

Rapist has sentence increased following referral to the Court of Appeal

News story

Selfo Myrtaj has received an increased sentence after his case was referred to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP.



A man found guilty of rape has received an increased sentence after his case was referred to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP.

Selfo Myrtaj, 28, approached the victim, who was unknown to him, when he saw her walking alone. On the pretence of offering the victim a ride home, he then drove her to nearby woodland and raped her.

On 17 December 2021, Myrtaj was sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment at Sheffield Crown Court. He was also made subject to a restraining order.

Following the sentencing, the Solicitor General referred the offender's sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

On 23 February the Court of Appeal found his original sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 6 years' imprisonment.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP said:

Selfo Myrtaj committed a sickening act of rape, deliberately targeting a woman who was alone and vulnerable. No sentence can wholly repair the damage that his actions have caused, but I do believe that this increased sentence better reflects the seriousness of his dreadful offending.

UKHO announces S-102 Bathymetric Surface data set sea trial project in collaboration with Port of London Authority and SEAiQ Pilot

The UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) has today announced it is kickstarting an S-102 Bathymetric Surface sea trial project in collaboration with the Port of London Authority (PLA) and multi-platform piloting solution SEAiQ Pilot.

The S-102 Bathymetric Surface data set is created using the International Hydrographic Office's (IHO) new S-100 data standard. The new S-102 product specification will enable Hydrographic Offices to create S-100 layers with a far greater granularity of bathymetric information than the traditional ENC, supporting safe navigation and unlocking economic value for ports.

The project is the first real-world S-102 sea trial in the UK and also marks the first time the UKHO has run a S-100 sea trial. Working in collaboration with the PLA and SEAiQ Pilot, UKHO will test S-102 Bathymetric Surface product specifications in real-life scenarios with the PLA pilots to understand user requirements of the new data set and collect feedback that will help to influence the S-100 data standard development process, in turn improving product specifications, data coverage and user experience.

The sea trial will take place in spring 2022, when the UKHO, PLA and SEAiQ Pilot will carry out a piloted passage on a commercial vessel. The PLA pilots will use SEAiQ Pilot software and UKHO's S-102 Bathymetric Surface data sets in a real scenario at sea. The outcomes of the trial will be monitored from pilot boarding point to berth, using SEAiQ Pilot's Portable Piloting Unit and the UKHO's S-102 data to monitor the passage. The results will then be assessed to understand the need for potential extensions to S-102 and to feedback into the IHO testbed development process.

The project will also set out to build the safety case for the S-102 data set and provide a real-life case study for how S-102 can improve situational awareness and navigational safety for pilots.

The live sea trial is the third phase of the S-102 Bathymetric Surface collaboration project between UKHO, PLA and SEAiQ Pilot. During January and February 2022, the PLA provided the latest hydrographic survey information of the trial area for the UKHO to create and supply the necessary S-102 data sets required by pilots. In March 2022, and before the live sea trial commences, the project will observe a passage planning desk exercise running

through different scenarios using the S-102 Bathymetric Surface data.

Commenting on the announcement, Tom Mellor, Project Lead & Head of OEM Technical Support and Digital Standards at the UKHO, said:

We are extremely excited to kickstart this exciting sea trial with our partners at PLA and SEAIQ Pilot. It marks the first time that S-102 will be tested in a real-life setting in UK waters and will provide crucial evidence for how we develop S-102 products in the future.

S-100 data standards will be transformative for anyone who uses marine navigational data. By conducting this trial we will continue to build the safety case for S-102 and help to support greater commercial, economic, environmental and safety of life at sea outcomes in the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone.

We are keen to bring a user perspective to the future of nautical navigation with a small, diverse and highly experienced team of pilots and hydrographers joining this collaborative effort.

John Dillon-Leetch, PLA Port Hydrographer, added:

We are keen to assist the UKHO and IHO with the development of S-102. Utilising up-to-date PLA Safety of Navigation survey data in S-102 format in real-world situations will gather important feedback through the whole data value chain, from survey capture to use. In particular, the live onboard testing of the product by experienced PLA pilots will provide valuable mariners' insights that will help to inform the final product.

