

# [Press release: Mark Field visits Sri Lanka to discuss reconciliation, demining and the illegal wildlife trade](#)

During his two day visit he will meet Minister of Foreign Affairs Tilak Marapana, Minister of Finance and Media Mangala Samaraweera, Leader of the Opposition R. Sampanthan, Speaker of Parliament Karu Jayasuriya and Chief Minister of Northern Province C. V. Vigneswaran.

In Colombo he will meet with families affected by enforced disappearances from both the north and south of the country, and hear of their concerns and their hopes for the Office of Missing Persons. He will also meet UK and Sri Lankan education institutions at the British Council to discuss education, and the UK's world-leading role in transnational learning.

In northern Sri Lanka, the Minister will visit a UK-funded demining operation and meet families living on land cleared of mines. He will speak with British demining charity the Halo Trust and hear how UK support for demining has enabled displaced families to return home. He will also visit the British Council teaching centre in Jaffna where he will talk with young people about their aspirations for the future and the importance of education.

Mr Field said:

The UK and Sri Lanka are long-standing friends, and we are committed to supporting Sri Lanka achieve its commitments on reconciliation and human rights. I welcome the Sri Lankan government's commitment to reconciliation and strengthening democracy. I am looking forward to talking with the government and affected communities about the additional steps that are needed to deliver long-term peace and stability for all Sri Lankans

Having hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2013, Sri Lanka is an obvious partner in defining and driving a shared vision of the Commonwealth, to ensure it is fitted to deliver for all its member states into the future. The UK will host an ambitious and dynamic Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018, with the purpose of ensuring that the Commonwealth remains on a path that is relevant for the 21st century.

I commend the authorities and all those in Sri Lanka working hard to combat the Illegal Wildlife Trade, and hope to encourage plans to conserve Sri Lanka's unique and beautiful environment.

Follow Foreign Office Minister Mark Field on Twitter @markfielduk

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## [News story: Research into national curriculum testing at key stage 2](#)

Ofqual has today (5 October 2017) published [an evaluation of the Standards and Testing Agency's \(STA\) approach to developing key stage 2 reading and maths tests](#), alongside a review of evidence relating to the accessibility of the 2016 key stage 2 reading test. 2016 was the first year of a new suite of tests, which assessed the new primary national curriculum.

The main report evaluates STA's approach to ensuring effective coverage of the knowledge, skills and understanding set out in the new English reading and maths curriculum. It finds that STA's approach is robust and compares favourably to approaches taken in similar tests internationally, while acknowledging that there are aspects of maths and reading that cannot straightforwardly be tested.

The subsidiary review summarises a wide body of evidence and data relating to the accessibility of the 2016 reading test, acknowledging concerns raised by teachers at the time. While standards were set appropriately in 2016, the review suggests that the test seemed to be more challenging than the sample materials provided and a significant minority of pupils did not finish the test. The 2017 reading test did not raise similar accessibility concerns, nevertheless, the review suggests areas that could benefit from further consideration by STA.

Dr Michelle Meadows, Deputy Chief Regulator, said:

We are reassured that STA's approach to sampling from the national curriculum is robust. We have identified specific questions that we will continue to discuss with the STA, to help them to enhance the validity of the reading and maths tests, over time, for all pupils.

In regulating national assessments, Ofqual's objectives are to promote standards and confidence in statutory early years assessments and national curriculum assessments such as those at key stage 1 and key stage 2. We focus on the validity of assessment, in particular, on technical aspects such as test development, standard setting or marking. We also monitor wider activity, such as delivery and risk, at a high-level and we provide advice to inform future approaches to assessment. Whilst we do not approve decisions made by the Standards and Testing Agency, our regulatory review can provide independent post-hoc assurance about assessment quality.

We do not have a role in deciding whether or not there should be particular statutory assessments, or in curriculum policy, accountability policy or internal school assessment.

More information on Ofqual's specific powers and duties in relation to national assessments can be found in our [Regulatory framework for national assessments](#).

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## [News story: UK takes world stage in fight against marine plastic](#)

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has set out how the UK is taking action to tackle marine litter and protect oceans from the effects of climate change at today's 'Our Ocean' conference in Malta.

Speaking in front of heads of state, ministers and NGOs from around the world, the Environment Minister pledged her support to help small island developing states with marine science, research and conservation projects – alongside setting out how the government is continuing the fight at home against the eight million tonnes of plastic that make their way into oceans each year.

The UK's ban on microbeads has been lauded as one of the toughest in the world and nine billion fewer plastic bags have been distributed since the government introduced a 5p charge. This week the government also issued a [call for evidence](#) on the benefits of reward and return schemes for plastic bottles in a bid to clean up our oceans.

Speaking from Malta, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Around the world our oceans are suffering from the blight of plastic pollution and the impacts of climate change.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life – our 5p plastic bag charge has taken nine billion bags out of circulation, our microbeads ban is one of the toughest in the world, and we are now exploring what more we can do to reduce the impact of plastic bottles.

