#) was established in 2002, with 60 chicks fledged from 19 nests across Northumberland, Yorkshire Dales, Cumbria and Lancashire in early summer 2020.

The success has been down to a number of factors including high numbers of voles which are a key food source, good weather, and strong partnership working between Natural England, RSPB, Forestry Commission, the Moorland Association, United Utilities, the National Trust, and others.

Hen harriers were once found across upland and lowland Britain including throughout many English counties, however after 1830 it became an exceptionally rare breeding bird in England due to raptor persecution, which was then made illegal in 1954. The hen harrier is now one of England's rarest birds of prey.

Hen harriers are one of our most distinctive birds, with a characteristic owl-like face and stiff facial feathers that direct sound toward their ears to enable them to hunt more effectively.

Tony Juniper, Chairman of Natural England, said:

"2020 has seen the best breeding season for England's hen harriers in years and I thank all those who've helped achieve this wonderful result, including landowners and managers, campaigners, conservation groups, police officers

and our own Natural England staff and volunteers.

“Despite the great progress there is though no cause for complacency. Too many birds still go missing in unexplained circumstances and I urge anyone who is still engaged in the persecution of these magnificent creatures to cease at once.

“Hen harriers remain critically endangered in England and there is a long way to go before the population returns to what it should be.”

This year’s success means that 141 hen harrier chicks have fledged over the past three years alone. [Natural England’s Hen Harrier Recovery Project](#) was established in 2002 to monitor hen harriers and work towards improving their numbers in England.

Although persecution is thought to be the main factor limiting hen harrier numbers in England, other factors including the suitability of local habitats and food availability are also significant in some areas.

Natural England is involved in a number of initiatives to help ensure hen harriers recover including through [Defra’s hen harrier joint action plan](#).

These include:

- satellite tracking to improve understanding of the bird’s movements and behaviour;
- supporting wildlife friendly habitat management in the uplands; and,
- working with a range of partners to protect the current population and extend its range across England.

Dr Adam Smith of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), said:

“This is a very promising result for a pragmatic conservation project. Management options for bird of prey conservation rather than just legal enforcement is very forward thinking approach. The GWCT has studied the very real tension between harrier conservation and grouse shooting for over 30 years. Until this managed approach was adopted – at no small risk to the reputations of all involved – there was a damaging deadlock.

“If this trend can be maintained and hen harrier conservation status further improved, whilst supporting the red grouse management that best delivers our unique heather uplands, it will be a real breakthrough for practical, working conservation.”

Amanda Anderson, Director of the Moorland Association, added:

“Yet again, it has been a fantastic year for hen harriers and we have now seen significant increases in successful nests and chick numbers for three years running as part of the hen harrier Recovery Plan which includes the

innovative Brood Management Scheme trial.

“Twelve of the nests reported today are on land managed for grouse shooting and this reflects a genuine commitment from moor owners and managers to work with others and help rebuild the harrier population.”

Hen harriers lay 4-6 eggs during late April–May, with incubation lasting 30 days. Hen harrier chicks then fledge in 28-32 days. Both females and males attend the young, with the males providing food which is often passed mid-air to the female in a distinctive display of ‘throw and catch’.

A high proportion of this year’s chicks have been fitted with satellite tags, which will allow Natural England to monitor the progress of the birds as they move away from their nest areas.

Additional information:

- A wide range of organisations have come together to work in partnership to ensure that the hen harrier chicks are well looked after and protected for the future. These include: [Natural England](#), [RSPB](#), [Forestry Commission](#), [the Moorland Association](#), [United Utilities](#), [the National Trust](#), [Hawk and Owl Trust](#), [Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority](#), [Northumberland National Park Authority](#), [Peak District National Park Authority](#), [Nidderdale & Forest of Bowland](#) Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and [Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#), [Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust](#), local police forces, individual Estates and their keepers, farmers, and a large number of volunteer raptor enthusiasts.
- The hen harrier is listed on Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive as it is considered vulnerable within Europe and is on the red-list of birds of conservation concern in the UK. It is a species of principal importance for biodiversity conservation in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Big step forward in digital infrastructure revolution brings benefits of 5G closer

- Major programme clears 700 MHz spectrum of radio waves for 5G and rural mobile coverage
- Spectrum will be auctioned off delivering nearly 20% more capacity for mobile services

- Comes after TV sets in nearly 20 million households were successfully re-tuned

Speaking later today at 5G World as part of London Tech Week, Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman is expected to confirm the milestone completion of the four-year £350 million major infrastructure programme to clear the 700 MHz spectrum band.

