

# Leicestershire operator to pay penalty for illegal abstraction

The Environment Agency (EA) has imposed a Variable Monetary Penalty (VMP) on JRM Hire and Leasing Limited for illegally taking water from Sapcote Quarry in Leicestershire.

The VMP was issued on 22 June 2022 and will see the company pay £8,510, plus the Environment Agency's investigation costs of £7,482.77.

Since November 2018, Environment Agency officers have been receiving regular reports regarding the illegal abstraction of water from the base of Sapcote Quarry and carrying out their investigations.

The quarry is situated close to the town of Sapcote, Leicestershire, and had filled up naturally since quarrying ceased in the early 1990s.

The quarry is owned Mr John R Mac whose company JRM Hire and Leasing Limited operates from the quarry.

Abstraction of water from any source is regulated by the Water Resources Act 1991. Under Section 27 of the Act anyone can abstract up to 20 cubic metres of water per day for any reason without the need for an abstraction licence. JRM Hire and Leasing Limited has never held an abstraction licence at Sapcote Quarry.

The EA requested the company voluntarily attach a water meter to the pump to show the abstraction was below 20 cubic metres per day. During a site visit to Sapcote in May 2019 to inspect the abstraction, EA officers observed the pump operating at the base of the quarry with the water meter detached and concealed nearby beneath a towel.

During May and November 2020, EA officers were successful at collecting evidence of non-compliant water abstraction from the quarry. A warning letter was issued for the May offence, but the continued non-compliance resulted in the penalty being issued.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

We take our responsibility to protect the environment very seriously. Where there is evidence, the Environment Agency uses a full range of enforcement options.

A variable monetary penalty (VMP) is a proportionate monetary penalty for the more serious cases of non-compliance.

We rely on communities to report pollution and environmental issues to us and urge people to report issues to us on our 24/7 incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

### **How much is a VMP?**

The maximum amount for any VMP is £250,000 for each offence. The exact amount is calculated using the methodology in Annex 1 of the [EA Enforcement and Sanctions Policy](#).

### **When can VMPs be used?**

A variable monetary penalty can be used in following situations:

- when there is evidence of negligence or mismanagement
- when there is an environmental impact
- to remove an identifiable financial gain or saving as a result of the breach
- where it is not in the public interest to prosecute.

### **What happens to the money once the VMP has been paid?**

The money is transferred to Her Majesty's Treasury – The Environment Agency does not keep the money to fund its own activities or have a say in how the money is used. The Environment Agency is however, able to recover its costs, using an Enforcement Cost Recovery Notice.

---

## **Defence demonstrates significant progress made for women in the Armed Forces**

Today marks the year anniversary of the recommendations made by Rt. Hon. Sarah Atherton MP in her report '[Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life](#)'. A year on, Defence have taken on these recommendations and introduced an extensive programme of work alongside the work that was already being undertaken to tackle unacceptable sexual behaviour, improve the experience for women in the Armed Forces and

build trust in the Service Justice System.

Most recently Defence has launched three new measures that provide clearer direction to prevent and address incidents. These are the [Zero Tolerance to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(SEA\) Policy \(JSP 769\)](#), the [Zero Tolerance to Unacceptable Sexual Behaviour: A Victim/Survivor Focused Approach Policy \(2022DIN01-073\)](#) and the [Tackling Sexual Offending in Defence Strategy](#). These policies will ensure that Defence continues to tackle unacceptable sexual behaviour and is a place where people are proud to work and have faith in their justice system.

In parallel to the recently published policies, a significant programme of work has been delivered across Defence and was set out in the [Government's Response](#) to Sarah Atherton's Inquiry. This includes training developments, transformation of the Service Complaints System, the stand-up of the Defence Serious Crime Unit HQ, delivery of improvements to uniform and equipment, and the Servicewomen's Health Improvement Sprint.

## **Recruitment**

Defence has set a Level of Ambition to achieve a 30% inflow of women to the Armed Forces by 2030. It is recognised that 30% is a very challenging level of ambition, and one which has not yet been achieved by many of our NATO partners. In meeting this ambition, a Whole Force approach has been developed including tailored recruiting activities, women-focussed marketing campaigns and making greater use of Servicewomen as recruiters. Defence, however, recognises that recruitment alone is not enough and recognises that a greater focus on retention, behaviour and inclusion continues to be vital.