But there is always more we can do – which is why I am meeting with my counterparts in Malta today to pledge my continued support for marine conservation and discuss how we can work together to protect our precious oceans and marine life for future generations.

The [Our Ocean Conference](#), held in Malta from 5-6 October, brings together heads of state, governments, industry and NGOs to discuss marine conservation and agree actions to protect seas and oceans around the world.

Alongside further funding under the [Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme](#) –

which began in 2015 to help small island states make the most of their maritime assets and encourage sustainable economic growth – the Environment Minister also announced support for global initiatives to tackle plastic pollution.

These include joining the Global Partnership on Marine Litter – one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – as well as signing up to the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, an alliance of the fishing industry, NGOs and government agencies working to solve the problem of lost and abandoned 'ghost' fishing gear that can trap sea life.

£5.2 million has also been granted to marine projects through the two most recent rounds of the Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus grant schemes – helping to protect coral reefs, set up Marine Protected Areas, encourage sustainable fisheries and increase the resilience of coastal communities to climate change.

While in Malta, Minister Coffey also reiterated the government's commitment to creating a network of marine protected areas around the United Kingdom, alongside reaffirming £4.8 million to drive forward the creation of a 'blue belt' across the UK's Overseas Territories.

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## **Press release: 'Right Waste, Right Place' spot-checks on Thames Valley waste firms**

A number of businesses across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are on notice to comply with the law on waste disposal, after a series of unannounced checks by the Environment Agency on Tuesday 3 October.

Officers visited more than 100 sites and firms across the Thames Valley, and will be following-up on 10 illegal waste sites found during the day. The owners may face prosecution. Other premises were given advice and guidance to help them meet their legal requirements.

Firms are required by law to manage waste without a threat to the environment, such as not releasing anything other than waste water into the drainage network. The surprise inspections covered the removal of hazardous items, like chemicals and car batteries. Thames Water assisted the Environment Agency on pollution checks. Companies were also checked for having the correct environmental permit for their business.

Environment Agency staff were also on hand at DIY store Wickes in Slough, to offer free waste-handling advice to hauliers and homeowners, in order to reduce fly-tipping.

Mark Tucker, Installations Team Leader for the Environment Agency in the Thames Valley, said:

The Environment Agency works with business to make sure waste ends up in the right place, and may take more formal action where we believe a serious crime has been committed through illegal waste disposal.

Anyone who produces, carries, keeps, treats or disposes of waste has a duty of care to make sure it is managed correctly. The public can do their bit by only using a licenced waste carrier, or reporting any concerns on waste management to the Environment Agency on 0800 807060.

The 117 sites we inspected this week were under no illusion of their legal obligations on waste management. Mishandling waste, poorly-operated permitted sites and illegal waste activities can pose a threat to human health and the environment by contaminating land, polluting rivers and producing emissions from burning waste.

As well as breaking the law, illegal operations undermine the work done by legitimate firms.

Waste crime is a very serious issue for both local communities and the environment. The Environment Agency uses reports from industry and the public to build intelligence, and target those involved in organised environmental crime, and where their activities pose the greatest risk to the environment.

Handling of illegal waste can be reported anonymously to Crimestoppers, on 0800 551111. There are lots of signs that could suggest suspicious activity. These include:

- Out-of-hours activity at night, over weekends and during bank holidays
- Smoke caused by constant burning
- An increase in the number of lorries entering a site
- Waste going into a site but not coming out with increasing quantities of waste stockpiled on site
- Water pollution

The Environment Agency and local councils also investigate reports of fly-tipping.

All media enquiries: 0800 141 2743.

Or email us at [southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk).

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# Press release: Thames Barrier to close due to high tide

Communities are warned to be prepared for a coastal surge which is forecast today. As a precaution the Environment Agency will close the Thames Barrier at 10am and re-open it at 4pm (5 October 2017) to reduce the risk of possible flooding in London and along the Thames catchment.

During today's closure the Thames Barrier, along with the associated gates and embankments, will be operating as part of our network of defences, protecting over 550,000 properties. The Thames Barrier is one of the largest moveable flood barriers in the world, protecting 125 square kilometres of central London.

It stretches 520 metres across the River Thames at Charlton and each gate takes 10 to 15 minutes to close (1.5 hours for total closure), and the control room is manned 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Andrew Batchelor, Thames Barrier Manager said:

We are closing the Thames Barrier to protect London from the threat of flooding due to high water levels around the time of high tides from the sea.

Practical advice on preparing for flooding can be found on [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK) or by calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188. Communities can also follow us on Twitter at [@EnvAgencySE](https://twitter.com/EnvAgencySE) and #floodaware for the latest flood updates.

For all media enquiries please contact 0800 141 2743 or email [southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk).