

Major oil spill in Poole Harbour costs company £6m

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Perenco UK Ltd has been made to spend £6.1m putting right the damage done, in a package which includes big payouts to impacted parties and local good causes.

The Environment Agency has made Perenco UK Ltd pay out £6.1m to put right the damage done to the Dorset environment by a major oil spill.

The package includes £620,000 to impacted parties alongside £400,000 towards wildlife and access projects run by local bodies.

In agreeing to the sanction, which is known as an enforcement undertaking and can be used as an alternative to a prosecution, Perenco has also put in place robust measures to ensure that a pollution incident does not happen again.

Perenco made the offer after an Environment Agency investigation into the incident. A revised offer made by Perenco was eventually accepted by the agency.

The pollution incident occurred in March 2023 when Perenco discovered oil leaking from a pipe carrying a mix of oil and water at Ower Bay in Poole Harbour.

A breach of the pipe was caused as part of the pipe corroded much faster than checks indicated or was expected.

A significant amount of oil leaked into the Poole harbour area, which includes sensitive habitats and species such as seagrass and saltmarsh.

The £6.1m includes £2.6m on the initial incident response, £2.4m for clean-up and £115k for ecological surveys.

The company paid £620k direct to impacted parties, including commercial seafood beds who were forced to close during the initial pollution assessment.

The Environment Agency accepted Perenco's offer due to the significant costs the company had already spent making right the environmental damage caused, and the measures taken to prevent a reoccurrence of the incident.

Environment Agency officer, Tom Fowler, said:

This commitment allows Perenco to put things right in a way that directly benefits the environment and local communities.

We are pleased that the money will go towards worthwhile wildlife initiatives and the local harbour.

Brian Bleese, Chief Executive of Dorset Wildlife Trust, said:

Poole Harbour is one of the UK's most important places for wildlife and people.

Dorset Wildlife Trust will use this funding to deliver a suite of high-impact conservation projects that improve water quality, restore wetlands, and support nature's recovery across Poole Harbour and its wider catchment.

Bob Irwin, Vice Chair of Trustees at The Friends of Dolphin, said:

This money allows us to continue to take individuals with any disability (including those using wheelchairs) for free trips on our unique specialised boat to enjoy the sights and sounds of Poole Harbour, the second largest natural harbour in the world.

Sandy Becker, founder of Wild Bird Rescue Dorset, said:

As a small, volunteer run rescue, we are incredibly grateful for this support. This funding will make a genuine difference to the welfare of the birds in our care by helping us improve facilities, create safer recovery spaces, and strengthen our ongoing fundraising through our charity shop for the future.

Captain Brian Murphy, Poole Harbour Commissioners' Chief Executive, said:

Poole Harbour is a highly designated, protected site of international and national importance. Poole Harbour Commissioners promote safe and sustainable use of the harbour.

The funding, being directed towards conservation, improved access to the harbour and environmental initiatives, will deliver lasting benefits for Poole Harbour and the communities that use it for both business and leisure.

Background

The money pledged will go towards these projects:

- The friends of Dolphin, as a contribution towards a new passenger vessel that provides access to the harbour those with disabilities.
- Birds of Poole Harbour, as a contribution towards the re-introduction of the red billed chough, protection against Puffin predation, and subsidised boat hire for 2025.
- Dorset Wildlife Trust: towards an enclosed beaver trial, the Dorset Peat Project, Brownsea Island Lagoon Restoration and Lyscombe Nature Reserve Wetland Restoration.
- Wild Bird Rescue Dorset: towards charity shop shelving & displays, new sheds for shelter and

environmental enrichment, upgraded quarantine facilities to reduce biodiversity risk to recovering birds, and to replace and improve older enclosures.

- Poole Harbour Commissioners - towards the Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan and a decarbonisation project.

What is an enforcement undertaking (EU)?

An EU is available to the Environment Agency as an alternative sanction to prosecution or monetary penalty for dealing with certain environmental offences.

It is a legally-binding voluntary agreement proposed by a business (or an individual) when the EA has reasonable grounds to suspect that an environmental offence has occurred.

EUs for environmental offences were introduced under the Environmental Civil Sanctions (England) Order 2010 and the Environmental Civil Sanctions (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2010.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-oil-spill-in-poole-harbour-costs-company-6m>