Dr Mark Hayden Founder of SEAIQ Pilot, added:

We are pleased to support this project with our SEAIQ Pilot ECS software; the most advanced navigational software specifically designed for pilots. Our software supports S-102 data display and we look forward to receiving the user feedback from the pilots in this trial to continue to innovate our system.

Households urged to get ready for £150 council tax rebate

- 20 million households to benefit from £3 billion scheme to help with cost of living pressures
- Comes as part of a £9 billion package to help spread the cost of rising energy bills
- 4 out of 5 households will benefit including around 95% of rented properties
- Households encouraged to set up council tax direct debits to ensure payment is made automatically from April

Households across England are being urged to set up direct debits with their local council to receive a £150 council tax rebate that will help millions of families manage costs of living.

People who pay council tax by direct debit, which is a safe, simple and quick way to pay will see the cash go directly into their bank accounts from April. Those who do not pay by direct debit will be contacted by their council and invited to make a claim.

Around 20 million households in council tax bands A to D – including 95% of rented properties – are set to benefit from the £3 billion council tax rebate, which does not have to be repaid. It is part of an extensive package of government measures to help families with rising energy costs.

An extra £144 million will also be given to councils to provide discretionary support to vulnerable households who may not qualify for the £150 council tax rebate. This includes people on low incomes in council tax bands E to H.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Rt Hon Michael Gove said:

As we emerge from the pandemic, we understand the pressures facing many families as global inflation levels increase.

The support we have introduced will help millions of people, particularly those on the lowest incomes and the most vulnerable.

We continue to stand behind the British people and I urge everyone who is eligible to claim this rebate to do so.

The advice follows the publication of [guidance for councils](#) today (23 February 2022) which will help them administer the rebate.

The council tax rebate is part of a £9.1 billion government support package, which from October, includes a further reduction of £200 on energy bills for domestic electricity customers.

The £200 reduction will help people manage the increase in energy bills by spreading the increased costs over a few years, so they are more manageable for households. It will be automatically recovered from people's bills in equal £40 instalments over 5 years, beginning in 2023, when global wholesale gas prices are expected to come down.

The Warm Home Discount will be expanded so nearly 3 million low-income households will benefit from a £150 discount.

All households in England are placed by the Valuation Office Agency into 1 of 8 council tax bands, ranging from band A to band H.

Households living in a property valued in council tax bands A to D as their main home will be eligible for a £150 council tax rebate.

An extra £144 million will also be given to councils to provide discretionary support to vulnerable households who may not qualify for the £150 council tax rebate. This includes people on low incomes in council tax bands E to H.

Householders can find their council tax banding via [Check your Council Tax band](#).

Lord Ahmad sets out the UK's support for Ukraine to the UN General Assembly

Mr President, Secretary-General, Your Excellencies,

The United Kingdom is unwavering in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We stand with the people of Ukraine. We stand with their right to determine their own future.

President Putin's decision to recognise the so-called 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic' as independent states, proves beyond doubt that Russia has chosen the path of confrontation over the path of diplomacy and dialogue.

Mr Putin has ordered his troops into Ukrainian territory. This amounts to a further invasion of Ukraine.

At every step, Russia has rebuffed offers of diplomacy and discarded its international commitments – commitments it has agreed and signed up to – rather it has decided to pursue a campaign to redraw Ukraine's internationally-recognised borders by force.

It is vital that we, the international community, respond.

We must understand the grave nature of where we are today.

Together, we must call on Russia to uphold the very founding principles of the United Nations, established precisely, as you said yourself Mr President, to end the scourge of war. Peace must prevail.

We must highlight the human cost and respond to the humanitarian consequences of any further Russian military action.

We know this would take a terrible toll on Ukrainians and Russians alike – both victims of an unnecessary war of the Kremlin's choosing.