Spectrum is the airwaves over which televisions, mobile phones, tablets, radios and other devices communicate. Clearing a portion of the spectrum in the 700MHz frequency means that new data capacity is released for mobile operators.

Data use is only set to grow as 5G, the next generation of mobile connectivity, becomes more available and is used for an increasing array of new services and applications.

The 700MHz spectrum band had mainly been used for digital terrestrial TV broadcast (Freeview) as well as professional radio microphones used in music studios, theatres and outdoor events.

Now that 20 million homes have successfully re-tuned their TV equipment to continue to receive their TV channels on lower frequencies the 700MHz band is exclusively available for mobile use.

This will allow mobile operators and other innovative companies to use 5G to develop new high data usage technologies and services to boost sectors such as manufacturing, transport and healthcare.

The low frequency of the 700MHz spectrum band is ideal for carrying mobile signals into buildings and over long distances – including the countryside. The clearance will increase capacity in today's 4G networks helping level up rural communities with greater mobile coverage, reach, and reliability.

Releasing these airwaves will help increase the total amount of the radio spectrum available for mobile services in the UK by nearly a fifth (18%).

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

The smooth and successful completion of this massive infrastructure project ahead of schedule and under budget is a huge testament to the collaborative efforts of our partners.

We have overseen a quiet revolution in the airwaves which will lead to better mobile coverage for rural communities and unlock new ways for 5G to boost business productivity and improve people's lives.

Around 1,000 workers from organisations including Arqiva, Ofcom, Digital UK, Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited (DMSL) and the multiplex operators spent more

than 2 million hours clearing the spectrum.

This saw changes made to more than 1,200 television transmitter sites in some of the farthest flung reaches and on top of some of the tallest structures in the country.

In many cases it involved engineers physically replacing antennas at the top of masts. The antennas can weigh around six tonnes and lifting them involved significant engineering feats using cranes, and sometimes special 'Heli-Lift' helicopters.

Works included building a new temporary mast to stand alongside the iconic Emley Moor Tower in Yorkshire, which is taller than the Shard. At 1,040ft (317m), the temporary mast alone stood as Britain's seventh tallest structure.

The last part of the infrastructure works took place at Kendal and on the Isle of Man on 19 August where channels were switched to the new frequencies in the last of 57 'clearance events'.

Philip Marnick, Spectrum Group Director at Ofcom:

This is a major milestone for improving mobile services across the UK. It's been possible thanks to the meticulous planning and hard work from a range of organisations – all working together to make sure this huge project ran smoothly and minimising any disruption to TV viewers. The airwaves will now be available to use immediately after our upcoming spectrum auction, bringing better mobile and innovative new services a significant step closer.

Paul Donovan, CEO, Arqiva, said:

The 700MHz programme is the largest broadcast engineering project since the digital switchover, and has been described as 'performing open heart surgery' on the nation's television network. Around 20 million UK households enjoy Freeview services so a key requirement for this project was that the vast majority of them wouldn't even know it was happening. The team has performed brilliantly, and the organisation behind making sure each step was completed in the correct order was phenomenal.

Recent events have underlined the importance of television in providing people with news, entertainment and connections to the wider world. I'm incredibly proud of our team that, alongside this clearance programme, has continued to support Freeview by maintaining the network that broadcasts its signals into homes every minute of the day.

Kate Macefield, 700MHz Clearance Programme Director at Digital UK, said:

We're pleased to have helped coordinate these required changes to the 700MHz spectrum band with Government and our broadcast partners, and have worked closely with Digital Mobile Spectrum Ltd to support Freeview viewers through the programme and ensure they can continue to enjoy free-to-air television.

TV sets in 17.8 million homes were re-tuned to continue to receive their TV channels on lower frequencies, with 99% of viewers able to re-tune their TV's themselves. Only 1% of viewers needed free support from the Freeview Advice Line, and only 0.1% required home visits from engineers to get them re-tuned – in some cases even having their TV aerial re-aligned or replaced free of charge.

The programme, which was funded by DCMS, was estimated for completion at the end of 2021 at a cost of £400 million. Its completion in August 2020 at a cost of under £350 million represents a Government Major Portfolio Programme completing ahead of schedule and significantly under budget.

Ofcom, which has a duty to ensure the UK's spectrum is used efficiently, will be releasing 80 MHz of these important airwaves for mobile companies to use at an auction expected to take place in January 2021.