## **Women's Health**

As part of the commitment to improving health and wellbeing for women in the Armed Forces, the Servicewomen's Health Improvement Focus Team (SHIFT) was established to deliver the six-month Women's Health Sprint, bringing together military and civilian skills and experiences to deliver key women's health policies and initiatives. This includes menstruation disposal bags and a urinary support device, which are currently under procurement. Furthermore, a series of blogs on women's health has been published by the SHIFT, with the aim of normalising the discussion of women's health topics. These have received thousands of views and positive comments from Servicewomen, who feel like their voices are finally being heard and acted upon, and by others who welcome the opportunity to better understand and support their Servicewomen colleagues.

## **Diversity & Inclusion**

A thorough training needs analysis was undertaken and a common standard introduced. Active Bystander Training continues to be an important part of the training offering, with the course being streamed 135,000 times, and we introduced a new Holistic Allies Training package in March 2022.

April 2022 saw the implementation of climate assessments across Defence and

work continues to upskill our diversity and inclusion Advisers and Practitioners to better support our people.

## **Uniform and Equipment**

As part of the pledge to improve the uniform and equipment offerings for women in the Armed Forces, the Services have all made amendments to uniform and clothing that address women's sizing, body shape and body changes. This includes the development of the [Narrow Scalable Tactical Vest \(STV\)](#). Wider revisions to uniform and clothing for each of the Services is in progress and rollout will commence in Summer 2022 and complete in 2023.

## **Service families**

In recognition of the requirement to support a modern and diverse workforce, the [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy](#) was launched in January 2022. As part of the support to service families there are currently six pilot locations running the [Wraparound Childcare \(WAC\) scheme](#), with full rollout in September 2022, with almost 2000 Service children benefiting from free before and after school childcare.

## **Service Compliant & Service Justice Reform**

In June this year we published the [Service Complaint Reform](#) which introduces a range of reforms and improvements to the existing Service Complaints system for Service Personnel. This is a new system that will increase efficiency; make the system more independent through the introduction of Central Admissibility Teams; improve the support available for those who engage with the process and increase trust and confidence in the system and its decision makers.

In order to address the recommendations regarding the investigation of serious crime the [Defence Serious Crime Command](#) was established in April this year and the Defence Serious Crime Unit (DSCU) will be fully operational by December 2022.

Defence continues to build trust in the Service Complaints System and Service Justice System through a revised approach to the [publication of official statistics](#). This is part of a commitment to being transparent and continually seeking to develop and improve policies and support to serving personnel.

## **Understanding behaviours**

We have also launched several targeted interventions to enable Defence to improve our understanding of unacceptable behaviours. These have included the implementation of recommendations from the '[Wigston Review into Inappropriate Behaviours](#)' and the subsequent [Gray Review](#). April 2022 saw the implementation of Climate assessments across Defence and work continues to upskill our diversity and inclusion Advisers and Practitioners to better support our people.

These delivered measures ensure that Defence continues to be a place where

people are proud to work and have faith in their justice system. However, this is only the beginning and we are continuing to develop and improve policies to ensure our brave and dedicated serving personnel are proud to be part of the British Armed Forces.

---

## More than a million businesses now eligible for Help to Grow as software scheme receives a boost

- The government's Help to Grow: Digital scheme is nearly tripling in reach, supporting up to 1.2 million UK businesses to adopt the latest digital technology
- businesses with 1 to 249 employees can now access discounts worth up to £5,000 on approved software
- from today, eCommerce software has been added to the scheme, helping businesses to sell online and reach new markets

A flagship government scheme that slashes the price of leading software, boosting productivity and growth of the UK's small businesses, will benefit even more firms from today (Monday 25 July).

With Customer Relationship Management software proven to boost firms' productivity by 18% on average, the Help to Grow: Digital scheme offers businesses discounts worth up to £5,000 on approved software.

Previously, only businesses with more than 5 employees were eligible for the scheme. From today, businesses with at least 1 employee are now eligible to benefit. This boosts the number of eligible businesses by 760,000 so that it now reaches up to 1.24 million.

Today it's also announced that eCommerce software is available through the scheme to help businesses ramp up sales of products and services online. This includes helping them to manage their inventory, take payments and gather data and insights on customers' needs. Businesses which adopt eCommerce software see on average [a 7.5% increase in employee sales over 3 years](#).

This means businesses can now access a £5,000 discount on 30 software solutions from 14 leading technology suppliers for eCommerce, Digital Accounting and CRM software.