And it is therefore essential that we must meet Russia's aggressive acts with solidarity, with strength, including co-ordinated sanctions, to impose a severe cost on Russia's interests and their economy.

Yesterday, the UK announced new sanctions targeting billions of Russian assets. This is the largest sanctions package against Russia in British history, and it is part of our coordinated sanctions effort, alongside our allies.

But Mr President we are clear, acting together with our allies, that this is just the start. If Russia continues its campaign of aggression, we have a further package of sanctions ready to go.

We urge the wider international community to join us in this effort. The Kremlin must understand the strength of the world's condemnation of President Putin's war of choice.

Let us pause for a moment to reflect that this very week marks 8 years since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

It also marks 8 years since Russia forcibly seized 10,000 square miles of sovereign Ukrainian territory, in flagrant violation of international law and Russia's own international commitments.

And it's also 8 years since we, the General Assembly, recalled through resolution 68/262 the obligations of all States under Article 2 of the UN Charter, to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State of the United Nations.

Yet 8 years on, tragically, here we are again. Confronted by Russian aggression against the sovereignty of Ukraine.

As the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made clear, Russia's unilateral measures conflict directly with the principles of the UN Charter.

Their actions are a fundamental challenge to global peace and security, and a challenge to the international order on which we all rely – and equally important, it is for all of us to protect.

We must condemn unequivocally this aggression together and stop President Putin's expansionist ambitions.

We must hold Russia to its commitments under the UN Charter, and say to Russia pull back – choose peace, not war – whilst also sending a clear message to the people of Ukraine that in your hour of need, we the international community, we the United Nations, stand with you.

Thank you.

Farming and the Environment Agency

The last time I spoke at the NFU conference was at the tail-end of the wettest February on record.

This February, two years later, the Met Office has named three major storms in one week for the first time.

Storms not only bring flooding, but disruption to supply chains, power outages, damage to buildings, trees and hedgerows.

So I'd like to thank you for taking the time to be here now.

I know that many of you will have repairs to make, as well as preparations for Storm Gladys, should she arrive with the same force as Dudley, Eunice and Franklin.

I'd also like to thank Environment Agency colleagues on the ground working around the clock to help communities respond and recover, alongside those working for the emergency services, internal drainage boards and local authorities who have helped with the response.

Events like these are becoming more frequent and severe.

Last year, more than 76,000 incidents were reported to the Environment Agency's incident management service, including flood, drought, fires, fish kills and pollution incidents.

One every seven minutes, 24 hours a day.

The final session today is called "Building Business Resilience", and everyone in society has a shared interest in doing that successfully.

As Chair of the Environment Agency, I have met farmers in drought making tough decisions about what vegetables to grow.

I have met farmers in flood who have had to move livestock and repair damage to farm buildings and fields.

The climate crisis means farmers could be doing both in the same year, perhaps more than once.

The Environment Agency is calling for much stronger focus on adaptation nationally.

Building your business resilience isn't only about avoiding risks, farming is integral to a prosperous future.

So, whether it's recovering after there has been too much water, coping when there is not enough water, or managing soils for a healthy water system, we want to work with you to make the whole country more resilient.

Minette asked me to set out how the Environment Agency wishes to work with farming, as a constructive partner.

And, we want to work with you at every opportunity on environmental improvement, flood management and net zero ambitions.

For me, it starts with collaboration, clarity and consistency.

Leaving the EU gave the UK a chance to change laws and help farmers realise new opportunities.

The much discussed concept of public money for public goods could unlock more productive agriculture, long term food security, increased biodiversity, viable infrastructure and thriving places.

The Environment Agency has been advocating to ensure that farmers can be paid through the Environmental Land Management scheme if the work they are doing upstream can mitigate downstream flooding.

Defra have recently asked us to lead delivery for the first round of Landscape Recovery, "Restoring England's streams and rivers", as part of the Environmental Land Management Scheme.

These projects will restore water bodies, rivers and floodplains to a more natural state, reduce nutrient pollution, benefit aquatic species, reduce flood risk and increase resilience to climate change.