To help maintain strong competition in the UK mobile market, it will impose a 37% cap on the overall spectrum that any one mobile company can hold following the auction.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- In its [2020 Annual Report](#), the Infrastructure Projects Authority highlighted the projects as an example of the government, Ofcom, Digital UK, DMSL, Arqiva and multiplex operators successfully working closely to deliver shared goals. Its Gateway Review of the Programme in February 2020 gave a Delivery Confidence Assessment of "Green" which was a strong and positive endorsement for the Programme team.
- Arqiva is the sole provider of digital terrestrial television (DTT) services in the UK and around 80 per cent of its DTT transmitter sites – which transmit services from the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C, Channel 5 and other commercial TV channels – were impacted by 700MHz clearance. Providing 99 per cent of the population with access to the main UK's main television channels, Arqiva's DTT transmitter network brings TV services into the homes of tens of millions of people, so any changes made were planned meticulously to minimise impact to viewers.
- The government funded an expansion of the Digital UK Freeview Advice Line to handle calls from any viewers who were struggling to re-tune their TVs after regional clearance events. It also funded a number of field based engineers who do home visits and, if necessary and following

social distancing guidelines, make changes to their TV aerials.

Greater voice for rail passengers in new collaboration between government and East Midlands transport leaders

- government signs multi-year collaboration agreement with Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM) to give councils and local stakeholders a voice in the management of rail services
- two local posts created to focus on ensuring benefits delivered to passengers
- councils and local stakeholders can now review and address performance issues, positively influence decisions in the railway and promote service enhancements

Local leaders in the East Midlands will have a more influential role in deciding how rail services can support improvements across the region thanks to a new collaboration agreement with the government, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has set out today (3 September 2020).

The Department for Transport has signed a multi-year agreement with TfEM that provides local leaders with a formal voice in the management of the East Midlands franchise which has been run by East Midlands Railway (EMR) since August 2019. This builds on the close collaborative work which has been taking place between TfEM and EMR since the start of the franchise.

To ensure passengers see improvements and services work in the best interests of people across the region the government is jointly funding 2 local rail officers with TfEM who will work closely with the department and stakeholders.

Employed by TfEM, one of the posts will lead stakeholder engagement with the DfT and East Midlands Railway to secure better outcomes for local communities and businesses while the other is a support post to gather, analyse and present performance data to help make the case for improvement and or investment.

This new set up will enhance the department's management of the East Midlands franchise and provide a mechanism through which councils and local stakeholders can review and address performance issues, positively influence investment decisions in the railway and call for improvements to services.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

This bespoke collaboration agreement delivers a railway truly focused on meeting the needs of the passengers who use it. It provides councils and local leaders with a greater voice in the management of the services which matter to them, helping deliver positive long-term changes focused on what passengers want.

Our railways are at the heart of this country's transport links and it is essential that we work closely with Transport for the East Midlands to deliver the modern, punctual and reliable journeys people expect.

Will Rogers, Managing Director, East Midlands Railway, said:

Working in partnership with our local partners is absolutely vital to ensure the railway meets the needs and supports the aspirations of our cities, towns and communities.

We have worked closely with Transport for the East Midlands since the start of the franchise to develop and improve the service we provide. This further investment and formal collaboration agreement will further develop and strengthen our partnership as we invest to improve the railway across the East Midlands and beyond.

The collaboration agreement will last the length of the East Midlands Railways franchise, up to at least 2027, with a 12 month notice period on either side.

The department will continue to retain its existing role in monitoring and managing the delivery of the contractual deliverables and benefits and all financial responsibility and accountability for the franchise.

Sir Peter Soulsby, Chair of TfEM and City Mayor of Leicester said:

I am delighted that we have been able to sign this landmark agreement with the Department for Transport, which builds on a process of collaboration going back several years to the earlier franchise competition.

These are clearly challenging times for the railway but if we are to 'build back better' after COVID-19, then we will need to make sure that rail services enable local communities and businesses to thrive and that the local experience of rail travel is reflected in key decisions.

Cllr Richard Davies, Vice-Chair of TfEM and transport lead at Lincolnshire County Council said:

This collaboration agreement for the first time gives a direct

voice to councils and local stakeholders in the management of our rail services. This can only be good thing for the urban, rural and coastal communities that make up the East Midlands. I look forward to working with government and EMR to unlock the potential of the railway to grow our economy and create jobs.

Recruitment for the new posts is currently underway. Further details can be found on the [East Midlands jobs website](#).