

Devon farmer convicted after slurry spill kills hundreds of fish

12.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Michael Wade was charged on two counts of illegal water discharge activity. He was fined £340 and is to pay costs of £4,302.

A Devon farmer has been ordered to pay £4,778 after an investigation into two separate slurry pollution incidents from his farm near Bideford which caused the death of hundreds of fish.

In a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency, Michael Wade of Higher Melbury Farm, South Yeo, Yeo Vale, Bideford, Devon, pleaded guilty at Barnstaple Magistrates Court to two counts of illegal water discharge activity on 9 March 2026.

He was fined £340, a victim surcharge of £136 and costs of £4,302.

Court fines are determined based on the financial circumstances of the offender.

Photographs taken on the day showed sewage fungus in the ditch

The Court heard that this case involved the investigation of two slurry pollution incidents at Higher Melbury Farm, in January 2023 and August 2024.

In the 2023 incident, slurry discharged from the farm via a ditch into a tributary of the Dipple Brook.

The pollution had travelled in the water for 1.6km and sewage fungus in the watercourse indicated that the discharge had been occurring for some time.

In August 2024 slurry was seen discharging from a ditch at the farm into a tributary of the Holebrook.

The Environment Agency used considerable resources and pumping equipment to pump the slurry contaminated water out of the watercourse on to an adjacent field to avoid a more serious incident.

More than 300 dead fish were collected from the watercourse, which included salmonids and lamprey.

The watercourse running along the boundary of the field

The farm previously paid £11,130 to the Environment Agency to cover the costs of dealing with the pollution incident.

Nicola Rumsey, Environment Officer said:

Farmers have a responsibility to ensure that slurry is properly stored and spread, to avoid the risk of harm to the environment.

If farmers have concerns about not having sufficient slurry storage capacity, we recommend they contact us, so that we can give advice ahead of time and avoid an incident.

When incidents do happen, these can kill fish and impact water quality, as well as requiring significant resources to clean up.

Guidance for farmers on appropriate storage is available on the Gov.uk site: [Storing silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil](#).

Notes to Editors

Michael Wade was charged with the following offences:

- On or before 26 January 2023 you, Michael WADE, did cause an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter from The New Dairy, Higher Melbury, Powlers Piece, Parkham, Bideford, Devon, EX39 5PP, into inland fresh waters.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

- On or before 07 August 2024 you, Michael WADE, did cause an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter from The New Dairy, Higher Melbury, Powlers Piece, Parkham, Bideford, Devon, EX39 5PP, into inland fresh waters.

Contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/devon-farmer-convicted-after-slurry-spill-kills-hundreds-of-fish>