This is an extension to our current role.

It involves extending our legal, financial and delivery responsibilities and will secure additional Future Farming & Countryside Project funding.

To enable the Environment Agency to adopt this new role, Defra will delegate specific powers to make and administer grants under the Agriculture Act 2020.

But for farming to make the most of new opportunities it will need private investment as well as public money.

We increasingly know about the multiple benefits of environmental services.

The question is how to monetise them.

Many farmers are interested in the prospect of being able to sell environmental services that come from improved soil health, be that carbon

sequestration, nutrient run-off reduction or greater water retention for flood resilience.

Such markets could be catalytic to farming's future, but investors and farmers need greater certainty about the outcomes and products on sale.

This could come in the form of standards.

We don't have a soil carbon code yet and we would benefit from other standards for nutrient trading and natural flood management.

The alternative is that green markets become like the Wild West, where farmers don't always draw first.

Farming is the only profession where everything, all the responsibility for getting the multiple technical, competing demands right, falls on the individual farmer's shoulders alone.

There is no expectation, and critically there are no legal duties, on the agriculture industry to support farmers to make the best choices for themselves or the environment.

And there is nothing, or very little, in the supply chain to require standards or proof for farmers' impact on the natural world.

We think the wider agri-food supply chain has a role to assist and incentivise farmers for making environmental progress.

Producer groups supplying to some retailers have made great strides in areas like animal welfare, but there is significant potential to do more for the natural world.

The Green Finance Institute is also exploring the need for upfront financing and investment to support farmers switching to more regenerative methods.

And the Environment Agency is working to help the private sector understand, invest in, and scale up activities that simultaneously deliver environmental improvements and generate an income.

Get it right and we can unlock investment into resilient food production and ensure that farmers are not ripped off by cowboys in city suits and welly boots.

One project we are supporting with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Defra and Triodos Bank UK, is restoring peatlands in the Pennines.

These are some of the most degraded in Europe.

The Moors for the Future Partnership is working to restore and conserve peatland in the area, and to attract investment that delivers sustainable financial returns.

Restoring peatland creates benefits for private investors.

It stores carbon and it filters water, meaning water companies use less chemical treatment.

Peaty soils also have a huge role in reducing flood risk, and heavy rainfall and thunderstorms cause soil erosion which make flood risks worse.

Some of England's most productive and high value agricultural land is in the floodplain or in low-lying areas, many are below sea level.

In 2020, we published the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy to 2100, which we worked on with the NFU.

One measure in the strategy concerns the Fens.

It says we will work with farmers, land managers, water companies and internal drainage boards in the Fens to better assess risks and discover what climate adaptation means in low-lying catchments where premium food production is dependent on flood risk management and land drainage.

We also plan to engage major supermarkets and the food and drinks sector in developing strategic options for sustainable food production in the Fens.

This approach will balance decisions which need to be taken now and those that need to be taken in the future.

Similarly, with the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission in Devon, the Environment Agency is supporting the trial of a new approach to long-term land use decisions.

This work has been part funded from a specific pot of money for innovative flood resilience.

We are seeking out new ways to deliver a more strategic approach to land use decision-making at local authority, catchment and landscape levels.

It will support action on net zero, nature recovery, ecosystems services, and also food production, housing and economic development.

Increasing public interest in the use of rivers for recreational activities, like kayaking or wild swimming, is bringing more scrutiny to the connections between water quality, the ecological health of rivers and human health.

The public demand tough action and we are delivering.

In the current financial year up to the end of January, the courts fined water companies £100,123,000 for pollution incidents following our prosecutions.

In November, the Environment Agency and Ofwat announced a criminal investigation into more than 2,200 sewage treatment works spanning all water and sewerage companies in England.

And I have called for the directors of companies guilty of repeated,

deliberate or reckless breaches of environmental law to be given custodial sentences.

There has been some fantastic campaigning and awareness raising about the impact of water company pollution, but attention is shifting to agriculture.