Additionally, the government has announced that Help to Grow: Digital will support one-to-one advice for SMEs on how best they can adopt digital technology. The government will be launching applications for advice platforms to partner with the scheme from today, and the advice service will

go live later this year.

**Business Minister Lord Callanan said:**

“Boosting productivity isn’t some abstract concept to be sniffed at – for individual SMEs it means bigger sales and breaking into new markets. It can add £100 billion to the British economy overall, creating jobs and opportunity across the country.

“Adopting the latest technology is proven to help businesses make the most of their potential, and by making more than one million firms eligible for the scheme, we’re helping to level up the UK economy and bolster the ability of our businesses to compete with the best worldwide.”

**Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury Alan Mak said:**

“Extending our Help to Grow: Digital scheme will enable thousands more SMEs to become more innovative, more competitive, and more profitable.

“Helping them adopt new technology to support customers, manage accounts and sell online will save them time and money. This will boost productivity and help create jobs and prosperity across the UK.”

The Help to Grow: Digital sits alongside the Help to Grow: Management scheme as the government’s flagship programme to help small and medium-sized businesses to scale-up and grow. Help to Grow: Management offers business leaders 50 hours of leadership and management training across 12 weeks, with government covering 90% of the costs involved.

The schemes help businesses to boost their productivity and grow, which can lead to more high-skill, high-wage jobs. This is part of the government’s commitment to grow the economy to address the cost of living and level up opportunity across the UK, alongside standing behind businesses by cutting fuel duty and raising the Employment Allowance.

**Martin McTague, National Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) said:**

“We are very pleased to have worked hard with BEIS to adopt our ask to expand the eligibility criteria of the Help to Grow: Digital scheme to support more small businesses getting the software they need.

“Our research shows the smallest firms are least likely to have adopted tech products because of the lack of resources although they would make the most productivity gains through adoption.

“It’s good that Ministers are listening. Together with the addition of e-Commerce software and one-to-one advice for SMEs on technology adoption, this will help small businesses enhance their operations and drive efficiency and growth.

**Murray Lambell, Vice President and General Manager, eBay UK said:**

“This is extremely welcome news for a significant number of the 300,000 small businesses who use eBay every day to grow their business. Many of our commercial sellers are micro-businesses who are extremely entrepreneurial but inevitably time poor.

“Being able to purchase e-commerce and other productivity-enhancing software at a discount could really help give rocket boosters to what are already fast-growing businesses. And given that three quarters of our small businesses are based outside London and the South East, this also has the potential to boost the government’s Levelling Up agenda.”

**Notes to editors:**

---

## [Fear and insecurity mean workers do not report underpayment](#)

Press release

Low Pay Commission report looks at labour market enforcement in Leicester’s textiles sector.



The Low Pay Commission (LPC) today publishes [a report on non-compliance and enforcement of the minimum wage in Leicester’s textiles manufacturers](#). Since 2020, multiple agencies have carried out large-scale joint enforcement operations in Leicester, partly in response to persistent reports of exploitation and underpayment. Low Pay Commissioners heard evidence on the forces driving non-compliance and what enforcement bodies have found.

At the heart of this evidence is a disconnect: enforcement bodies have found relatively modest non-compliance in Leicester, while Commissioners spoke to other bodies and individuals who believed non-compliance to be widespread and flagrant. Today’s report looks at three potential explanations for this

disparity.

- Firstly, on the positive side, recent changes within the textiles industry mean some evidence of underpayment may be historic and so less reflective of current situation.
- Secondly, the vulnerability of workers means they may be reluctant to provide information.
- Thirdly, there remains potential for employers to conceal underpayment from investigating bodies.

Bryan Sanderson, Chair of the LPC, said:

The evidence we heard from workers in Leicester was striking. Despite some positive recent progress, job insecurity, a poisonous workplace culture and low expectations leave workers trapped in poor-quality jobs and vulnerable to exploitation. These same factors mean they are unlikely to report abuses, which undermines efforts to enforce workers' rights.

The case of Leicester is not unique. Across the UK, workers in precarious positions face the same obstacles, with the same consequences for enforcement. The problem demands comprehensive action, including to give these workers greater security over their hours and incomes.

Low Pay Commissioners make several recommendations for Government:

- The process for reporting abuses does not work for the most vulnerable low-paid workers; but it also fails to engage the third-party bodies whom workers may trust more, or wider industry networks. Commissioners recommend HMRC looks at ways to address these problems.
- There is an 'information gap' between what industry and civil society groups think they have reported to official bodies, and what those official bodies are able to share and act on. A forthcoming official review of enforcement operations in Leicester should take into account evidence from both sides of this gap.
- Insecure work and uncertainty over hours and incomes are central to the vulnerability of workers to exploitation. Low Pay Commissioners urge the Government to take action on the measures recommended by the Commission



in 2018 to address these issues.

