

## **Farming rules shake-up to cut pollution and support farmers**

Streamlined agriculture rules to cut duplication and make it easier for farmers to drive down water pollution

From:

[Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#), [Environment Agency](#) and [Emma Hardy MP](#)

Published

27 January 2026



New, clearer rules proposed today (Tuesday 27 January) will help to improve water quality, reduce pollution in our rivers and give farmers the confidence to grow food sustainably.

41% of England's rivers, lakes and streams are currently affected by agricultural pollution, and they will get stronger protection under new proposals to increase oversight on sewage sludge spreading.

A [consultation](#) launched today proposes tighter controls on spreading sewage sludge on farmland, including options to bring it under the Environmental Permitting Regulations, to better protect human health and the environment from harmful contaminants.

At the same time, existing agricultural water rules will be simplified, cutting unnecessary duplication and complexity and making it easier for farmers to understand and follow the rules.

The measures form an important part of delivering the government's Environmental Improvement Plan, reducing ammonia emissions from farming, and the Water White Paper – a major overhaul of how England's water system is regulated and managed.

Water Minister Emma Hardy and Farming Minister Angela Eagle set out the plans at a roundtable with key farming, water and environmental stakeholders today as part of the government's plan to transform Britain's water system.

### **Water Minister Emma Hardy said:**

By setting clearer guidelines and providing better support, we're making it simpler for farmers to meet standards, farm sustainably and protect our environment.

### **Jennie Donovan, Environment Agency Director, Nature and Place, said:**

We support government's plans to strengthen the regulation of sludge use, with our preferred option being to move it into Environmental Permitting Regulations. Our aim is to ensure that sewage sludge can be recycled to agricultural land in a safe and sustainable way.

These proposed changes will reduce risks to human health and tighten environmental protections. We will continue to work closely with the water industry, farmers and partner organisations to support this regulatory reform.

The Government's approach to working with the farming sector on water pollution is focused on advice and partnership. Already funding to double the number of advice-led inspections has been introduced, enabling at least 6,000 inspections a year by 2029.

This simplified, clearer regulatory approach will sit alongside support through Environmental Land Management schemes, the Catchment Sensitive Farming advice programme and targeted infrastructure grants, helping farm businesses reduce pollution, protect water and strengthen their long-term resilience.

The changes build on last summer's ministerial roundtable, where the government established the Addressing Pollution from Agriculture programme, working with farming and environmental stakeholders to drive reform of agricultural water regulations.