Agricultural diffuse pollution is one of the biggest contributors to poor water quality in England.

It is the primary cause for 40 percent of water bodies failing to achieve good ecological status.

We need a long term view on the best use of organic manures.

Organic manures can benefit soil health, sequester carbon and reduce the need for inorganic fertiliser.

However, their excess use impacts rivers.

As new laws are created by government, I want to deliver consistency and give you certainty about how we will enforce them.

By focusing on the 'what' – the standards we want to achieve – rather than a prescriptive 'how', we want to create space for you to innovate.

But, we must also be a robust regulator.

When some farmers undermine environmental law it delivers a triple threat.

1. It damages the natural resources you need to grow food
2. It undercuts your economic model
3. And it diminishes British farming in the eyes of the public.

That is why, for those who persistently break the rules, it is important we take action.

And we do.

But for those of you who want to do the right thing, the Environment Agency is on your side.

If you need expertise or if you need pointing in the direction of good practice, we will help alleviate that extra demand on your time.

The Environment Agency has worked hard to support the provision of money for slurry storage.

We all know many current slurry stores are not fit for purpose and farmers risk prosecution.

We hope this is a major opportunity for farmers to transform their storage and do the right thing for water quality, and avoid us having to prosecute, something we really don't want to have to do.

The farming rules for water came into force in 2017/18.

The Government created these regulations and the Environment Agency must implement them.

It was a significant change to business as usual, so we took an advice-led approach working with hundreds of farmers across the country to help with the new circumstances.

Last autumn, the Environment Agency introduced further flexibility by introducing a regulatory position statement that allowed over 4,000 farmers to spread organic material on the land last autumn, who otherwise would not have the legal right to do so.

The Environment Agency cannot offer such flexibility in perpetuity, so I am pleased that the Secretary of State has asked Minister Prentis to create statutory guidance to remove any ambiguity about what is required this spring.

Alongside that, we must improve our communications, being clear and consistent about what compliance means and when it must be achieved.

We will work with the NFU, other farming bodies, Water UK and government to deliver clarity around the risk based approach we will apply to autumn spreading this year.

We also believe there are opportunities to streamline regulations governing farming and nutrient management and storage, which could make it easier for you to understand your obligations, and for us as a regulator.

Water resources are an issue.

We know that if the country continues to operate as usual:

- by 2050, we will need around 3,435 million extra litres of water per day
- and some rivers could have between 50 and 80 per cent less water during the summer

Although irrigation demands overall have gone down since the 1990s, spray irrigation demand is likely to increase in the longer term, with the biggest increases in eastern England.

However, uncertainty exists related to food policies, diet trends, the proportion of food that gets wasted, and how efficiently water for irrigation will be used.

I want the Environment Agency's regulation to deliver consistency so that farmers, water companies and other businesses, can see a reasonable and fair approach to water use.

Recently, emerging regional water resources plans have been launched for consultation that will start to show how the nation will manage water resources in the future.

Please take part in the consultation, we want to hear from you.

We see these plans not as the end of the story, but the beginning of how we act to ensure resilient and secure water supplies.

In the two years since I last spoke at the NFU conference, the pandemic highlighted the importance of British food production and international trade to keeping everyone fed with a balanced diet.

By 2030, the population of the world will be over 8.5 billion people.

There will be a likely 50 percent increase in global food demand between 2010 and 2050.

With strategy and a clear vision, that should be an opportunity for farming.

Get it right and it should leave a legacy of productive agriculture, long-term food security, increased biodiversity, viable infrastructure and thriving places.

The NFU's Blueprint for British Farming says: "We have a once in-a-generation opportunity to make a success of the UK's new domestic agricultural policy and ensure that everyone recognises the importance and value of British food, and the huge benefits farming contributes to the whole country – its economy and its treasured landscapes – through our world-leading environmental and animal welfare standards."

We agree, but to deliver that we must also overcome climate impacts and natural decline.

The Environment Agency and the farming sector have shared goals.

We must work, learn and innovate together to achieve them.

Thank you.