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The report published today is the Low Pay Commission's fifth standalone report on non-compliance and enforcement, but the first to focus on a single sector and location.
2. The report draws on meetings in March and April 2022 with workers, retailers, supply chain auditors, manufacturers, local government officials and enforcement officers.
3. The Low Pay Commission is an independent body made up of employers, trade unions and experts whose role is to advise the Government on the minimum wage. It will submit recommendations on minimum wage rates for 2023 by the end of October.
4. The Low Pay Commission made recommendations in 2018 on the problem of 'one-sided flexibility'. These recommendations were: a right to switch to a contract which reflects your normal hours; a right to reasonable notice of work schedule; compensation for shift cancellation or curtailment without reasonable notice; provision of a written statement of terms from employers detailing the rights Commissioners proposed. That report can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-pay-commission-response-to-the-government-on-one-sided-flexibility>.
5. The current Low Pay Commissioners are Bryan Sanderson, Professor Patricia Rice, Professor Jonathan Wadsworth, Kate Bell, Kay Carberry, Simon Sapper, Matthew Fell, Louise Fisher and Martin McTague.
6. Bryan Sanderson can be contacted via the Low Pay Commission's press office (07341 098734).

Published 25 July 2022

---

[Alok Sharma, COP26 President, to visit](#)

# Australia to meet the country's new government and build momentum on climate action ahead of COP27

- COP26 President Alok Sharma will meet members of the Australian Cabinet in Canberra as the new parliament meets for the first time
- He will visit the New South Wales Rural Fire Service State Operations Centre to hear directly from first responders tackling the impact of severe weather in the region
- While in Canberra, Mr Sharma will also meet indigenous community representatives to understand their approach to nature-based solutions, as well as engaging with states, businesses and civil society in support of stronger climate actions

COP President Alok Sharma will travel to Sydney and Canberra from 24-26 July 2022 to meet ministers in the first week of the new Australian government as he continues to press for the delivery of the Glasgow Climate Pact.

Mr Sharma will discuss Australia's potential as an international climate leader in a number of areas, including climate finance and zero-emission vehicles. He will also engage with Australian states and hold discussions with banks, businesses and civil society groups in support of stronger action on climate.

In recent months, more frequent and severe natural disasters have shown the impacts of climate change in Australia, including severe flooding in New South Wales. Mr Sharma will speak with first responders to these disasters at New South Wales Rural Fire Service State Operations Centre

On Monday, the COP26 President will be in Canberra, where he will visit a local nature reserve. He will hear first-hand from Ngannawal Indigenous leaders who will explain the impacts of climate change in Australia, as well as traditional land management practices.

COP26 recognised the role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the Glasgow Climate Pact. As stewards of 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples are leaders in how to develop nature-based, resilient and effective solutions to climate change, through their knowledge and innovations, technologies, and spiritual values.

Alok Sharma, COP26 President, said:

Australia is turning a fresh page with its climate commitments and

I look forward to working with the new Australian government on its path towards increased commitments and leadership in crucial areas such as climate finance, deforestation and support for less developed nations in the Indo-Pacific.

The "Powering Australia Plan" is an innovative centrepiece of the new government's clean energy and industrial decarbonisation policy and paves the country's path to net-zero by 2050 and increasing its clean energy capacity.

During my time in Australia I will meet Indigenous representatives, business leaders, government ministers and more, providing a great opportunity to discuss ways we can work together for effective climate action.

UK High Commissioner to Australia, Vicki Treadell said:

We're delighted to welcome Alok Sharma to Australia where he'll hear first-hand how the region is impacted by the climate emergency.

We know that the Glasgow Climate Pact was a historic collective achievement, keeping 1.5C alive. Now is the time to deliver on those commitments. This visit by the COP President to Australia and Fiji outlines how important the Indo Pacific is to tackling climate change within the decade.

Following the COP President's visit to Australia, he will travel on to Fiji, a climate leader in the Pacific region. Like other Pacific countries, Fiji is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The UK is focussed on working with Fiji and Pacific countries to keep adaptation, loss and damage and climate finance on the top of the agenda in the lead up to and at COP27 in Egypt.